



The NOODLE

Open up and say AHHHH!!!

Volume 8, Issue 3

March 2015



Florida Youth Council

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The Florida Youth Council is a program of The Family Café

Welcome To The Noodle!

Welcome to the March 2015 edition of *The Noodle*, written and published by The Florida Youth Council! In this issue of *The Noodle*, members of the Council were asked to write about our experiences with transportation. This topic allowed members to share their thoughts on getting around as a young person with a disability. We wrote

Driving My Way

By Whitney Harris

I have had the privilege of being able to drive a car without any modifications, even though I do not have my right arm or right leg. When I first learned to drive, I learned in my Mom's car, which was a large SUV. For my 16th birthday, my parents actually played a joke on me and gave me a family friend's old, beat-up, very small truck. I was mortified! I remember getting in the truck and immediately escaping to drive around my neighborhood so that everyone would not see my tears. I was grateful that I had gotten a vehicle, but this truck couldn't have been any uglier.

When I returned after my breakdown, my brand new 2006 Jeep Wrangler was sitting in the driveway! It was beautiful. The parts that were the best were that the steering wheel was on the right side of the car, and the gas and

about taking the bus, driving our own car and relying on others for rides, and some of the challenges and advantages that come with different mobility options. We hope you will take a few minutes out of your busy schedule to learn about our experiences and enjoy our thoughts and opinions in this March 2015 edition of *The Noodle*!



brake pedal were switched. Even though I am fully capable of driving a regular car, it was so much more convenient to not have to reach across the steering wheel to touch the buttons on the center console or to have to cross my legs to reach the gas.

Sadly, I no longer have my Jeep. While I was living in Colorado, someone ran a red light and crashed into my dear Jeep-o. It was heartbreaking to say goodbye to my first car, but since then I have bought a car on my own, and it has given me a new appreciation for owning a vehicle.



The Struggle

By Dakota Smoot

In my opinion, the main reason that people who are differently-abled don't drive is because of their nerves, like something that has happened in the past. I have a history of having seizures. I cannot drive myself because I would be at risk of having a seizure while driving. Most people will take risks and try to drive themselves or just ride around in a city bus. I have never taken the city bus. The only time I have ridden the bus has been for school functions. Some people, for some reason, it doesn't matter if you have a disability or not, still have a hard time taking the bus. The struggles are real.

My Mom drives me whenever I need to go somewhere, as long as it fits in her schedule. The only negative to getting my Mom to drive me is that I can't go to my friends' parties that end late at night. It would be nice if my friends could drive me, but I live in a neighborhood with a lot of crime and I don't want to put my friends at risk. I try to be a good friend in that way.

My goal is to learn how to control my seizures well enough to be able to drive myself. I am not allowed to drive until six months after my most recent seizure. I would like to get my own car and have the freedom to go anywhere at any time. We all have trouble with transferring from place to place, whether we are in the older generation or the younger generation. The issues are the same, and they still have not changed enough to this day.

Public Transit

By Megan Atkinson

Transportation has always been something I have struggled with. I am 21 years old and I have to rely on public transportation, friends, and family to get me from point A to point B due to my disability and the fact that the thought of driving terrifies me. So, with that being said, Thank God for public transportation. I am lucky that the county that I live in has a semi-reliable public transportation system. I use it to go back and forth from my house to the college I attend. Here's how it works: I have to call a week in advance and schedule my trip. The paratransit bus picks me up at my doorstep anywhere between 7:30AM and 8:30AM for my morning class. The downfall about public transportation is that it can be expensive and unreliable at times. The transit buses have a two hour window to pick me up and get me to school. That means I could be late to my classes if they do not show up early enough. Luckily this has never happened. I am thankful for public transportation, but that doesn't necessarily mean I like it. I can't just get on a bus and go to the mall. Like I said before, I have to call a week in advance to schedule my trips. This leaves no wiggle room for fun. If I ever become a billionaire the first thing I will do is hire a 24/7 chauffeur to take me where I need to be and anywhere I want to go.



Just Like a Penny

By Shevie Barnes

A penny can be good thing or a bad thing. If you find it heads up, it means you'll have a good day. If you see it face down, it means you'll have a bad day. I dare say this is similar to my experience on public transportation. As a young independent adult with a disability, my primary mode of transportation is the bus. In Jacksonville they have a system called JTA. This system picks you up at your door and takes you directly to your location. However, this has not always been such a pleasant experience for me. Before this system, I was often left stranded by bus drivers because my scooter was "too big," even though I took the same bus there. There have been times where people have been so mean that I would rather not take the bus. Many times, because of pick up windows, I have been forced to either arrive hours early,

or late. I am currently a teacher, and each day I leave my house at 6:15am to arrive at my workplace by 8:30, even though my house is less than 10 minutes away. Just like a penny, often times it seems like I am picking transportation on the flipside. On the good side of things, many years ago the bus used to be the only way to get around if you could not drive. Now, the world has heard our pleas for more options. There are Uber, and Lyft, and let's not forget good friends. Uber and Lyft are similar companies. They cater to immediate rides. You download the app and input your payment information. It's great: no money exchange and all drivers are background checked. Most drivers are very accommodating, and if they are not you can rate them. The truth is public transportation is not the safest and isn't what everyone would choose. However, for me, I wouldn't be able to have a job, shop, go to church, or even just have some fun times without it. Public transportation is a lifesaver and I couldn't live without it.



Project Free

By Christina Waldron

My transportation experience is riding the bus in Saint Petersburg, Florida. I have a bus pass that allows me to pay half price. The cost to ride the bus fits in my budget. When I was in high school, I rode the local public bus system for the first time. Most Saturdays, I ride the bus to my bowling alley. I even ride the bus to a friend's house. Sometimes I ride the bus to church so that I can get there on time to alter serve. It is very convenient to ride to the program I attend on a scholarship. It is called Project Free, and it is located in Gulfport, Florida.

My Transportation

Experience

By Derek Carraway

Well, the issue of transportation as it relates to my disability. Where do I even begin? I have several disabilities, one of which prevents me from being able to drive. This has proved to be a real pain in the rear at times. Why is that? The answer is going to be really blunt but is the absolute truth. I live in Tallahassee and the public transportation options suck! Not being able to drive, without spending a fortune I pretty much have three options: the city bus, the transportation disadvantaged service that is available, and getting rides from my parents or friends. I mainly rely on those last two. I tried the city bus a couple of times, once attempting to take it home from school. A 3.5 mile trip that one could easily make in about 15 minutes by car turned into a 2.5 hour trip via the bus. That was just ridiculous. Then there is the transportation disadvantaged service, known in Tallahassee as Dial-A-Ride. Although this is the slightly better option, only because it will take you directly from point A to point B without having to transfer, it has its downsides too. A couple of these are that you can't go anywhere on a whim; you have to call and schedule the ride by 5pm the previous business day.

Then, also, they have an hour window to get you to your destination. So say you needed to be somewhere at 8, you have to be ready to go at 7 and they have that hour to pick you up and get you to your destination. Then there's the issue that they sometimes get you to your destination late. This can cause problems if you had an appointment or were going to work. This was starting to be an issue with me and sadly I started backing up the time I told them I needed to be somewhere just to ensure I got there on time. The biggest problem though is that it's run by the same sorry people who run the city bus. Then, I also am able to get rides off of family and friends. In the end, none of these options are the greatest, but it was the hand I was dealt and unfortunately I don't see my transportation problems changing, barring a miracle healing of my vision (which I do believe could happen) or unless I could get a hold of one of those new driverless cars they have been working on.



How Do I Become Part of The Florida Youth Council?

The Florida Youth Council is a group of youth (between the ages of 15 and 17) and emerging leaders (between the ages of 18 and 30) with disabilities or special health care needs that live in Florida.

The Florida Youth Council is all about getting youth and emerging leaders involved in self-advocacy, peer mentoring and other activities that will improve the quality of life for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities in Florida. The program empowers youth and emerging leaders to decide what issues are important

to their generation, to express those issues in their state and local communities, and to develop strategies to solve them.

We are seeking a group of enthusiastic, motivated youth and emerging leaders to participate. If you would like to take a leadership role in advocating for youth and emerging leaders in Florida, please visit The Florida Youth Council website at www.floridayouthcouncil.com. The program is open to application year round. We hope to hear from you soon!