

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 over 200 participants/families through their ASSET funded programs. Active Lifestyles, their largest program, continues to grow steadily, with opportunities sponsored 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. 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.

Project SEARCH in partnership with Iowa State serves six to 10 people annually with employment training and campus-wide internship opportunities. The ARC of Iowa City continues to provide the means to bill Medicaid for this program. Project SEARCH does not require ASSET funding at this time.

Program Strengths

Leadership and talent are core strengths of this agency. Together, the director and the board seek new approaches to outreach, achieving financial stability and addressing unmet needs. They continue to take a creative and energetic approach to fundraising. Their third annual ARC March at North Grand Mall is scheduled for November, with a goal of raising \$10,000. They are in the second year of another creative fundraiser—servicing vending machines at Child Serve.

The breadth of client 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, including a positive relationships class, “unified golf” (pairing athletes with non-disabled golfers) and “unified partners” for cheerleading. Other examples of Active Lifestyles opportunities include bowling, cooking, flag football and volleyball. An increase in ASSET funding for Active Lifestyles has allowed the program to remain solvent through its busiest season.

The ARC uses a variety of means to reach potential participants and build relationships with the community in general, as well as local legislators. In addition to partnering with NAMI on candidate forums, The ARC is making plans for caucus training for their clients. Their newsletter and annual Viva La ARC event have been 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.

Program Challenges

A significant area of vulnerability is The ARC’s dependence on ASSET funding. With the exception of Project SEARCH, the operating budget relies heavily on the ASSET process. Changes in grants and CICS qualification criteria for respite care have placed a burden on the operating budget. Subsequently, respite

funds tend to be exhausted quickly. To augment funding, The ARC continually seeks 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.

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. One priority is for the board to update its strategic plan.

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 for their clientele, and supporting other community resources such as the Miracle Field. Future goals include evaluating the feasibility of acquiring a passenger van and identifying possibilities for additional handicapped accessible space for athletic activities.

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.