



In the Lowcountry, there are very few opportunities to have children suspected of having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosed. Currently, parents have two choices when suspecting their child has ASD, wait for an opening at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) or DDSN, both of which have more than a 12 month waiting lists and only see children under the age of 5. The other option is to pay a private provider between \$2,500-\$8,000 for the assessment. Without a diagnosis, many families can't access the care and services they need. The Lowcountry Autism Foundation saw the frustration in our families and parents and created the ADOS program, which has no wait time and sees individuals up until the age of 17. It also erases a financial barrier that may be stopping a family from accessing the care they need and deserve. Not only do we offer the in-house developmental pediatrician; we have also partnered with NorthStar Center for Autism and Wright Directions to assist in evaluations whenever we are unable to do it "in house". Since May 2024, we have been able to diagnose 10 children and get them and their families connected with the appropriate resources. This has been possible due to the Children's Relief Fund providing a generous grant to our organization. These funds have been used to pay for the autism evaluations and with an early diagnosis children and families experience less stress, better mental health, a reduction in Autism symptoms, stability at home, and an overall higher quality of life. We want to sincerely thank the Children's Relief Fund for supporting our mission, the ADOS program, and the families that we serve.



OUR 2025 Scholarship Recipients



R. ROBERT BOKAT SCHOLARSHIP **GARRETT SIMONS**

Hilton Head High School

Ranking: 8 out of 293

College: Duke University

Major: Political Science and Public Policy

Goal: Become a lawyer with a long term goal of legislator or judge. He has learned a lot from the special needs children and adults he has worked with and knows the importance of advocacy for them and their families.

High School Activities:

Varsity Golf Team, Project Unify Service Club, National and Spanish Honor Societies, Incubate Debate Club, Model UN

Community Service: Involved with Make Birthdays Bright Project for Pockets Full of Sunshine provide technical support for residents of Bayshore Adult Community

GREGORY FOTIA SCHOLARSHIP

AMY SCHUTZ

Hilton Head Christian Academy

Ranking: TOP 206

College: Clemson University

Major: Health Sciences

Goal: Occupational Therapist

High School Activities:

Member National and Spanish Honor Societies selected by teachers for "high level of achievement and engagement in each core class"

Community Service:

Volunteer: Lowcountry Autism Foundation, Challenge Camp Counselor.

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

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children's relief fund 2024 news



33 Years! It's hard for me to imagine that! It seems like a lifetime ago. My son, Gregory was 3 years old and was diagnosed with West Syndrome, a rare seizure disorder that left him unable to walk, talk or even hold his head up. He was my inspiration for starting The Children's Relief Fund. The years that followed were challenging to say the least but we knew we had to find a way to help him and others like him have the best possible life we could provide. We started small and added as we could. Before we knew it we developed summer camp programs, built the first handicapped accessible playground in our area, expanded Special Olympics programs, funded therapeutic horseback programs, provided much needed therapy and equipment along with educational and recreational programs! We became the Beacon of light for families of children with disabilities in the Lowcountry! It's been a challenging journey but it is so rewarding to all of us involved in this organization! I am eternally grateful to our faithful supporters that allow us to continue our amazing work!

**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 8th, 2025

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 2024

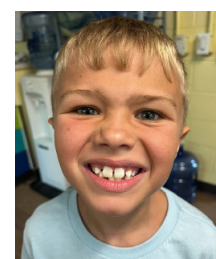
Challenge Camp is an adaptive summer camp program through the Hilton Head Island Recreation Association. This camp serves children with intellectual and developmental disabilities aged 5-21 and runs inclusively with the rec center's other summer camp.

Each child is given one on one support to help navigate through the camp setting.

By making camp more accessible these kids get to participate in activities that may not always be available to them. The best part about camp is the inclusivity, each child is placed within their age group and participates in all activities with the help of the staff and those around them. Challenge Camp provides opportunities of not only inclusion but awareness of the many different kinds of people that live in this world.

Thanks to the Children's Relief Fund, we are able to serve a wide variety of needs and make summer camp more accessible for ALL. "This program is one of the best things that has happened to Carson and our family. We can't thank island rec enough for this program and the doors Olivia and her staff have unlocked for Carson. The confidence and social skills Carson has gained in this program is ever lasting. There is not one thing we would change, and we look forward to next year!"

Written by:
Olivia Richardson
Adaptive Recreation
Director





soar & special olympics

Eight years ago, SOAR Special Recreation began with a simple dream: to empower athletes with intellectual disabilities to find their voices, strengths, and joy. Starting with just 140 athletes, we envisioned a world where everyone could participate in sports, build friendships, and experience the thrill of competition. Today, we proudly support over 630 athletes, and none of this would have been possible without the unwavering support of the Children's Relief Fund (CRF).

From the very beginning, SOAR has walked hand in hand with CRF. This partnership has not only provided resources but has also built a family of support that has changed lives. Together, we have witnessed transformations that make our hearts swell with pride. Every smile, every cheer from the sidelines, and every triumphant moment remind us why we do what we do.

At SOAR, we encourage healthy and active lifestyles, impacting countless lives in the process. We are particularly excited about our new Young Athletes program, held on late Sunday afternoons. This initiative brings families and their young children with disabilities together to learn how to play and make good choices. The joy and laughter echoing through the gym serve as a testament to the connections being formed.

What makes this program even more special is the involvement of high school volunteers from across Beaufort County, who bring enthusiasm and mentorship to our young athletes. We are thrilled to have Superintendent Frank Rodriguez volunteering his time as a referee, showing that community leaders care deeply about our mission.

This year, we made significant strides, expanding our offerings to 11 sports programs and introducing exciting new activities that ignite passion and camaraderie. Our athletes have showcased their talents at 12 state and national competitions, demonstrating their dedication and hard work. The pride we feel as we watch them compete is immeasurable.

Our 32 Unified Champion Schools, ranging from elementary to high school, have become havens of inclusion. These schools are not just places of learning; they are communities where friendships blossom, and barriers break down. We witness students standing together, cheering for each other, and forming bonds that transcend differences. This is the essence of our mission: to create a world where everyone is valued.

As we reflect on our journey from 140 athletes to over 600, we extend our deepest gratitude to CRF and our supporters. Your belief in our mission has fueled our growth and inspired countless athletes to reach their full potential. We cannot do this without you. Every dollar, every hour of volunteering, and every word of encouragement helps us create moments that change lives.

At SOAR Special Recreation, we believe that every athlete deserves the opportunity to shine. Together, we can continue to make dreams come true, one athlete at a time. With your continued support, we will keep soaring to new heights—because every smile, every success story, and every friendship is worth celebrating.



pockets full of sunshine

At Pockets Full of Sunshine we strive to keep the special adults we serve engaged both mentally and physically. Meaningful activities come in all forms and thanks in part to The Children's Relief Fund, our Rays continue to enjoy the use of the Island Recreation Center in a variety of ways! From Adaptive Fitness Classes, shooting hoops, walking the track, swimming on a sunny day or playing dodgeball against friends, we love taking advantage of all of the diverse opportunities that the Rec provides. Thank you CRF for your ongoing grant which provides memberships for our Rays! As you can see from the photos above, they are put to very good use! *Laurin*

Heroes on Horseback



Children's Relief Fund Empowering Our Children One Stride At A Time The support of Children's Relief Fund to the equine therapy program at Heroes on Horseback continues to be one of the longest and largest collaborations in HOH's 24-year history. For nearly a quarter of a century, tens of thousands of children have been impacted by this unique form of therapy that targets physical, emotional, and mental challenges including learning disabilities, autism, cerebral palsy, downs syndrome, ADD and ADHD, and muscular dystrophy.

The goals of HOH's equine therapy fall into two primary categories: physical enrichment which includes the recovery of physical abilities, improved balance and coordination, greater strength and muscle control and increased range of motion; and emotional and mental progress which includes increased confidence and self-esteem and improvements in language, cognitive abilities, and social skills. Every participant in the program is evaluated prior to the start of their equine therapy session, and measurable goals and objectives from their involvement are defined with caregivers including parents, teachers, therapists, and others.

HOH never turns anyone away from the benefits of the healing and empowerment of their program for financial reasons, with 90% of its costs funded through contributed income. The funding provided by Children's Relief Fund helps to cover the expenses of therapy horses and certified instructors leading the lessons. During the last year, Children's Relief Funded also helped HOH with the costs to acquire a new therapy horse, appropriately named, "Angel." There are many success stories of children benefiting from the equine therapy funded by Children's Relief Fund.

Many of these children and young adults have experienced the thrill of winning medals and ribbons competing at state, national, and world games hosted by Special Olympics. To say that this level of success is important to the development of any special needs individual is an understatement.

The generosity of Children's Relief Fund has always been vital to improving the lives of our special needs community. The 20-plus years of collaboration between Heroes on Horseback and Children's Relief Fund has proven time and again that children, regardless of the challenges facing them, can learn, improve and be their best.

