

GOOD NEWS

REGULAR BOARD MEETING

OCTOBER 2025

from our funded partners



Children's Board
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

www.ChildrensBoard.org

University of South Florida Board of Trustees, THE DOCS PARENTING PROGRAMS



Impact Story: *Hispanic Heritage Month*

The DOCS Team is celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month by honoring our DOCS Program Español. It is our goal to ensure that all members of our community, English and Spanish speaking, have access to the most current and effective strategies for managing

child behaviors. Our program coordinator, Cristina Ortiz, oversees both sections and brings years of experience supporting caregivers and professionals who speak either English or Spanish. In recognition of Hispanic Heritage Month, we are especially committed to sharing this information with our community.

One participant from the August 2025 cohort shared in a video testimonial: We just finished the HOT DOCS course in Spanish, and it has been incredibly helpful. We learned about real-life situations and gained new strategies that we can use every day, both personally and professionally. We highly recommend this program to other parents and professionals—come join the group and take the class with the teacher, who is fantastic!"



Family Enrichment Center

AUTISM IS REAL (A.I.R)

Child Safety: *Creating Safe Spaces for Children with Autism:*

Children with autism may face unique challenges in navigating their environments, making safety at home a critical priority. Sensory sensitivities, communication differences, and impulsive behaviors can increase the risk of injury or distress if the home isn't thoughtfully adapted. A safe environment, one that is predictable, calming, and responsive to each child's needs, can foster emotional security and may reduce injuries during behavioral incidents.

Caregivers are encouraged to assess potential hazards, establish clear routines, and use visual supports to promote understanding and comfort for their children. Together, the Family Enrichment Center's Autism Is Real program strives to help build homes that nurture both safety and growth for the population we serve by sharing a copy of the Surgeon General's Health Home Checklist.



A Healthy Home Checklist

Bedrooms, Living Rooms, and Family Rooms

1. Install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms.
2. Do not smoke or allow anyone else to smoke in the home.
3. If your home was built before 1978:
 1. Test your home for lead paint.
 2. Do not paint or chip/peel paint using lead safe work practices.
 3. Use safe work practices when painting, remodeling, or according to general remodeling lead dust.
4. Keep floors clear of electrical cords and clutter.

Kitchens

1. Never use the stove or oven to heat the house.
2. Use a range hood fan or other kitchen exhaust fan that vents outside.
3. Install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms.
4. Use safe cleaning and pest control products.
5. Deep clean dishes, pots, and pans without pesticides.
6. Keep floors clear of clutter and clutter in the outside.
7. Use hand sanitizer.
8. Change them often: for toilet and wipe up spilled water.
9. When necessary, use closed bins, traps, and gels.
10. Never use bug bombs.

Bathrooms

1. Install grab bars next to the bathtub and shower.
2. Use mats with non-slip rubber backs on bathroom floors.
3. Clean up moisture and mold safely.
4. Use a bathroom exhaust fan that vents outside.

Attics

1. Check for water leaks from the roof.
2. Ensure proper ventilation to prevent moisture that can promote mold growth.
3. Test gaps around roofing and attic openings to keep rodents and insects out.
4. Clean up clutter to deny rodents and insects places to nest.

Stairways and Halls

1. Fix loose or wobbly steps and rails.
2. Attach handrails to every step or remove carpet and stairs completely.
3. Keep stairs free of clutter.
4. Install handrails on both sides of the stairs.
5. Keep a working light bulb in overhead lights in the hall and the stairs.

Everyone can have a healthy home. This checklist and accompanying illustration show some key action steps to take in each room and area of the home.

Basement, Crawl Space, Utility and Laundry Areas

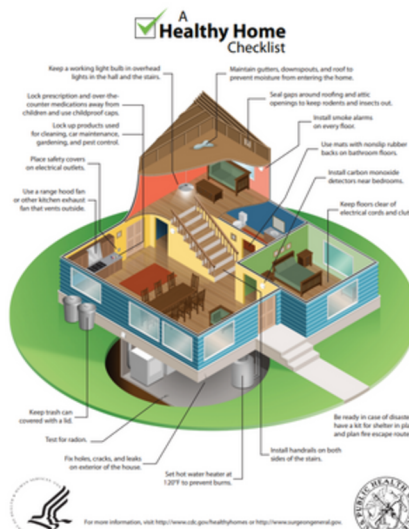
1. Set hot water heater at 120°F to prevent burns.
2. Change furnace filter regularly.
3. Have gas appliances and furnace checked yearly to make sure they don't release into carbon monoxide.
4. Make sure the clothes dryer vents outside.
5. Test for radon. If there's a high level, hire a specialist to abate the radon.

Outer Parts of House and Yard

1. Keep pests away:
 1. Fix holes, cracks, and holes on exterior of the house.
 2. Eliminate standing water and food sources.
 3. Keep trash can covered with a lid.
 4. Remove shoes before entering the house to keep dirt out.
 5. Seal and repair holes and other insect access.
 6. Maintain gutters, downspouts, and roof to prevent moisture from entering the house.
 7. Use safe work practices when painting, remodeling, or remodeling a home built before 1978.
2. If you have a septic tank or private well, properly maintain it to prevent disease.
3. Be ready in case of disaster: have a kit for shelter in place and plan fire escape routes.

Special steps to protect children:

1. Make sure childproofers, and play equipment are safe.
2. Keep kids off of roofs, decks, or in the yards of roofs of children.
3. Place safety covers on electrical outlets.
4. Lock up pesticides and other household chemicals away from children and use childproof caps.
5. Use car seats at the top and bottom of stairs.
6. Lock up products used for cleaning, car, or maintenance, gardening, and pest control.
7. If you have a swimming pool, make sure you have proper fencing and gates.
8. Complete a playground safety check if you have playground equipment in your yard.
9. If a firearm is kept in the home, it should be stored unloaded and locked in a secure container inaccessible to children.



For more information, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyhomes> or <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov>



Impact Story:

Supporting Families Through Readers in Motion

Teachers received goodie bags filled with school supplies as a small token of appreciation for their dedication. Students were excited to receive free backpacks stocked with essential learning materials, including notebooks, folders, headphones, whiteboards, markers, colored pencils, and even fidgets to help them stay focused. Parents were also supported with free books and engaging activities to enjoy with their children at home, helping to strengthen literacy and family connections.

A photograph of a table covered with a black cloth, displaying a large collection of children's books and educational materials. The books are arranged in rows, including titles like 'The Cat in the Hat', 'The Little Engine That Could', 'The First Day of School', and 'The ABCs of Reading'. A sign on the table reads 'SENIORS in SERVICE GEARED UP TO SERVE' and features logos for AmeriCorps and Volunteer Florida.

University Area Community Development Corporation

GET MOVING! MIND, BODY, SOUL

Impact Story: ***A Season of Growth***

Aslan and Kion Martinez joined the Get Moving! program in September, and it has been a true pleasure to get to know both them and their family. Their father, Alvin, has also been an incredibly supportive volunteer, adding to the sense of community within our program.

We are deeply grateful for the impact you and your team had on our holiday season, especially with the wonderful Christmas community event at the center. My family and I thoroughly enjoyed it, and we truly appreciate the effort you put into making it such a special occasion.

Reflecting on our journey with Get Moving!, it feels like just yesterday we were eager to get started, and now my boys are proudly yellow belts. Time has flown, and your team has made a significant difference in our lives. I've witnessed a positive transformation in my sons' personalities—their confidence, obedience, and discipline have all grown remarkably. Beyond that, we've found a sense of belonging and community, and from day one, you made us feel truly valued.



Karate has become such a meaningful outlet for my boys, contributing to both their mental and physical health. We are incredibly grateful for the mentorship, coaching, and leadership that your team provides. Thank you for welcoming our family, for creating a safe and supportive environment, and for making us feel like we belong. We're excited to continue growing together with you all in the future.

Girl Scouts of West Central Florida

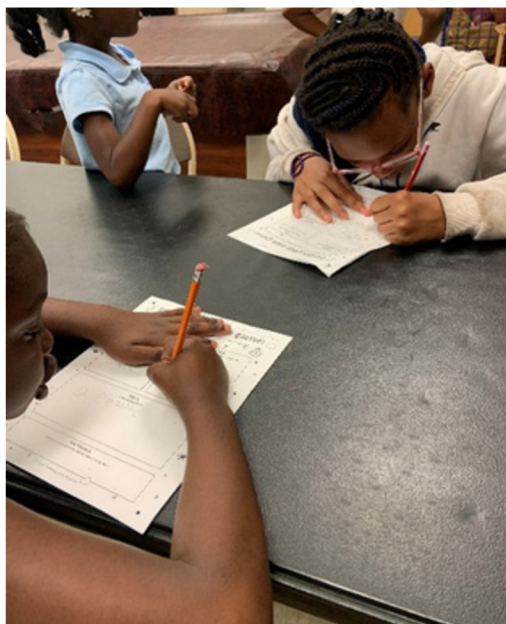
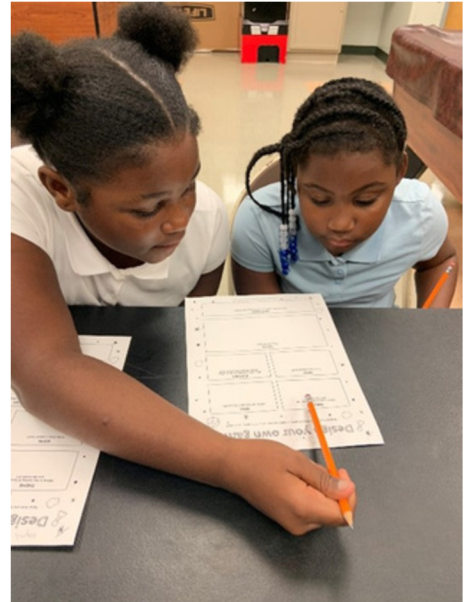
G I R L S C O U T T R O O P P R O G R A M

Improved literacy

Share a story of a child who has shown growth or resilience.

During our Girl Scout troop meetings, we’ve witnessed meaningful growth in literacy through interactive, hands-on activities. One standout example comes from our “Build a Board Game” activity. This project required girls to write instructions, create storylines, and use critical thinking to design their own games, blending literacy with creativity and STEM.

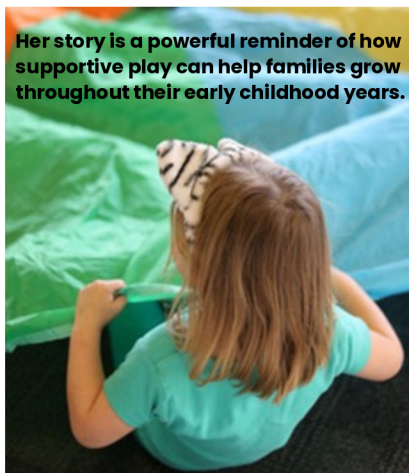
In our Rowlette Park Troop 96045, one girl in particular, who initially struggled with writing and often hesitated to share her thoughts, showed remarkable progress. As the weeks went on, she began contributing confidently,



eventually helping others shape their ideas and proudly presenting her own. She later shared how combining reading and writing with fun, collaborative STEM challenges made learning feel exciting and empowering. Her journey is a powerful reminder that when girls are given the right tools, teamwork, and supportive space, their confidence and academic skills can flourish together.

Glazer Children’s Museum

LEARN & PLAY TAMPA BAY



Impact Story: *A Season of Growth*

Learn & Play Tampa Bay hosts Neighborhood Play Squads at all seven Children’s Board Family Resource Centers across the county. These 10-week sessions give families a place to learn, play, and build lasting connections while supporting early childhood development and the journey through parenthood. This summer, a mom and her 4-year-old son joined our Neighborhood Play Squad at the

Brandon Family Resource Center. On the first day, the boy appeared overwhelmed, covering his ears and showing signs of distress throughout the session. Our team introduced his mom to our Neurodiversity-Affirming bin, which includes headphones and sensory tools to help children feel more comfortable.

The following week, he arrived wearing his own headphones and was noticeably calmer, more comfortable, and ready to participate. From then on, he wore them every week—they attended every single session! Over time, he even decorated his headphones with the stickers we handed out at the end of each class.

Throughout the quarter, we watched him blossom—becoming more confident in his communication, social interactions, and creative play. On sensory bin days, he loved the activities so much that he asked his mom to take pictures so they could recreate them at home.



His mom shared how meaningful the program had been for their family. It gave them a reason to get out of the house, connect with others, and support her son’s development in a positive, understanding space. She was wonderfully supportive of him and encouraged him to be himself, which was inspiring to see. The other parents in the group also formed a strong, caring community—offering each other empathy and encouragement every week.

Rooted in Play

POPUP ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND PROJECT

Child Safety: Featuring a camper



This summer at Rooted in Play’s Every Child Plays Camp, we had the joy of welcoming Charlotte, a camper with DDX3X syndrome. This rare genetic condition affects speech, motor development, and learning. From the moment she arrived, Charlotte was a bright light, curious, engaged, and eager to connect. Her favorite question quickly became, “Whatcha doing?” as she explored each play invitation with enthusiasm. Whether she was painting, building, or inventing new games, she jumped into play with enthusiasm and a smile, but nothing topped her love of face painting. What made the week truly special was the way other campers and volunteers were naturally drawn to her. Charlotte was included, celebrated, and deeply loved by the group.



A core value of our camp is that safety and freedom are not opposites; they work together. Instead of controlling play, we teach children how to take healthy risks responsibly. Each day, we used a simple social story created specifically for camp to review safety expectations in a visual, accessible way. We asked campers to: let a playworker know if they needed to leave the play area, tell us if a loose part was broken or unsafe, and stay aware of their surroundings, especially around the play gym. These expectations

empowered children to take ownership of the space and look out for one another, allowing them to play boldly while still staying safe. Charlotte thrived in this environment. With clear routines, visual supports, and caring playworkers nearby, she was able to participate confidently and independently.

Her mother later shared, “I am so grateful Charlotte had the opportunity to attend this camp! It was perfect for her and she had a great time. For me, I felt confident knowing she was safe and well cared for while she was away from me. I hope you’re able to continue providing these inclusive opportunities for play for all children!” Charlotte’s story is exactly why we do this work. When children are given time, freedom, support, and a safe space to play, they flourish. And when play is truly inclusive, everyone grows.



Tampa Heights Junior Civic Association



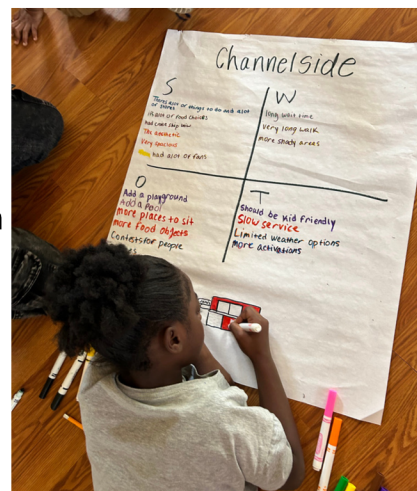
Impact Story: A Season of Growth

This summer, with generous support from the Planning Commission, the Children’s Board, the American Planning Association, USF’s Masters in Urban and Regional Planning Program, and community partners across Tampa, the FLIP Jr. program brought planning to life for elementary and

middle school students through a one-of-a-kind hands-on learning experience.

Throughout the multi-week program, students explored the big question: *What makes a community great — and who gets to decide?* Through interactive lessons, creative challenges, and field experiences, they discovered how cities are shaped, who is involved in development, and how planning can serve everyone — including kids, elders, people with disabilities, and future generations. Students learned how to think like planners, developers, and advocates through role-playing, site analysis, sketching, and team design activities. They even met with land use attorneys, who helped break down the development process and the legal side of zoning and land use.

Each year the program has incorporated unique experiences for the children with their favorite visits to various locations, offices, elected officials, taking a boat



up or down Hillsborough River, and riding the trolley as they “plan” their own cities and living spaces. Last year Fatima and Naya took two of the youth to do their presentations at the APA FL annual conference in Jacksonville. The children role-play as elected officials, making decisions on real projects that have come before Tampa City Council and make decisions on whether to approve the proposals. They help to influence real projects during their development.