

**Volume 26 Issue 2- SPRING 2026**



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**Happy Spring**

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**From The Desk Of Nanette Forte-Gerst**



Dear SBRN Community,

This spring marks my first year serving as Executive Director of the Spina Bifida Resource Network. Over the past year, I've had the opportunity to listen, learn, and connect with a strong community of individuals, families, volunteers, and partners dedicated to supporting those affected by spina bifida and similar disabilities. I appreciate the opportunity to work alongside you all

One of the highlights of the coming season is our upcoming SBRN Walk—a meaningful day that brings our community together while raising critical funds to support our programs and services. I encourage you to join us by registering, forming a team, fundraising, or sponsoring the event. You can learn more further in this issue.

We are also excited to launch *Unstoppable*, a new pilot program designed to help teens build confidence, strengthen leadership skills, and connect with peers.

In addition, we are pleased to offer a Financial & Wealth Planning session on May 16, available both in person and virtually, to provide individuals and families with valuable tools for long-term financial security.

We will continue offering Adult Empowerment conversations and monthly virtual programs, creating consistent opportunities for connection, learning, and support. As we look ahead, we remain committed to expanding our resources, programs, and educational offerings to better serve our community.

We are also planning our Adult Empowerment Retreat for Fall 2026, focused on connection, personal growth, and community building for adults living with spina bifida.

We are especially grateful for the critical support of our community, which empowers us to grow and expand our impact. We invite you to stay engaged—by participating in programs, sharing our mission, or supporting our work—so that together, we can continue to make a meaningful difference.

With gratitude,

*Nanette Forte-Gerst*

Nanette Gerst  
Executive Director



## Introducing Our New Tagline: Strengthening Identity, Elevating Impact

*Empowering People, Building Communities—Together*



Empowering People, Building Communities - Together

We are excited to unveil the new tagline alongside the Spina Bifida Resource Network (SBRN) logo—a meaningful step forward in clarifying who we are, what we stand for, and how we serve our community.

A tagline is more than just a few words, it's a promise. It reflects our mission, our values, and the unique role SBRN plays in the lives of individuals and families affected by spina bifida. As our organization continues to grow and evolve, we recognized the importance of clearly communicating what sets SBRN apart.

**Empowering People, Building Communities — Together** captures the heart of our work. It reflects our commitment to providing trusted resources, fostering meaningful connections, and supporting individuals at every stage of life. It also speaks to something deeper—that real impact happens when we come together as a community to uplift, support, and advocate for one another.

What makes SBRN unique is our holistic approach. We are more than a resource hub—we are a network of support, advocacy, education, and opportunity. This refreshed identity strengthens our voice and ensures that when people see our logo, they recognize not just who we are—but the collective impact we are building together.

We look forward to continuing this journey—empowering people, building communities, and moving forward together.

### Building Financial Confidence

**Presented by: John Keith, Retired CPA; SBRN Board Member**

**When:** Saturday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2026

**Time:** 11:00AM – 12:30PM

**Where:** SBRN Office – 84 Park Ave, Suite G106, Flemington, NJ

*Also available virtually via Zoom (link will be sent after registration is received/confirmed)*

Making informed financial decisions can feel overwhelming, especially when planning for the future. In this informative and practical session, John Keith—retired CPA and SBRN Board Member—will share key strategies to help individuals and families build greater financial confidence and stability.

Participants will gain valuable insights into managing personal finances, planning for long-term goals, and navigating today's financial landscape. Topics may include budgeting and saving strategies, understanding investments, planning for major life expenses, and ways to strengthen overall financial well-being in 2026 and beyond.

Whether you are just beginning to think about financial planning or looking to refine your current strategies, this session will provide helpful guidance, practical tips, and tools to support smarter financial decision-making and greater peace of mind.

[Register here](#)



## Volunteer Spotlight: Amanda Trott



For nearly a decade, Amanda Trott has been an active and inspiring member of the Spina Bifida Resource Network (SBRN) community. Since becoming involved in 2016, Amanda has dedicated her time and talents to helping create welcoming spaces where individuals with spina bifida can connect, express themselves, and feel empowered.

Amanda was first drawn to SBRN because she was seeking a sense of community. Living with spina bifida herself, she understands the importance of connecting with others who share similar experiences. Volunteering quickly became a meaningful way for her to give back while building relationships with people who truly understand the journey.



One of Amanda's greatest passions is dance, and she loves bringing that passion to SBRN events. Whether leading or participating, she enjoys seeing people relax, have fun, and express themselves through movement. For Amanda, watching others enjoy the moment and feel confident in themselves is one of the most rewarding parts of volunteering.

Some of Amanda's favorite memories come from SBRN's Empowerment Retreat. She describes the retreat as a special space where participants can be open, learn from one another, and build lasting connections. One memorable moment even led to the creation of the group nickname "ELFs," a lighthearted reminder of the friendships and camaraderie formed during the retreat.

Outside of volunteering, Amanda works as a teaching artist and enjoys spending time with family and friends, attending events, and staying active doing things she loves.

SBRN is grateful for Amanda's dedication, energy, and commitment to building a stronger, more connected community. We're especially excited that Amanda will be leading the pre-walk warm-up at the SBRN Empowerment Walk on May 31—helping everyone start the day energized and ready to walk for empowerment!



## WALK FOR EMPOWERMENT

*Let's Raise Awareness of Spina Bifida*



Funds raised support education, advocacy, and connections for children, adults, and families living with disabilities in the communities we serve.

**Sunday, May 31, 2026**

**Sign-in Begins at 10:00 AM**

**Roosevelt Park , Edison, NJ**

*Activities, Refreshments, Tricky Tray*



### HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- ⇒ **Register** online to Walk or Roll to Raise Awareness
- ⇒ **Raise Pledges** to Support Services
- ⇒ **Become a Sponsor**
- ⇒ **Ask your employer** about a **matching gift** program and double your impact!
- ⇒ **Volunteer** to help at the Event



**Registration and Sponsorship Information is on our website**  
[www.theSBRN.org](http://www.theSBRN.org) • Email us at - [info@theSBRN.org](mailto:info@theSBRN.org)

**Register by May 8 to receive a Walk T-Shirt**

## Introduction of Andrea Bachmann-Brady & **UNSTOPPABLE** Teen Program



Andrea Bachmann-Brady is a dedicated youth advocate and educator with a longstanding commitment to supporting children and teens with developmental and physical disabilities. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Douglass College at Rutgers University and also completed additional studies at Rider University, bringing both academic insight and practical experience to her work with young people.

Throughout her career, Andrea has worked in both school and community-based settings, including the Stroudsburg Area School District, Flemington-Raritan Regional School District, the Pocono Family YMCA, and currently serves as the Director of an afterschool program at YMCA at Deerpath. In these roles, she has built strong, supportive relationships with students and families while fostering inclusive environments where all young people can thrive.

Andrea has extensive experience supporting individuals with developmental disabilities and is deeply committed to helping youth build confidence, independence, and meaningful peer connections. Her work consistently centers on creating spaces where young people feel seen, supported, and empowered.

She is excited to launch and pilot the SBRN **UNSTOPPABLE** Teen Program, a new initiative designed specifically for pre-teens and teens with Spina Bifida and other disabilities. The program will focus on leadership development, self-advocacy skills, and social engagement in a supportive, inclusive community setting.

### Upcoming SBRN Events & Programs

Join us this spring, connect, support, and get involved!

#### **SBRN Empowerment Walk**

May 31, 2026 \* Roosevelt Park, Edison, NJ

Register by May 8 for a t-shirt—[Register here](#)

Join us to raise awareness and support the community. Walk, fundraise, or sponsor—every step matters!

Register / Fundraise / Sponsor

#### **Unstoppable Teen Program**

Monthly meet ups—Locations TBD

A new initiative designed specifically for pre-teens and teens with Spina Bifida and other disabilities

Sign up [here](#)

#### **HundredX Campaign**

Now – May 19 \* Virtual

Share your opinions through quick surveys (60–70 mins total) and generate funding for SBRN—at no cost to you.

[Sign up here](#)

#### **Wealth Management Program**

May 16 \* Flemington, NJ + Virtual

Learn about financial planning and tools to support your future with confidence.

[Register here](#)

Share with a friend & help spread the word

## Thriving This Spring: Tips for the Spina Bifida Community

As the weather warms up, spring is a great time to refresh routines, get outside, and focus on health and wellness. Here are a few simple tips to help make the most of the season.

### 1. Get Moving Outdoors

Warmer weather makes it easier to stay active. Consider activities like:

- Short walks or wheelchair strolls in a park
- Adaptive sports or stretching exercises
- Gardening or spending time in nature

Even small amounts of movement can help improve mood and energy.

### 2. Check Skin Daily

With more outdoor time, it's important to monitor skin health.

- Check for redness, pressure areas, or irritation
- Make sure braces, wheelchairs, or mobility devices fit properly
- Wear sunscreen and protective clothing

Daily skin checks can help prevent problems before they start.

### 3. Stay Hydrated

As temperatures rise, it's easy to become dehydrated.

- Drink water regularly throughout the day
- Carry a reusable water bottle
- Eat fruits and vegetables with high water content

Hydration is especially important for individuals who manage bladder and bowel programs.

### Final Thought

Spring is a season of new beginnings. Taking a few simple steps to focus on health, organization, and connection can help individuals with **Spina Bifida, and similar disabilities** and their caregivers enjoy the season safely and confidently.

### 4. Spring Cleaning for Medical Supplies

Spring is a great time to organize supplies.

- Check expiration dates on medications
- Restock catheter or medical supplies
- Clean and inspect mobility equipment

Keeping supplies organized helps daily routines run smoothly.

### 5. Plan for Appointments

Many families schedule medical visits in the spring.

- Confirm upcoming appointments
- Update medication lists
- Write down questions for providers

Preparation can make appointments more productive and less stressful.

### 6. Support Emotional Wellness

Spring can bring a sense of renewal.

- Connect with friends, family, or support groups
- Try a new hobby or activity
- Spend time outdoors when possible

Small moments of joy and connection can make a big



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# SBRN Disability Book Club

## 2025 SELECTIONS

Done	Title	Month
♥	<i>Sitting Pretty</i> by Rebekah Taussig	January
♥	<i>Year of the Tiger: An Activist's Life</i> by Alice Wong	February
♥	<i>A Man Called Ove</i> by Fredrik Backman	March
♥	<i>The Pretty One</i> by Keah Brown	April
♥	<i>Mean Baby</i> by Selma Blaire	May
♥	<i>Golem Girl: A Memoir</i> by Riva Lehrer	June
♥	<i>Unfit Parent</i> by Jessica Slice	July
♥	<i>If You Really Love Me...</i> by Erin Clark	August
♥	<i>Long Live Evil</i> by Sarah Rees Brennan	September
♥	<i>Places I've Taken My Body</i> by Molly McCully Brown	October
♥	<i>Care Work</i> by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha	November
♥	<i>Unswerving</i> by Barbara Ridley	December

### About Our Book Club

Our Disability Book Club brings together community members to explore powerful, diverse stories centered on disability, identity, advocacy, and lived experience.

The group meets **quarterly in 2026**

**Next Meet-Up: June 2026**

**Interested in Joining?** We'd love to have you!

Learn more here: [bit.ly/sbrn-bookclub26](https://bit.ly/sbrn-bookclub26)



## The Joy of Gardening

Spring is a wonderful time to reconnect with nature, and gardening can be both therapeutic and empowering for individuals of all abilities. With a few thoughtful adaptations and the right plant choices, creating a beautiful, accessible garden is well within reach. Beyond the blooms, gardening offers a sense of purpose, relaxation, and connection—whether you’re tending a single pot on a windowsill or cultivating a fully accessible raised bed.

### Gardening Made Accessible

Accessible gardening focuses on comfort, safety, and ease of use. Raised garden beds, vertical planters, and container gardening can reduce the need for bending or kneeling. Tools with ergonomic handles, lightweight watering cans, and adaptive grips can also make a big difference. For individuals using wheelchairs or with limited mobility, placing plants at varying heights ensures easier access and a more enjoyable experience.

### Easy-to-Grow Spring Flowers

Choosing low-maintenance, resilient plants helps build confidence and ensures success. Here are a few great options:

- **Marigolds** – Bright, cheerful, and easy to grow in containers or garden beds. They also help deter pests.
- **Pansies** – Known for their vibrant colors and ability to thrive in cooler spring temperatures.
- **Petunias** – Ideal for hanging baskets or raised planters, offering long-lasting blooms.
- **Zinnias** – Fast-growing and perfect for adding bold color with minimal care.



These flowers are forgiving and require only basic watering and sunlight, making them ideal for beginner gardeners or those with limited energy.

### Herbs & Edible Plants

Growing herbs and vegetables can be especially rewarding—and practical!

- **Basil** – Grows well in pots and is perfect for sunny spots.
- **Mint** – Very hardy and easy to maintain (best kept in containers to prevent spreading).
- **Lettuce** – Quick-growing and ideal for shallow containers or raised beds.
- **Cherry Tomatoes** – Can thrive in containers with proper support and sunlight.



These plants not only add greenery but can also be used in everyday cooking, bringing a sense of accomplishment and independence.

### Tips for Success

- Start small—one or two containers is a great beginning.
- Use lightweight, well-draining soil to make planting easier.
- Consider drip irrigation or self-watering pots to reduce daily maintenance.

Label plants clearly with large-print or tactile markers for easy identification.

*This spring, let your garden grow in a way that works for you—accessible, enjoyable, and uniquely yours.*