

children's relief fund 2026 news

35 years of helping

Letter from Rose

To enrich the life of a child and see the worth and value of each and every individual is the power to change the future in ways yet unknown. Over the years, The Children's Relief Fund has offered love, laughter, comfort and hope for our special needs community. The celebration of a single life serves as a catalyst for positive change and outreach to so many. This organization has selflessly devoted itself to making life better for those in need. We are so very grateful to everyone who makes this possible through your support of The Children's Relief Fund!

**Straight from my heart,
Rose Fotia,**

Founder
The Children's
Relief Fund



Save the Date!

Straight from the Heart Wine Dinner & Auction

Celebrate with us at an intimate gathering to support the Children's Relief Fund

Saturday, February 13, 2027

Venue 1223

1223 May River Road, Bluffton

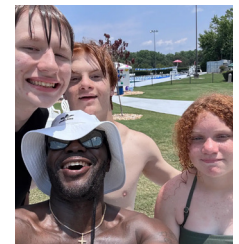
*Tickets can be purchased on our website at thechildrensrelieffund.org
or call Rose Fotia at 843-681-7668*

challenge camp 2026

Challenge Camp is an adaptive summer camp program offered through the Hilton Head Island Recreation Association for children and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, ages 5–21. The program operates inclusively alongside the Island Rec Center's all day summer camp, giving participants the opportunity to enjoy the same activities, experiences, and traditions as their peers. While they do attend field trips and events with their age groups, we also took all of our CC campers on special trips as a group. This year, we had an ice cream social, learned some pickleball skills, printed t-shirts with Pockets Full of Sunshine, and had an end of camp pool party.

Each camper receives individualized, one on one support to help them successfully navigate the camp environment and participate in activities in a way that is meaningful and appropriate for them. Participants are placed with their age groups and included in daily games, activities, field trips, and special events. By providing additional support and removing barriers to participation, Challenge Camp makes recreational and social experiences more accessible to children and young adults who may not otherwise have these opportunities.

At its heart, Challenge Camp is about creating an environment where everyone belongs. Inclusion benefits not only Challenge Camp participants but the entire camp community by encouraging friendships, empathy, acceptance, and a greater understanding of people with different abilities. Through shared experiences, participants have opportunities to build confidence, independence, and social skills while all campers learn the value of being part of a diverse and inclusive community.



Thanks to the unwavering generosity of the Children's Relief Fund, SOAR/Special Olympics Area 8 has transformed over the past decade. We truly could not have come this far without them. When we first partnered 10 years ago, we were serving just 140 athletes. Today, we're proud to support nearly 700 athletes throughout Beaufort and Jasper County. At SOAR, our mission is to create inclusive and enriching experiences for everyone we serve. And speaking of the heart of what we do, let me share Kayonna Simmons' journey with you. Now 29 years old, Kayonna first picked up a tennis racket when she was just 11 at Hilton Head Middle School. From that moment on, she dreamed of two things: competing in the USA Games and flying on an airplane—something she'd never done in her life. And this year, after all those years of dedication and training, Kayonna not only flew to the USA Games in Minnesota, but she also brought home gold in both singles and doubles. It truly changed her life in so many ways. Kayonna met so many new people and created memories she'll never forget. There are so many people to thank for Kayonna's gold medals: Public Tennis, Inc., Cherie Taylor, Rose Fotia and the Children's Relief Fund for their incredible support."

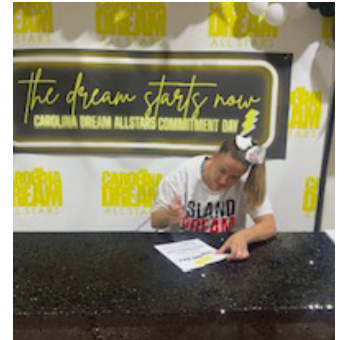


If you're interested in becoming an athlete or volunteering with us, there's a sport or activity for everyone—from bowling and tennis to horseback riding and track and field, our calendar is packed every day. Just visit our website at www.soarspecialrecreation.org for more details and to get in touch!

Island Dream Team

CRF, Thanks so much for the generous donation to Island Dream Team for our new uniforms. We've had a wonderful season and looking forward to the next one in our NEW Uniforms. Without CRF NEW uniforms would not be possible.

- Cindi Faulkner



pockets full of sunshine

We are continually grateful to The Children's Relief Fund for their support of our programming for adults with disabilities, particularly those transitioning out of high school and into the next stage of their lives. This year we received funding towards a new program, "Sunny Adventures". Sunny Adventures are designed to expand the horizons of our Rays through the power of shared interests and new experiences. Ray's attend fun adventures with more targeted interest groups like hiking, bird watching, geocaching and more! This program provides a great way to get outside and be active, have access to visible, community focused activities and socialize with peers in age-appropriate settings. Sunny Adventures have been a great addition to our programming, and have been an entry point for Rays who are new to Pockets to start getting involved and building relationships. As we are all aware, opportunities and programming for special adults are few and far between so we are so very grateful to CRF for recognizing this need and helping us to continue growing and filling it. Thank you!





Heroes on Horseback

Heroes on Horseback and the Children's Relief Fund: Changing Lives One Stride at a Time Celebrating 26 Years of Service Through Equine-Assisted Therapy

Heroes on Horseback (HOH) is celebrating its 26th year of service to children with special needs in our community, providing equine-assisted therapy designed to support physical, emotional, cognitive, and social growth. Guided by a commitment to accessibility, HOH provides services regardless of a family's ability to pay and has never turned away a child because of financial hardship. Donor contributions cover approximately 90% of program operating costs, helping ensure that therapy remains available to the children who need it.

The Enduring Collaboration with Children's Relief Fund: The partnership between Children's Relief Fund and HOH is the longest and most meaningful collaboration in HOH's history. For more than a quarter century, this support has helped children benefit from therapy that addresses a range of physical, emotional, and developmental needs, including learning disabilities, autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, ADD and ADHD, and muscular dystrophy.

Goals and Outcomes of HOH's Equine Therapy: The objectives of HOH's equine therapy can be grouped into two main categories: physical enrichment and emotional and mental progress. Physical enrichment focuses on the recovery of physical abilities, enhanced balance and coordination, improved strength and muscle control, and increased range of motion. On the emotional and mental side, the therapy aims to boost confidence and self-esteem, as well as language, cognitive, and social skills. Before beginning their therapy sessions, every child undergoes a thorough evaluation. Together with caregivers—parents, teachers, therapists, and others—HOH establishes measurable goals and objectives to track each child's progress.

Financial Accessibility and Program Support: That commitment is sustained through donor investment in therapy horses, certified instructors, and program resources that keep services available to participating families. In the past year, the Children's Relief Fund also helped HOH acquire a new therapy horse, fittingly named "Angel."

Transformative Results and Lasting Impact: Over the years, children and young adults served by HOH have made meaningful progress through equine-assisted therapy supported by this partnership. Many participants have also experienced the pride of earning medals and ribbons at Special Olympics events at the state, national, and international levels. These achievements reflect more than competition; they build confidence, independence, and a sense of accomplishment that can carry into everyday life. The generosity of Children's Relief Fund has played a vital role in strengthening HOH's work and expanding opportunities for participating children and families. After more than two decades, this partnership continues to demonstrate that, with the right support, special needs riders can build skills, gain confidence, and move toward their fullest potential.





In the Lowcountry, access to a timely, high-quality autism evaluation remains a significant challenge for families. When parents begin to suspect that their child may have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), they are often faced with long waitlists for evaluations or the difficult choice of paying thousands of dollars out of pocket for a private assessment. For families who cannot afford a private evaluation, these delays can prevent children from accessing the therapies, educational supports, and other resources they need during some of the most critical years of development. The Lowcountry Autism Foundation (LAF) recognized this gap and created the ADOS Project in 2023 to provide high-quality autism evaluations to families who otherwise could not afford them. Through this program, LAF removes a significant financial barrier while providing families with a timely pathway to an accurate diagnosis. Our in-house developmental pediatrician conducts comprehensive autism evaluations, allowing families to move forward with confidence and connect their children to the appropriate therapies, services, and supports.

In June 2026, LAF received funding from the Children's Relief Fund to provide autism evaluations for 30 children by April 2027. We are already seeing the tremendous impact of this investment. Since receiving the funding, our developmental pediatrician has diagnosed 16 children with Autism Spectrum Disorder—all of whom live in Bluffton or Hilton Head Island. These 16 children and their families now have the answers they need and, most importantly, can begin accessing valuable therapies, educational supports, and community resources that may not have been available to them without a diagnosis.

For a family waiting for answers, an autism evaluation is about much more than a medical diagnosis. Parents often spend months or even years wondering why their child is struggling to communicate, interact, learn, or navigate everyday experiences. A diagnosis can provide clarity and, more importantly, open the door to services that can make a meaningful difference in a child's development and quality of life.

Early identification is particularly important because it allows families to begin appropriate interventions during critical developmental years. Without timely access to an evaluation, children can lose valuable time waiting for the answers they need. The ADOS Project helps ensure that a family's financial circumstances or the availability of appointments within the traditional healthcare system does not determine whether their child receives the support they deserve.

The impact of this program extends beyond the 16 children already diagnosed. Each diagnosis represents a family that now has a clearer understanding of their child's needs and a roadmap for moving forward. It means parents can advocate more effectively for their children, schools and providers can better understand how to support them, and children can begin receiving therapies and services tailored to their individual needs.

With the support from Children's Relief Fund, LAF will be able to fulfill our goal of evaluating 30 children by April 2027 and continue addressing the critical shortage of accessible autism evaluations in our community. We believe that every child deserves the opportunity to be understood and supported, and every family deserves access to the answers and resources that can help their child thrive.



DONATIONS

If anyone would like to honor someone they love during the holiday season by making a charitable donation to CRF, please call Rose at 843-681-7668.

We are happy to send an acknowledgment to the recipient with your good wishes.

All donations are tax deductible.

*The Children's Relief Fund is proud to be 100% volunteer driven.
To volunteer to help or to request assistance please call Rose Fotia at 843-681-7668.*



children's relief fund

www.thechildrensrelieffund.org
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