September 2025
Report Dates: July 01, 2024-June 30, 2025

The Arc™
Community Advocates

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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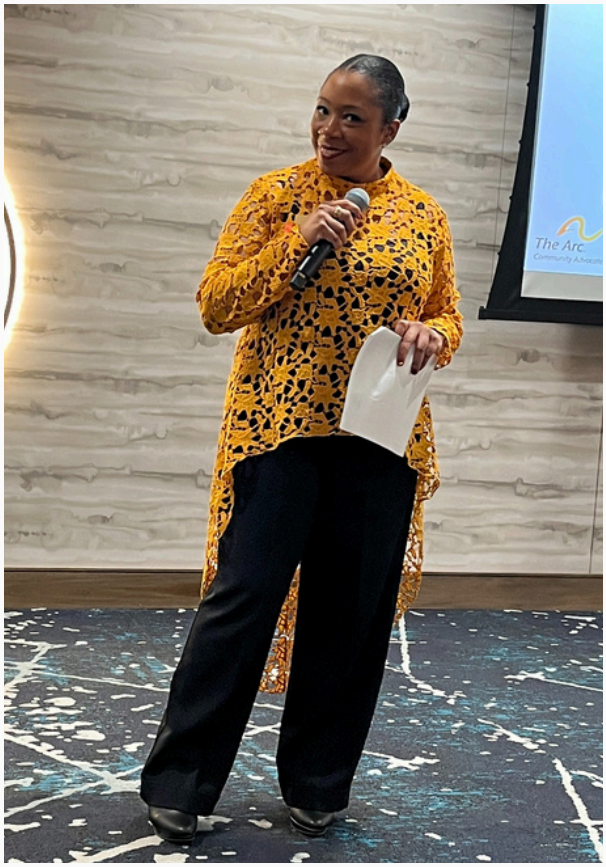
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Letter from the ED



Rhasheda Shepherd, MPA

Executive Director

As we approach the end of this remarkable year, I find myself reflecting on the journey we've undertaken together. It has been a year marked by both challenges and triumphs, and as the agency's first African American Executive Director in our 71 year history, I am profoundly grateful for the unwavering dedication and support of our entire community.

This year, we faced obstacles that tested our resilience and adaptability. From navigating unexpected shifts in our sector to responding to the evolving needs of those we serve, each challenge was met with a spirit of collaboration and innovation. It is through these experiences that we have grown stronger and more united.

1. We strengthened our connections with the community through increased community partnership with agencies like the Maple Hill Auto Group, The Great Lakes Center for Autism Treatment and Research, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, Challenger Jamboree, and the Douglass Community Center. These interactions have deepened our understanding and expanded our ability to address the intersectional needs of those we serve.
2. Internally, we have seen significant growth in accessing and leveraging national and statewide collaborations. Partnerships with The Arc United States, Amazon, and the Michigan Assistive Technology Program through the Michigan Disability Rights Coalition has enhanced our capacity to deliver on our mission beyond our service areas and prepared us for future opportunities.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the commitment and hard work of our staff, board of directors, volunteers, donors, and partners. Your belief in our vision and your generous support have been the driving force behind our success.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the possibilities that 2025 holds. We are committed to building on our momentum and continuing to push the boundaries of what we can achieve together. As we plan for the future, our focus remains on increasing and diversifying our service capacity across 6 Southwest Michigan counties we are eager to embark on this next chapter with you by our side.

Thank you for being an integral part of our journey. Your dedication and support have made this year one of growth and accomplishment. We look forward to continuing this journey with you.

With Sincere Gratitude - Rhasheda Shepherd, Executive Director

Agency Overview



Mission

We exist as an advocacy organization to make it possible for each person with a developmental disability to participate fully in all aspects of community and to support the effort of each individual to determine their own future.

Staff

- Rhasheda Shepherd, Executive Director
- Anne Gaertner, Director of Outreach & Advocacy
- Sarah Carmany, Legislative Laison
- LaTaynia Conant, Marketing & Communications Coordinator
- Kallie Griffin-Pena, Individual & Family Advocate
- Stephanie Sutton, Individual & Family Advocate
- Jackie VanHorn, Individual & Family Advocate

Financial Highlights



Revenue

$536,965.58

85%
Grants

6%
Contracts

9%
Individual Gifts

Funding Includes: Michigan Alliance for Families, The Ability Experience, Stryker Johnston Foundation, Dorothy U. Dalton Foundation, Okun Foundation, Kalamazoo Community Foundation, United Way Grant, Allegra FootPRINT Foundation, Irving S. Gilmore Foundation, Harold & Grace Upjohn Foundation, and various individual donations.

Expenses

$397,609.26

Expenses Include: rent, utilities, insurance, benefits, unemployment, medicare, health/dental/life/vision, salaries, professional development, repairs/maintenance, affiliation fees.

Advocacy Overview



We assist and guide families through the Special Education Process. We advocate for the best possible supports and services for students to achieve academic progress. We partner with schools to develop student-centered academic plans. We empower families with valuable resources, information, and training to advocate for their student.

141

Screenings

101

Intakes

1070

Contacts Were Made

1.6

Hours Spent Per Contact

Client Success Stories



Dylan

Since Dylan returned to school after his behavior has been great. He was awarded student of the month and received his award at the board meeting. Thanks again for all your help.



Stuart

Bill and I cannot thank you enough for your help, direction & support in all you do. We truly appreciate who you are and what you do for the community and the future ahead. Stuart graduated with his diploma. God bless and Thank you.

177
Goals Developed

81%
Completed Goals

18%
Goals No Longer Being Pursued

1%
Goals Still In Progress

Community Outreach

Expanding Our Reach, Strengthening Our Community

This year, The Arc Community Advocates made meaningful strides in connecting with individuals with disabilities, their families, and our broader community. Through our outreach, we engaged in 30 events, reaching 2,489 people with resources, advocacy, and support.



Our team represented The Arc at five major conferences, sharing our mission and learning alongside partners who are equally committed to building inclusive communities. We also proudly hosted three of our own events, creating welcoming spaces where individuals and families could connect, learn, and celebrate together.

Collaboration played a key role in our success. We partnered with five event vendors to extend our impact, participated in four local fairs to meet people where they are, and delivered 13 educational presentations that raised awareness, inspired advocacy, and empowered individuals with knowledge.

Each conversation and connection reflects our ongoing commitment to inclusion, dignity, and opportunity. Together, these outreach efforts move us closer to a community where every person is valued and has a voice.



The Arc Partners with Amazon

Technology is deeply embedded in our lives, but for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), the barrier to accessing technology can be disproportionately high, even as a community that could greatly benefit from its impact.

To address this, Amazon and The Arc announced a landmark program that will expanded access to technology and encourage greater independence for thousands of people with IDD. Through local participating Arc Chapters you could receive one for free.

27 Devices Awarded

Kalamazoo County **48%**

Ages 6-17 **44%**



Cynthia

My Son is 5 years old, autistic and nonverbal. He loves opening his "tabby" and accessing sesame street and mickey mouse phonics and counting games. Has come a long way with it and does great while having a fun time.

Adam

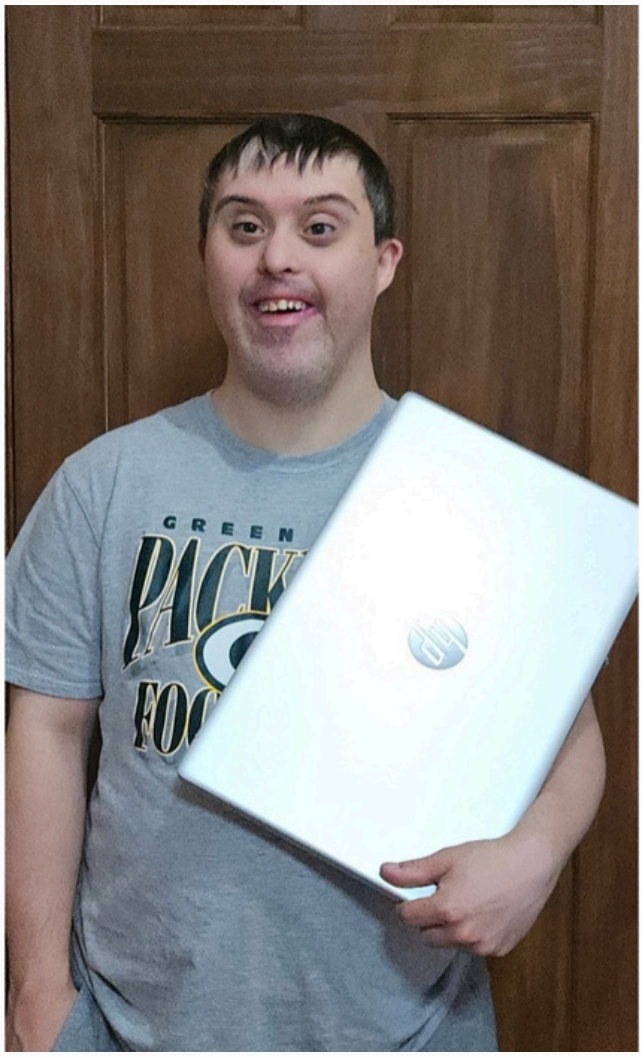
Adam has severe and nonverbal autism. Having a tablet has been a dream come true he loves watching his YouTube videos and relaxing with it.

Debby

I have truly enjoyed having the Alexa. It makes my life so much easier being able to ask for the time and for the weather for TV stations rather than struggling with my blindness to try to figure those things out. Thank you so much for this generous gift.

Joseph A. Cekola Memorial Endowment Fund

To provide financial assistance for the families with permanently disabled children who desire to maintain the family unit by caring for the child in their home.



$124,926

Awarded to 25 Families

We would like to Thank you for financing the laptop given to Jonnie just days after his 33rd birthday.

Jonnie loves to write and save his many thoughts. He has vision problems (floating cataracts), so having the laptop allows him to enlarge the screen to see what he's typing.

Thank you again,
Jerry, Sheila and Jonnie Angeletti

Upcoming Events





9th Annual Arctoberfest

Arctoberfest is more than just an event; it's a chance to be part of a positive change. With every bid and every contribution, you're helping us make a difference in the lives of individuals that experience a disability. You help keep our services at no cost to our families! Mark your calendar and spread the word – together, we can create meaningful change.

October 23, 2025
Radisson Plaza Hotel
100 W Michigan Ave, Kalamazoo, MI 49007
6:30-9:00 PM

19th Annual Inclusion Conference

Our Inclusion Conference brings together a diverse group of professionals, advocates, and thought leaders to explore and promote the principles of inclusivity in various aspects of society, including but not limited to education, workplace, communities, and policy-making. We believe that your presence would be invaluable in enriching the discussions and initiatives at our conference.

March 18, 2026
Delta Hotel & Conference Center
2747 S 11th St, Kalamazoo, MI 49009
8:30-4:00PM

Contact Us



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