

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.

Employment In A Changing World

The COVID pandemic has created challenges in every aspect of society, and unfortunately the field of employment for people with disabilities has been disproportionately impacted. Luckily the St. Louis Arc emerged as a leader and early adopter of virtual supports as a way to keep people on their career paths.

Many supported employees work in businesses deemed “essential,” so the challenge became how to continue providing job support when in-person contact was not possible. For employees who were either laid off or were looking for jobs before the pandemic, the challenge centered on how to keep skills sharp until employment could be regained.

The St. Louis Arc Employment Services team responded quickly to ensure that essential employees had the support needed to stay on the job under stressful conditions. Coaching, one-on-one support, and daily check-ins were transitioned to virtual formats. Employers were grateful that our staff could provide support remotely, allowing them to comply with capacity restrictions and safety precautions.

Despite the disruption to normal routines, participation in the Arc’s skills development and training classes flourished over the past year. The transition to virtual platforms has resulted in attendance tripling for many sessions, due in part to the convenience of participating from home and the removal of barriers such as transportation. The already-popular Skills To Pay The Bills sessions have become even more successful in helping participants develop the social and vocational skills needed to succeed in competitive employment.



Michelle kept her skills sharp during the pandemic and recently started working at Grant's Farm, a job she was originally offered before COVID placed it on hold.

“There have been so many positive outcomes during this time,” said Employment Services Assistant Director Taylor Hartmann. “We’ve seen both participants and staff emerge as leaders and find new avenues for their creativity.”

Examples of this creativity can be found in the “Motivational Mondays” and “Tuesday Engagement” activities. Led by participants, staff and Washington University occupational therapy students, these sessions have created a sense of community at a time when isolation threatened to undermine the progress job-seekers had been making. Participant Tara C. seized the opportunity to lead virtual cardio classes, while John J. found an outlet for holding sports trivia sessions.

As we transition back to in-person support, the Employment Services team plans to incorporate the best parts of the virtual experience into our ongoing menu of services. If there’s one thing we’ve learned from the past 18 months it is that we must continue to evolve in order to succeed in this changing environment.

Mark's Message



I can't believe I am saying this, but we are already halfway through 2021 and beginning our new fiscal year. We have had a lot to celebrate in the first half of this year. We provided vaccines to hundreds of our residents, staff and participants. We added two new board members, hosted an incredibly successful golf tournament, and had two direct support staff win regional and national awards. Last, but certainly not least, we successfully achieved Person-Centered Excellence Accreditation with Distinction from The Council on Quality and Leadership, our accrediting body. This achievement was four years in the making culminating in 60 meetings during a rigorous accreditation week in March. I can't tell you how proud I am of our staff for their hard work and commitment to excellence.

As we look to the second half of 2021 we have many new projects on the horizon and opportunities for growth. Several of our departments will resume in-person programs this fall or offer a hybrid format of virtual/in-person opportunities. We are excited and hopeful as we work to safely return to "normal" and begin welcoming visitors back to our Arc Family Center building.

Thank you for your continued support and service to the St. Louis Arc!

Mark A. Keeley, MSW, LCSW
President and CEO

Welcome New Board Members

Courtney Dean has over 25 years of experience in the investment management industry and is currently the Chief Revenue Officer for eCIO, a fintech investment advisory firm. She has a BA from Colgate University and an MBA in Finance from New York University's Stern School of Business. Courtney derives her passion for the Arc from her uncle Dan Liebig's experience as a long-time participant.



Michkeal L. Cross joins the Board as a self-advocate and a member of the Program Strategy Committee. Michkeal is the president of the new St. Louis Self-Advocates group. His future career goals are to become a disability or civil rights lawyer, a professor, or a TV talk show host. Michkeal likes to read for knowledge, listen to music, learn a new language, and give back to his community.



Vaccination Support

Thanks to Arc Board member Kathie Winter and her husband Richard, the Arc was able to be proactive in vaccinating residents and staff beginning in February. The Winters helped secure 250 Moderna vaccines through United Scripts. With the additional generosity of Long Term Care RX we have now provided vaccines to all residents and staff who wanted them.

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY MAKING AN IMPACT

The St. Louis Arc and Washington University's School of Medicine Occupational Therapy (OT) program have had a growing partnership since 2019. It started with a presentation to the Arc's Social Justice Committee, when an OT professor and student intern helped participants learn how to advocate for themselves during health care visits. From there the partnership branched out to other successful collaborations with the Arc's Transition Services, Supported Employment, and Leisure Services departments.



In the spring of 2020, OT student interns began working with Next and Launch, two of the Arc's programs for transition-aged youth. During the year-long internship the OT students helped develop an independent living curriculum that will be used in our NextED program. Other projects included creating a series on healthcare self-advocacy. When the students finished their internships in May 2021, they presented their work at the WashU OT Scholarship Day.

The partnership with the Arc's Support Employment department began in the summer of 2020 and proved to be very beneficial in helping our job coaches adapt to providing supports during the pandemic. The OT students observed 1:1 sessions, brainstormed support strategies with coaches, implemented assessments, and lead group classes on topics such as Budgeting, Diversity and Inclusion, Thai Chi, and more. Female OT students started a series of classes called the Girls Club, covering Empowerment, Boundaries, Relationships, and Confidence. Male OT students created a similar series called the Man Cave.

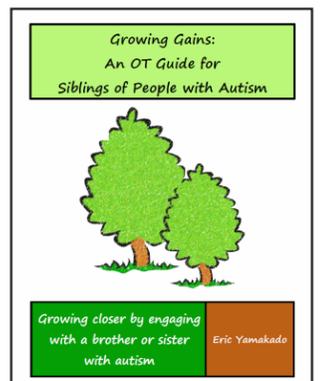


Betsy Hawkins-Chernof (left) with OT students

The Arc's Leisure Services team received a big assist from the OT department in creating its successful new PLUG IN gaming program. Betsy Hawkins-Chernof, Occupational Therapist, Assistive Technology Professional, and Lecturer at Washington University worked with Arc Leisure Coordinator Dan Correll to design the program. Betsy says of the program: "It might sound corny, but PLUG IN is the program I have been dreaming of since I started teaching at the university. I have this amazing opportunity to be involved in my community, teach Occupational Therapy students through service learning, and live my dream of promoting inclusion through gaming. I finish every game night with a huge smile on my face!"

The partnership with Washington University has yielded other benefits that could extend well beyond the Arc community. Eric Yamakado, a doctoral OT student, worked on a capstone project supervised by Arc President and CEO Mark Keeley. Eric's project involved creating a guide designed to help siblings grow closer by engaging with their brother or sister with autism. Called "Growing Gains: An OT Guide for Siblings of People with Autism," the guide focuses on how people can support their siblings by assisting them with their daily activities.

"Washington University is known for the global impact made by its students, faculty and alumni," said Keeley. "We salute them for also making a difference right here in their 'back yard' by partnering with local organizations like the St. Louis Arc."



Memorial Rock Garden at Dautel Circle | Arc Golf Tournament

When people we love pass away, it is natural to want to find a way to remember them and share that with others. The Aging With Empowerment (AWE) Central staff and participants decided to design a memorial garden to honor loved ones from AWE Central. Those honored include participants, regular visitors, and a few folks who inspired the program's existence but passed away too soon to attend.

This project has been in the planning stages for several months. The engraved stones were selected carefully and include unique fonts chosen to represent each participant's personality and character. All of the rocks were painted together by AWE Central participants and staff. The fairy garden was added to celebrate some of the more whimsical loved ones who passed. Additional engraved stones will be added over time.

The 31st Annual St. Louis Arc Golf Tournament at the Country Club of St. Albans was a swinging success! Not only did we have two full fields of golfers in-person, perfect weather that was sunny, breezy, and 85 degrees, we also raised more than \$300,000! Thank you to our co-chairs, Michael Neidorff and Ron Kruszewski, for their continued leadership and support!



Top: Centene Team, 1st Place Lewis & Clark Course; Bottom: Giuntoli Team, 1st Place Tavern Creek Course



Left: AWE Assistant Director Jessica Gantner and Georgia Kuss, Coordinator, AWE Central, working on the garden. Above: Memorial Garden

ENJOYING THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Folks from residential services have been enjoying the spring weather with outdoor activities and baseball games. Below: Claude and Jamie (not shown) attended a game with tickets donated by KHS; gentlemen from Clager in Community Residential attended an old rivalry baseball game at Busch stadium between South and North high schools; Residential Services Director Craig Strohbeck and Billy H. enjoy a Bocce Ball game on the new court at Dautel Circle.



PLUG IN Program Keeps Athletes Engaged

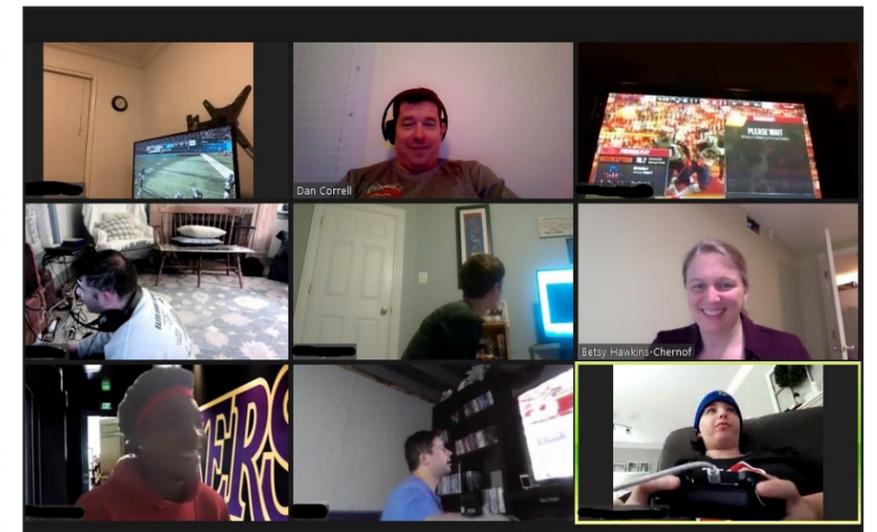
When the pandemic hit in early 2020, the St. Louis Arc's Leisure Services Department converted 16 of its in-person programs to a virtual format in less than a month. One challenge was to create a virtual experience for "Arc United" participants -- the athletes, with and without disabilities, who missed playing basketball, softball, and indoor soccer due to the pandemic. After researching many different virtual programs, the Leisure team decided to develop an Esports video gaming league called PLUG IN (Play Leisure's United Games). This inclusive Esports program, one of two in the United States, allows players ages 16 and up of all abilities and skill levels to play against their friends, family, and players in other states. The first official game played by PLUG IN was the NFL football game Madden 19. The current season's game is the popular Rocket League.

Participants learn valuable skills such as communication, good sportsmanship, problem-solving, online etiquette, and teamwork. For our participants, this is an opportunity to interact with other gamers in a way that may not otherwise be possible. Especially during the pandemic, the PLUG IN program has helped participants stay connected with their friends and create new relationships. The league has a dedicated Zoom session on Thursday evenings to see each other, ask questions, and play additional games. PLUG IN uses Mission Control, a gaming platform app that allows players to see their schedule, schedule games, and rank throughout the season.

The St. Louis Arc sought donations for gaming consoles and games to loan to participants who may not have the equipment to participate. We wanted to ensure that the PLUG IN program was accessible and affordable for all participants. We also had several participants who had never played video games before. As a result of this program, they now enjoy video games and have learned about the various consoles and game options.

Participants have stated that they enjoy being part of an organized league and no longer have to play games by themselves. One gamer said, "It helped me connect with other people and make new friends. I will be doing it again when they send the email to reapply for the next PLUG IN tournament." Another participant said, "I loved everything, gaming and meeting other people."

In the words of one parent: "I wanted to let you know what a positive impact that this program had on my son during the winter. He spent the pandemic primarily in his room with little social interaction, and it was rare to hear him laugh. On the first night of Plug In, I sat outside his door just to hear him laugh and have so much fun with everyone. I know that this program immensely improved his mental health in a time when it was most needed. My son has difficulties making social connections, and gaming has always been a great outlet for him. This combination of gaming as a safe social experience has been absolutely perfect for him."



Participants playing Madden 19 with Dan Correll, St. Louis Arc, and Betsy Hawkins-Chernof, Washington University

St. Louis Arc *Accentuate the Positive*

Accreditation With Distinction

Since 1983, the St. Louis Arc has been continuously accredited by The Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL). CQL is an international organization dedicated to defining, measuring, and improving personal quality of life. CQL's vision is a world of dignity, opportunity, and community for all people.

Following months of preparation, numerous planning meetings with CQL, a week-long accreditation review, and an in-depth approval process, the St. Louis Arc officially achieved CQL's Person-Centered Excellence Accreditation "With Distinction" on April 2. This is a four-year accreditation term that encompasses the very highest standards that have been achieved by only six organizations worldwide.

"CQL commends St. Louis Arc for its success in increasing the quality of life for the people it supports," states Mary Kay Rizzolo, President and CEO of CQL. "We are pleased to partner with them on this journey of ongoing organizational transformation."

Arc President and CEO Mark Keeley notes, "The accreditation from CQL validates and impacts our employee retention efforts, strategic programmatic development, and ultimately the high-quality, person-centered supports we provide. The end result of this process is a plan of action that will address our top priorities to reach Person-Centered Excellence over the next four years."



Outstanding Direct Support Professionals

Samantha McNeal was awarded the 2021 Person-Centered Direct Support Professional of the Year Award from the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR), a national disability provider association. The ANCOR award recognizes outstanding professionals who deliver long-term supports and services to people with I/DD. Samantha was selected for recognition from among 350 nominations, a testament to her exceptional work to support St. Louis Arc participants.



Seth Buehnerkemper was awarded the Allene Jackson Direct Support Professional of the Year Award from the Association on Aging with Developmental Disabilities. The award honors Seth for demonstrating a commitment to excellence in his work with people 50 years of age and older who have developmental disabilities. Allene Jackson developed the Association on Aging while working for the Arc in the 1990s, eventually spinning it off into a separate agency.



St. Louis Arc *Around the Arc*

New Self-Advocates Group

The St. Louis Self-Advocates is a new group of teens and young adults with disabilities organizing to create change in their community. The group is facilitated by Arc Transition Navigator Madeline Webster and has elected officers from the group to help with leadership. While most self-advocate groups target adults, this group is geared for people between 14 and 29. Group members are developing individual leadership skills and cooking up big dreams of legislative advocacy and political activism. In addition, the self-advocates are having fun, making friends, and seeking to ensure that individuals with disabilities are given a seat at all tables in which decisions that impact them are being made. These young self-advocates are demanding attention and making waves.

Launch, NextEd, NextEd Challenge

The St. Louis Arc created two programs, Next and Launch, to help teens and young adults transition to independence and set goals for their future as adults. Building on their early success, both programs are now expanding to offer new opportunities. With funding from the St. Louis Office for Developmental Disability Resources, the Arc will now offer free access to the Launch program to qualifying city residents. Launch In The City will support individuals to connect with other young adults living in the city and build relationships within their community while working on their personal goals.



The Next program is expanding with two new programs: NextEd and NextEd Challenge. NextEd is a class-based program for young adults, age 18-25, who are ready to take the next step toward living independently. This innovative program utilizes personalized goals, flexible supports, resource development, hands-on learning, video modeling, and virtual reality to work toward self-directed living. NextED Challenge is a new residential summer camp experience that provides young adults an opportunity to challenge their expectations of living on their own. Attendees participate in hands-on learning, interactive group activities, and community exploration while staying in apartment-style living. The first sessions of NextED Challenge will be held this August, with participants staying in an Airbnb during the day near Forest Park and the Saint Louis Zoo.

Virtual Opportunities Attract People Nationwide

The Arc's Family Support team has worked with Arc staff and community partners to host weekly Q&A Sessions and evening events through Zoom and Facebook Live. Several of these sessions have included nationally known panelists. Guests have included: Dr. Kerry Magro, an award-winning national speaker, best-selling author, and autism advocate; Janice Fialka, a nationally recognized lecturer, author, and advocate on issues related to disability; and Janice's son Micah Fialka-Feldman, a disability activist and speaker. In 2014, Micah was appointed by President Obama to the Presidential Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities.



Micah Fialka-Feldman, Janice Fialka, Sharon Spurlock

Megan Eader, the Arc's volunteer manager, found innovative ways to keep volunteers engaged when in-person opportunities were limited or nonexistent. Volunteers found new ways to interact with the Arc participants virtually. For example, volunteers helped with bingo and music therapy classes, participated in virtual dance clubs, assisted with cooking classes, and conducted contactless meal delivery to our residential homes. Megan also requested volunteers send in homemade cards for different holidays and birthdays to be shared with program participants. Our volunteers then shared the request, and cards have come in from all across the U.S. and brought joy to many of our residents and participants.



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