

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, continues to grow steadily each year. They have gone from having 2-3 social/recreational opportunities per week to 4-5 days per week.

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.

2017 saw the completion of the first Project SEARCH class. In partnership with the College of Human Sciences at Iowa State, Project SEARCH graduated four participants, who are all now successfully employed. The program has faced challenges in developing partnerships to expand the number of clients served, but they remain optimistic that this can be accomplished. Another challenge was to find an efficient means of billing Medicaid for this program; this has been resolved through a partnership with The ARC of Iowa City.

Program Strengths

Leadership and talent are the core strengths of this agency. Together, the director and the board have developed and effectively implemented new approaches to outreach, managed financial challenges and addressed unmet needs. The board is actively involved in fundraising, and this year, they attracted about 50 participants, while netting about \$6000, as part of the 1st Annual ARC March, held at North Grand Mall.

The breadth of support systems is another strength of the ARC of Story County. Building on its Special Olympics programming, they offer diverse activities and resources, and continue to add new classes, e.g. a relationship class. 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 long-term viability, they continue to build cash reserves to an appropriate level to ensure services can continue through changes in funding sources.

Program Weaknesses

A significant area of vulnerability is The Arc's funding sources. With the exception of Project SEARCH, the operating budget relies almost exclusively on ASSET funding. Changes in grants and CICS qualification criteria for respite care have placed additional burden on the operating budget and ultimately may result in unmet needs. The Active Lifestyles budget struggles due to increased client numbers and increased costs for participating in Special Olympics. Leadership is reluctant to increase the annual enrollment fee (\$70/year) since all participants are on disability. In response, The ARC continues 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. Ongoing attempts to recruit community members to provide support for activities and relationship development have met with limited success.

Financial Outlook

Overall, the financial outlook remains cautiously optimistic. Their board is engaged in efforts to grow "rainy day" assets through development of private donation sources, as well as fundraising to ensure financial stability. In spite of their challenges, they are encouraged with financial successes in the past year—The ARC March, funding partners for Project SEARCH, and a solid reserve.

Concerns remain for the financial support of Active Lifestyles. This is very popular and extremely important to the clients and other agencies that serve this population. The ARC routinely runs out of funding before the end of the year due to increased costs of maintaining and expanding the programming. Last year they were able to use some reserves, but this is not a long-term solution.

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. The board engages its members through four (4) action-oriented committees – Communications, Finance, Service and Fundraising.

Additionally, the Arc appropriately leverages 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 remain 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.

Agency Comments

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.