



**NATIONAL PARENTS
FIRST CALL CENTER**

a program of the



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Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress' National Parents First Call Center and Best Buddies International's Eunie's Buddies Program announce collaboration aimed at providing information, resources, and supports to new and expectant parents

BURLINGTON, MA & MIAMI, FL (September 16, 2024) — The Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress and Best Buddies International, two powerful organizations with similar missions to provide essential services for individuals with Down syndrome and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), are proud to announce an important new collaboration.

The MDSC's renowned National Parents First Call Center, which has developed best practices in providing critical one-on-one mentoring support for new and expectant parents who have recently received a Down syndrome diagnosis and has trained 33 organizations in 18 states, is collaborating with Best Buddies International's new Eunie's Buddies program, which will provide support and resources to new and expectant families as they navigate the journey of raising a child with an intellectual or developmental disability (IDD).



Eunie's Buddies — named affectionately in honor of Special

Olympics' founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver — pairs experienced parents of a child with an IDD with new

parents who are expecting, have just welcomed a baby, or are raising a child up to the age of five years old who has been recently diagnosed with an IDD.



“Best Buddies has a stellar reputation in the disability advocacy world for good reason, and they have been a valued programming partner with MDSC in Massachusetts for many years,” said Maureen Gallagher, MDSC Executive Director. “Now, with this new collaboration, we are thrilled that MDSC’s National Parents First Call Center’s gold-standard best practices can benefit Eunie’s Buddies. By working together, we can help many more families at a critical time in their journey here in Massachusetts,” Gallagher said.



“Historically, Best Buddies has supported individuals with IDD, while Eunie’s Buddies now focuses specifically on parents and caregivers, offering vital support and resources to help the entire family thrive throughout the different life stages” said Cecilia Elizalde, Senior Director of Eunie’s Buddies. “We couldn’t be more excited about this innovative new chapter in our Best Buddies—MDSC partnership. When it comes to providing one-on-one mentoring for new and expectant parents, MDSC’s National Parents First Call Center is the gold-standard, that’s why we are proud to have selected them to provide our staff with invaluable

training, enabling us to implement proven best practices in engaging and supporting Eunie’s Buddies’ families.”

In Massachusetts, where MDSC is headquartered and where the Parents First Call Program serves over 600 local new families annually, MDSC and Best Buddies MA/RI will be working especially closely, providing a seamless experience for new and expectant families. Together, these two organizations will ensure that all new and expectant families have a helping hand as they learn about the full potential of all individuals with IDD and the many programs and resources available to help them in their journey.

You can learn more about the MDSC’s National First Call Center at mdsc.org/npfcc and Eunie’s Buddies at www.bestbuddies.org/family-support

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About the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress National Parents First Call Center

For the past 30 years, MDSC’s Parents First Call Program has provided new and expectant parents of a child with Down syndrome with access to experienced parent mentors who have been in their shoes and are equipped to provide support and guidance to highly personal, sensitive questions and concerns. Upon receiving a Down syndrome diagnosis and being referred to MDSC, new and expectant parents each year are custom-paired with one of 40+ specially-trained PFC parents across the state who offer one-on-one support, accurate, up-to-date information on Down syndrome, and priceless guidance. At a highly emotional time when they are just starting their journey, PFC offers new and expectant parents customized advice and resources, including lists of recommended books, websites, potentially helpful organizations, information on how to locate medical and early intervention services as well as full access to all of the MDSC’s family support, education, and empowerment programs throughout the lifespan. All resources are provided confidentially and free of charge. The National Parents First Call Center – a first-of-its-kind, comprehensive full-service professional center that serves expectant parents and medical providers as well as Down syndrome organization leaders and parent volunteers – was birthed from this unique and renowned model. The Center includes three branches: the National Prenatal First Call Center, the First Call National Training Center, and Julia’s Way, support for breastfeeding babies with Down syndrome. Three decades since its inception, MDSC’s still-evolving PFC Program and National Parents First Call Center continue to support, reassure, and ease parents at perhaps the most vulnerable point in their parenting journey, impacting the lives of parents and their babies with Down syndrome in a way that is both profound and enduring.

About Best Buddies’ Eunie’s Buddies Program

Established in 1989, Best Buddies is the largest organization dedicated to ending the social, physical and economic isolation of the 200 million people worldwide with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Our programs empower people with IDD to form meaningful friendships with their peers, secure jobs, improve communication and advocacy skills, and live independently, while also offering support for their families. In 2024, Best Buddies launched its Family Support program, which offers families the support and resources needed to navigate the journey of raising a child with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Named affectionately in honor of Eunice Kennedy Shriver, founder of Special Olympics and a true hero who advocated tirelessly for positive change in the lives of individuals with

IDD, Eunie's Buddies pairs experienced parents of a child with an IDD with new parents who are expecting, have just welcomed a baby, or are raising a child up to the age of five years old who has been recently diagnosed with an IDD. This pairing creates a mentor–mentee connection and friendship. Eunie's Buddies provides a framework offering parents and caregivers encouragement, emotional support, and valuable resources. Participation in Eunie's Buddies helps families pave the way for a child with IDD to have an education, gainful employment, and a fulfilled life.