September 2024

The Arc™

Community Advocates

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

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Letter from the ED



Rhasheda Shepherd

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, and 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, and we look forward to continuing this journey with you.

With Sincere Gratitude - Rhasheda Shepherd, Executive Director

Company 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

- Rasheda Shepherd, Executive Director
- Anne Gaertner, Director of Outreach & Advocacy
- Sarah Carmany, Legislative Laison
- LaTaynia Conant, Marketing & Communications Coordinator
- Kallie Griffin-Pena, 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.

119

Screenings

103

Intakes

1238

Contacts Were Made

1.4

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.

292

Goals Developed

76%

Completed Goals

16%

Goals No Longer Being Pursued

4%

Goals Still In Progress

Client Success Stories

Jacob Soule

I am Jacob's mom, Katie Soule and I would love to provide an update because I feel like Jacob is such a success story within the (autism) community! He is now 22 years old and has moved into his first apartment to start his junior year at Western Michigan University. He is an Environmental Geography major and works closely with WMU's Autism Services Center to stay organized and communicative with professors and other staff. In addition to being a full time college student, he is employed at the Children's Nature Playscape downtown near Bronson Park where he works with children as an outdoor educator. He still isn't driving and I don't know if he ever will, but he has learned how to navigate the Metro bus system like a champ and really gets around.

He was also recently contacted by an investor who would like to partner with him to start an online greenhouse business using his international social media connections, which continue to grow. This opportunity is very exciting to Jacob and our whole family!

As I brag about all of this, I just have to say that without Annie and the Arc Community Advocates, I don't know how much of it would've happened. As a high school counselor with a master's degree in counselor education I STILL struggled advocating for my own son in school and community settings. Even though I had participated in countless IEPs for my students, it was extremely different to be sitting on the other side of the table as a parent. The emotional element clouded my judgment and made me less effective.



In addition to the expertise the Arc brought to the table, Annie also provided a level of calm. Inside of this calm is where solid and logical work got done. I have worked with the Arc both personally as Jacob's mom and professionally as a school counselor. I can say that in both situations when emotions run high, all parties can lose sight of the ultimate goal we all work towards: Helping ALL children succeed by reaching their full potential.

I am so thankful for the Arc Community Advocates in their tireless quest to help children, parents, educators, and various agency personnel strive to be the best we all can be as we navigate life with our most vulnerable populations. I know that Jacob has had a better life because of them and I am positive there are many stories like his out there!

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 have announced a landmark program that will expand access to technology and encourage greater independence for thousands of people with IDD. Through local 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.



$6,622

Awarded

Faith absolutely LOVES her wagon!! Also plays on and uses her new tablet from The Arc Community Advocates. We couldn't be more thankful that an organization like yours is here to help our girl prosper and enjoy life the way everyone else around her can. She can finally enjoy being out in the world for more than an hour. Thank you so much for everything you do. For my girl and our entire community!

Upcoming Events





8th 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 24, 2024
Radisson Plaza Hotel
100 W Michigan Ave, Kalamazoo, MI 49007
6:30-9:00 PM

18th Annual Inclusion Conference

Our Inclusion Conference aims to bring 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 14, 2025
Delta Hotel & Conference Center
2747 S 11th St, Kalamazoo, MI 49009
8:30-4:00PM

Contact Us



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