

The Arc of Story County

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Need for Program

The Arc of Story County is a resource for individuals with developmental disabilities. Their target population comprises all Story County residents with intellectual or developmental disabilities, and subsequently they also serve families and other providers for these individuals. Overall, they serve about 225 participants/families through their ASSET funded programs. Active Lifestyles, which is their largest program, grows by about 10 participants per year. They have gone from having 2-3 social/recreational opportunities per week to 4-5 days per week. 2016 is remarkable for the initiation of a fifth program area—Project SEARCH.

The mission of The Arc is “to enrich the lives of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities as they learn, work, play and grow within our community.” They achieve this through five program categories: active lifestyles, advocacy, respite, care coordination, and Project SEARCH (new in 2016). Each area of service fulfills an important and otherwise unmet need for the population served. The result is greater independence and better quality of life for the individuals who receive services. In general, the active lifestyles programming promotes better mental health and life satisfaction through physical recreation and social interaction; while training provided through Project SEARCH prepares clients for competitive employment. Advocacy and care coordination help to navigate myriad hurdles unique to this population. Access to respite care enables families and other providers to keep participants in a home setting.

In response to the challenge of sustained employment for its participants, the Arc has implemented Project SEARCH, a national program that serves young adults (18-30) with disabilities (high graduates or the equivalent). It is unique in that it provides a combination of classroom training and workplace immersion, empowering clientele to develop work skills and become competitive in the workplace. While Iowa State University is the employer for the inaugural class, the director anticipates that other employers will be involved with future classes. Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) provides funding for the internship portion. This program is being staffed by a new graduate who was already engaged with active lifestyles programming.

Program Strengths

In general, leadership and talent is the strength of this agency. Together, the director and the board have effectively developed and implemented new approaches to outreach, managed financial challenges and addressed unmet needs. Not only have they implemented new programming, but they are providing community leadership in support of a Miracle Field that would serve the needs of Ames and surrounding communities. The director’s drive and visioning, along with staff’s engagement and enthusiasm are proving to be a strong combination.

The breadth of its support systems is another strength of the ARC of Story County. Building on its Special Olympics programming, they now offer a diverse set of activities and resources. They use a variety of communications and events to reach potential participants and build relationships with the community in general, as well as local legislators. They offer an informative newsletter, and their

annual Viva La ARC event has been very successful at “friendbuilding” within the community. They have an excellent relationship with Iowa State organizations and students who volunteer in a number of capacities, including the Best Buddies program and fundraising events. To ensure their long-term viability, they continue to build cash reserves to an appropriate level to ensure that services can continue through future changes in funding sources.

Program Weaknesses

A significant area of vulnerability is The Arc’s funding sources. The operating budget relies almost exclusively on ASSET funding. Furthermore, the addition of new programming (Project SEARCH) and changes in grants and CICS qualification criteria for respite care will place additional burden on the operating budget and ultimately may result in unmet needs. In response, they continue to seek additional funding sources through grants and fundraising activities.

Another challenge has been community involvement. While ISU students have been very active as volunteers, they have limited availability on weekends and during the summer. Also, turnover is inherent in a college population. Attempts to recruit community members to provide support for activities and relationship development have met with limited success.

Financial Outlook

The financial outlook for the Arc remains cautiously optimistic. They have recently completed a clean audit of their books. Their board is engaged in efforts to grow “rainy day” assets through development of private donation sources, as well as new fundraisers to ensure financial stability.

The attitude of The Arc is that they do not allow funding to get in the way of doing something. If there is an important program, they find ways to make it happen. They are creative and flexible and continue to build a diverse base of funding sources.

Internal Management Practice

With a small staff and an active board, the Arc of Story County operates efficiently and effectively. They work together to identify and implement new ways to achieve their mission, through a creative approach to programming, staffing and resource utilization. Recently, the board reorganized around four (4) action-oriented committees – Communications, Finance, Service and Fundraising. This should lead to increased engagement and activities driven by board members.

Additionally, the Arc has made excellent use of community and public resources. Iowa State University has been an excellent source of volunteers and is now a partner in Project SEARCH. The Arc is developing relationships with other employers, as well as Progress Industries, to support employment for its clientele.

Areas of focus this year include building a more diverse funding stream, enhancing opportunities for competitive employment through Project SEARCH and other partnerships, and supporting other community resources such as the Miracle Field.