

Our mission is to empower people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families to lead better lives by providing a lifetime of high-quality services, family support, and advocacy.

Adjusting to the New Normal

As the COVID-19 pandemic has turned the world upside down, the St. Louis Arc has adapted as we maintain our commitment to the people we serve. From in-person direct care to virtual opportunities, we've dedicated ourselves to ensuring our participants and families feel supported as they confront the challenges created by the coronavirus.

From day one, our highest priority has been the health and safety of the 113 older adults who rely on us for around-the-clock residential support. In anticipation of the virus' arrival we began implementing safety



Keeping residents safe and active

protocols designed to minimize the risk of exposure at 32 homes and apartments in the community. Preventive measures included rigorous disinfecting practices, screening staff and residents for symptoms, strict use of facemasks and social distancing and limiting non-essential personnel from entering the homes. We're convinced that our proactive efforts led to our early success in keeping residences virus-free.

For our other programs – leisure, employment, day support, children's services, and family support – our staff continue to flex their creativity and incorporate technology to keep people engaged and connected. We have adopted telehealth strategies for children, virtual recreation opportunities for young adults, and remote coaching for supported employees. Although no replacement for direct contact, our efforts are helping mitigate the isolation and inactivity that result from the disruption to our participants' daily routines.



A virtual Skills to Pay the Bills class

We are also on the front lines of responding to the critical needs of our community's most vulnerable citizens. For many families, the challenges of caring for a child with a disability have been compounded by the loss of a job or childcare. In partnership with the United Way of Greater St. Louis we have provided basic necessities, food, and household items to many families facing dire circumstances.

As we've begun to resume certain in-person activities we are taking great pains to safeguard the health of our participants and staff. We will only proceed when we can minimize risks through social distancing, increased hygiene, and other precautions.

Throughout this issue of the Arc Times you'll see not only the work we're doing, but also the response of those who are rallying to support our efforts. We're lucky that St. Louis is such a giving community. We couldn't do it without you!



Softball in the COVID era



From the Top

Celebrating 70 Years of Empowering People with Disabilities



During the past several months many of us have had to decide what is essential for ourselves and families. Food, cleaning supplies, masks are all essential items, but what does it mean to be an essential worker? While most people may think of doctors, nurses, or first responders, our St. Louis Arc families likely think about the people taking care of their loved ones - direct support professionals (DSPs). Our DSPs have been on the front line every day to ensure the health and safety of our residents throughout this crisis. I cannot thank them enough for their selfless commitment to the individuals they serve and the mission of the St. Louis Arc. They have been and continue to be essential workers.

I also want to express my gratitude for the essential support we receive from our many partners in the community. In particular I want to commend our funding partners within the Eastern Region Alliance, including the Productive Living Board, St. Louis Office for DD Resources, Developmental Disabilities Resource Board of St. Charles County and Developmental Disability Advocates of Jefferson County, in addition to the Missouri Department of Mental Health, and United Way. Their leadership, partnership, and support have been truly essential during this challenging time.

Mark A. Keeley, MSW, LCSW
President and CEO

New Board Member April Regester, Ph.D.

The St. Louis Arc welcomes April Regester, Ph.D., Associate Professor, College of Education, UMSL, to the Board of Directors. April has served on the St. Louis Arc's Program Committee since 2011. She received her Ph.D. in Special Education, Disabilities & Risk Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 2009. She also holds an M.A. in Special Education, and a Preliminary Education Specialist Credential for students with moderate to severe disabilities. April's expertise in our field makes her a perfect addition to the Arc Board.



MEET OUR NEW VICE PRESIDENT



Stephanie Scott has been named Vice President of Support Services and Strategy for the St. Louis Arc. Since joining the Arc in 2010, Stephanie has directed quality assurance efforts, helping the agency achieve the highest level of accreditation from the Council on Quality and Leadership. In her new role, Stephanie will oversee Community Supports, which include Employment, Leisure, Connect, Launch, Nutrition, and Adult ABA services. She will continue to provide leadership for organizational strategy, quality and staff training and development. Stephanie holds a master's degree in Social Work from the University of Missouri-St. Louis and received her Licensed Clinical Social Worker certification in 2015.

St. Louis Arc Community Partners

Providing a Safety Net for the Community

For more than six decades the St. Louis Arc has been a proud member agency of the United Way of Greater St. Louis. Together our organizations have worked to provide a safety net for our community's most vulnerable citizens. In order to maximize their impact in the 16-county region, the United Way recently conducted a comprehensive needs assessment and strategic realignment of resources. In June, the United Way announced the list of 167 "Safety Net" partner nonprofits for 2021-2023. The St. Louis Arc is honored to be included among those organizations. We look forward to continuing our partnership and are eager to help rally the community's support during the upcoming United Way campaign.



Keeping People on the Job

People with disabilities often rely on public transportation to get to and from work. A transportation system that was already considered challenging for people with disabilities has been made more complicated by the COVID pandemic: bus routes have been suspended or consolidated, commute times have doubled or tripled, and some trips have been rendered impossible. Many of the Arc's supported employees have been faced with a choice between spending three hours getting to work by bus or paying out most of their earnings for alternate transportation.

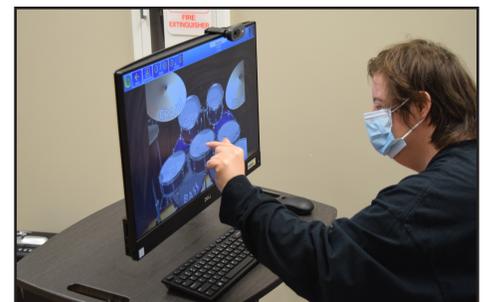


To help address these issues, the St. Louis Arc has received a \$25,000 grant from Citi, in partnership with the National Disability Institute (NDI). Citi and NDI's funding will enable the Arc to provide direct assistance to help people meet unexpected costs for transportation and personal protective equipment, so that they can maintain competitive jobs in the community. "The pandemic has disrupted work routines for many people, including workers with intellectual and developmental disabilities," says St. Louis Arc president and CEO Mark Keeley. "We applaud Citi and NDI for recognizing that the needs of people with disabilities shouldn't be overlooked during this crisis."

Above: Stanley J. shows off the Laclade Cab gift card that will help him get to his job at a local retirement community. With him are Arc Career Consultant Laurie Gaterman and Employment Specialist Sandy Crowell.

Helping People Stay Connected

Thanks to funding from Charter Communications' Spectrum Digital Education Grant, the participants at the Arc's Aging With Empowerment site in North County have new ways to communicate, learn, interact, and experience the world. "People with disabilities, especially those in low income communities, often have limited access to technology, including email, Facebook, or other social networks," says Mark Keeley, President and CEO. "One of the most impactful results of Spectrum's grant is how it is empowering people to stay engaged virtually with relatives and friends during the pandemic."



Kat F. learns to play the drums using the equipment provided by the Charter grant.

Around the Arc St. Louis

Transitioning to Virtual Supports

While the pandemic has resulted in the cancellation of most of the Arc's in-person activities, we are committed to combatting the isolation that the crisis has caused for our participants. As soon as the virus hit, our staff leapt into action to come up with innovative online and remote activities to keep individuals and families active and engaged.

The Leisure department has been utilizing Zoom for virtual cooking classes, R&R Camp activities, and an online version of our Teens in Motion and Neighborhood Experiences summer programs. Supported Employment, which is heavily reliant on face-to-face support, has adapted by doing virtual job coaching and check-ins with employees to make sure they feel supported and are keeping their skills sharp. For the participants in our employment training programs, we are offering "Skills To Pay the Bills" and other training opportunities in a virtual format. Launch, our program for transition-aged youth, has implemented an array of virtual activities, including scavenger hunts, trivia nights, and "daily boosts."

The pandemic has been particularly stressful for parents, who have taken on the role of full-time caregivers while often struggling to maintain their own employment. Our Family Supports department has responded with a variety of virtual support groups using Zoom and Facebook Live. They are also offering workshops and family activities, including Sibshops, Bingo, Zumba with Sam, and karaoke in a virtual format.

We all look forward to the day when we can return to activities without social distancing restrictions. Nonetheless, this challenge has helped us identify new ways to engage our participants that we will incorporate into our program mix even when COVID becomes a distant memory.



From Top: Virtual Zumba class with Sam Gross; Virtual tour of the Center of Science and Industry in Columbus, OH; Participants and staff dressing up like clowns for Sibshops.

Keeping Our Residents Active, but Safe

Throughout the pandemic the health and safety of our residents has been the top priority of the staff in our 32 community- and campus-based homes. We implemented strict policies designed to minimize the risk of exposure and to activate a quarantine protocol should someone show symptoms or test positive. While these measures have addressed the safety of our residents, we are mindful that these conditions can have an impact on their social and emotional well-being. Our staff have worked hard to keep residents active, socially engaged, and connected to their families. To celebrate Memorial Day, we held a 'social distancing' BBQ dinner that allowed the residents to enjoy the company of their friends and neighbors. The staff from our Community Engagement program have also stepped in to help residents adapt their typical day program activities to their home environment including celebrating birthdays virtually. With everyone working together we have been able to maintain a sense of community that is the hallmark of our residential program.

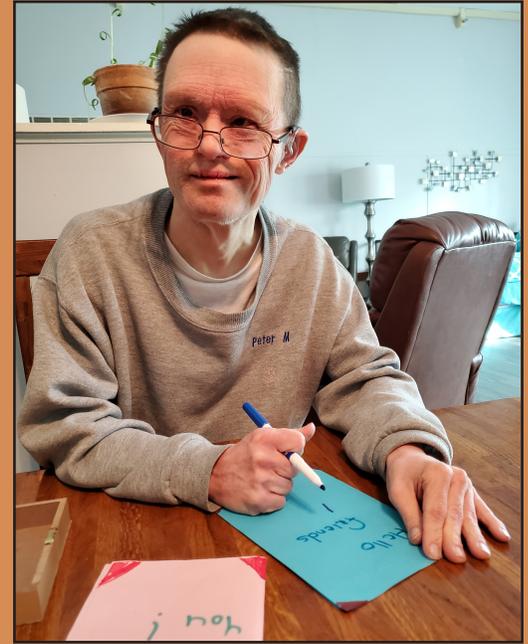


Virtual birthday party for Dwight T.

Giving Back to Others

Arc participants and staff from the Residential and Community Engagement programs wanted to find a way to bring joy to others in the community. They decided to use their artistic talents to make special cards to be delivered to folks living in area nursing homes. Thanks to their efforts, 200 people had their days brightened with colorful cards and warm wishes.

Right: St. Louis Arc resident and artist, Peter M. creating cards for people living in area nursing homes.



Camping in the COVID Era

R&R Camp is a weekend camping program for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, ages seven and older. Families and campers rely on camp weekends as a way to take a break, re-energize, and re-connect with friends. Due to the pandemic, Camp Director Kara Huffman had to think outside the box and find innovative ways to engage campers while they stayed at home. The program moved to a virtual format through Zoom that included cooking classes, art sessions, and even a virtual tour of an organic farm in Oregon. The Leisure department shipped art kits directly to each camper's home to make sure they could participate in the various art classes. The support of the Productive Living Board has been critical to our success in transitioning R&R Camp to a virtual format.



Left: Alicia receiving her art kit for R&R Camp.

Top: Campers and staff at a virtual camp day.



“Wrestling” with a Personal Outcome

Matt had a personal goal of meeting a professional wrestler, and the Community Engagement and Residential teams came together to make that happen. Matt had a Zoom call with Kevin Lee Davidson, a professional wrestler who has worked with over 20 wrestling companies worldwide. Matt asked Kevin questions about his career, his wrestling moves, and his travels around the world. Matt then proudly shared his interview with his friends in the Community Engagement program.



Right: Matt interviewing professional wrestler Kevin Lee Davidson.



Giving Corner

Our Community Answers the Call

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the St. Louis Arc put out the call for help and the community responded in a big way! Dozens of individuals and organizations have donated facemasks, personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies, and other essential items that have been used in our programs or distributed to families. We would like to thank all who have supported us throughout this crisis, especially the Chinese Education and Culture Center of St. Louis, the Catherine Connection from Mercy, the St. Louis Diaper Bank, Forai of St. Louis, and the Hispanic Leaders Group of St. Louis.



Left: Ed Nieman, St. Louis Arc, picks up masks from the Chinese Education and Culture Center; Right: Alex Ott, St. Louis Arc, with Hadley Kombrink from Mercy

BLUEPRINT4summer STL

Summer Scholarships for Neighborhood Experiences

The St. Louis Arc is honored to have received renewed support from Blueprint4SummerSTL, a program of the Clark-Fox Family Foundation. The funding provides scholarship assistance to allow youth with limited financial ability to participate in our Neighborhood Experiences summer program. Founded in 2015, Blueprint4SummerSTL is committed to helping youth succeed by connecting them to opportunities that develop their creativity, expand their education, and prepare them for career success.

Helping Families In Need

With the help of a COVID-19 Emergency Response Grant from the United Way, the St. Louis Arc was able to provide food, household supplies, baby items, and educational materials to 56 families who were facing extreme hardship throughout April and May. The families had either a parent or a young child with a disability and they were additionally vulnerable due to other factors such as poverty, lack of transportation, unstable housing or employment, or health issues. In addition to providing supplies, St. Louis Arc staff stayed in close contact with the families, offered guidance on safety matters, and facilitated connections to other emergency resources.



Left: Items purchased with grant funding from the United Way; Top: Staff boxing up essential supplies and food for distribution to our families.

St. Louis Arc *Accentuate the Positive*

OUR STAFF ARE THE BEST!

In the world of human service organizations, you're only as good as the people you hire to deliver your mission. At the St. Louis Arc, our staff are the epitome of caring, compassion and professionalism. Never has this been more evident than during the past six months. Our frontline employees have risen to meet every challenge that's come their way. They are true heroes of the COVID crisis.

The staff in our 32 homes embraced the challenge of keeping their residents safe and healthy from day one. "The residential teams have been rock solid throughout the pandemic," says Craig Strohbeck, Director of Residential Services-Dautel Circle. "Teamwork has been the name of the game, and they have responded marvelously to pick up each piece of the puzzle, take on more responsibility, and support each person in ways no one would have imagined."

In our Supported Employment department, staff had to adjust to changes in both their own job routines and in the job routines of the people they support. Says Brian Hubler, Director of Employment Services: "I can't begin to thank the Employment team enough for all of the hard work and dedication to the people we support. Their creativity and outside-the-box thinking to adapt to this strange new world has been amazing."

A Family's Perspective

My daughter Michelle has participated in R & R camp for many years. When camp was cancelled in the spring, Kara jumped in and organized Zoom meetings for the campers. These events were a lifesaver in our house. With Michelle home from work, it gave her something to look forward to every afternoon. It gave her a chance to see her camp friends and her camp counselors. Michelle participated in exercise classes, zumba classes, art, games, scavenger hunts, trivia games, and more. We even toured a farm in Oregon!

I wanted to let you know what an amazing staff you have and what a difference they make in Michelle's life.

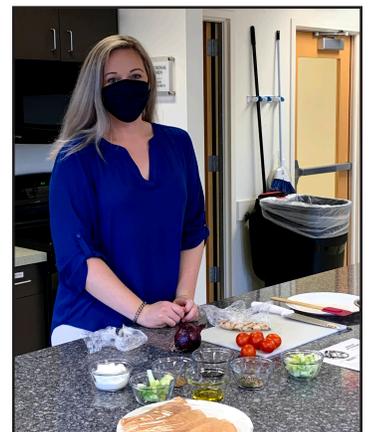
*Thank You,
Chris Watson*



Matthew Quarrels supporting Fred P. to fill cleaning bottles at a Community Engagement site.

Kate Hannon, Senior Director of Belle Children's Services, marvels at the way her staff have responded to the crisis facing North County early childhood programs. "A global pandemic is not strong enough to stop the determined efforts of our Normandy-focused Early Intervention team. With the immediate needs of maintaining the health and safety of everyone involved, they were able to switch from face-to-face weekly services in eight child care centers to totally virtual daily supports."

For 70 years the St. Louis Arc has responded to the ever-changing needs of our community. Although our 70th year might be the most challenging yet, the dedication and commitment of our staff will ensure that our services remain the hallmark of quality.



Katharine Rug, Director of Nutrition Services, prepping food for a virtual cooking class.



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