



IGNITING INNOVATION AT SPARC TANK

People from around the state of Maryland passionate about supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) gathered together in mid-November to celebrate innovative projects designed to benefit the community. Around 100 people showed up to The Arc Maryland's SpArc Tank Ig-Nite event.

It was the fifth year for the SpArc Tank program which brings together prospective projects to compete for funding from The Arc Maryland's Board. Over this time more than \$100,000 has been provided and over 10,000 people have been supported through creative and cutting-edge projects.

For The Arc Montgomery County, it was our first time pitching! Chief Development Officer Stephanie Benedetti and Director of Children & Youth Services Doreen Engel took to the stage for five minutes to share their vision: an in-person digital literacy boot camp for teens with IDD.

Being online and part of the digital world is essential to the modern human experience and one that everyone deserves. Unfortunately, while digital literacy and safety are often taught in schools, teens with IDD are often left out of that

education. Thanks to the funding awarded through SpArc Tank, in summer 2024, The Arc Montgomery County will be offering a series of classes for these teens and preteens, ensuring they have the knowledge base to access the digital world in a safe and empowered way. The classes will be led by Dr. Mary Jo Krile, assistant professor at Eastern Kentucky University and digital literacy advocate.

"Teens with IDD want this access. There's been lots of research, the biggest was recently done across Europe, in five different countries with a very big pooling sample. What is the number one thing teens with IDD want? A phone," said Doreen during the pitch. "Our project is designed to give that to them safely and then replicate what we have put together for schools, teens, and their families across the country. Because I think we can argue that if you don't have access to technology, the internet, and social media, how can you actually be included in our modern society?"

Stephanie and Doreen wowed the judges and were awarded \$5,000 – full funding! The classes are set to begin this summer and we're thrilled to see them come to life. See page 14 for more information.

Other pitches from the night included a youth mentorship program, an inclusive children's musical theater company, and an initiative to make boards of directors more inclusive for people with disabilities.

Montgomery County and all of Maryland will be greatly improved by the projects funded by SpArc Tank this year and last. For more information on the winners visit <http://www.thearcmd.org/sparc-tank/>.



Achieve with us.®

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FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



I am delighted to welcome you to the latest edition of our newsletter, where we share updates and insights from The Arc Montgomery County. As we continue our mission to empower people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), I am thrilled to highlight some exciting developments.

One of our key initiatives is the implementation of a career ladder for our Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). Thanks to a generous grant from the Maryland Department of Labor, we are creating pathways for career advancement and professional development within our organization. This will not only benefit our DSPs but also enhance the quality of support and care for the people we support. Learn more on page 13.

In addition to our DSP laddering project, we are focusing on hiring initiatives to attract and retain top talent. We are proud to offer competitive employee benefits, recognizing the dedication and hard work of our employees.

Furthermore, we are leveraging technological advancements to improve the lives of those we support. From innovative communication tools to personalized care solutions, we are committed to enhancing the quality of life for everyone at The Arc Montgomery County.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership as we strive to create a more inclusive and supportive Montgomery County.

–Daria Cervantes, CEO

SPREADING JOY TO ALL!



The holiday season brought a wave of generosity to The Arc Montgomery County, thanks to two new community partners, Prudential and SECU, and long-time partner Holy Cross. This year, over 400 items were donated, making it the largest drive yet! Their support, along with the generosity of our community, made a significant impact on the people and programs of The Arc.



The giving campaign and our Employment & Meaningful Day program were featured on Channel 7 morning news, attracting new donors. Additionally, the coverage led to at least \$300 in purchases from our Amazon wish list, benefiting our programs directly.

As we celebrate the success of this year's drive, we extend our deepest gratitude to Prudential, SECU, Holy Cross, and all our donors. Your kindness and generosity have brought joy and comfort to those we support at The Arc Montgomery County. Thank you for making this holiday season a truly special one.



ANNUAL PICNIC & CELEBRATION

SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 2024
10:30 am–2 pm • Headquarters

Membership Meeting
Board Installation • CVEA Awards

COMEDY FOR A CAUSE



Benefitting
STAND Together

Give a Hoot Comedy Club

Friday, November 8 &
Saturday, November 9



Health isn't
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Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States, Inc.
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Congratulations to The Arc Montgomery County
on their 65th Anniversary!

CHILDREN & YOUTH SERVICES

Everything may look business as usual at **KFICCC**, but behind the scenes, big things are in the works. Compass Pro Bono, a nonprofit strategic consulting firm, has agreed to work with The Arc Montgomery County, offering free consultations with their team of highly-qualified business professionals where they'll be analyzing KFICCC, The Arc's inclusive childcare center.

"We know there's a need for more inclusive childcare in Montgomery County, that's well established," said Doreen Engel, Director of Children & Youth Services. "How can we respond to that need?" That's where Compass Pro Bono comes in, their team of dedicated volunteers is going to look over a series of propositions for KFICCC to establish some framework for moving forward. Those possibilities include the evaluation of KFICCC's complex and variable funding structures to determine if there might be a more efficient model going forward. We're also curious if it would be possible to open a second location of KFICCC, so a feasibility study will be performed. Another feasibility study will determine if we might be able to establish a behavioral readiness program to prepare children for entrance into the inclusive childcare setting. We're also working together with Compass Pro Bono to explain the benefits of inclusive childcare to parents of children who are typically-developing.

"I am certainly excited," said Doreen. "When families call us and they need childcare, you're not only supporting the child, because you're providing them a wonderful childcare option that you know is going to help them thrive and grow, [the families can] enjoy their work and feel confident that their child is safe and well and learning." We're all excited by the prospect of growth and how many more children we can support.

Congratulations to classrooms one and twelve, the winners of the fall reading challenge! Between both classrooms over 500 books were read. For their victory they enjoyed a pizza party and even more books. Keep reading, KFICCC!



After All, The Arc Montgomery County's afterschool, day-off, and summer program for youth with IDD, is abuzz with the energy of advancement.

A lot is being done to work towards inclusion, making sure the youth in After All have opportunities to socialize with their peers who are typically-developing. By partnering with local private and public high schools, teens that are typically-developing have been participating in activities with the youth at After All. Some are there to learn about careers in working with people with disabilities, some are there to volunteer or have fun.

The other advancement? We're making sure there are always plentiful options to be had and that the teens get to make choices of what activities they want to participate in. When the youth from one of the schools comes over with her art activity, the After All teens can decide whether or not they want to participate or they want to do something else.

On a hot summer day last year, the youth of After All gathered outside for field day. The annual tradition brings together the youth from After All and students from St. John's High School to play a variety of games outside and enjoy good inclusive fun. One of those After All students was Faisal. Faisal, now a graduating senior, enjoyed field day after a dramatic turnaround from the year before. In 2022 Faisal stood alone and didn't participate, but in 2023 Faisal happily joined in activities. Having fun with "old friends and new," said Faisal. He shot basketball, tossed beanbags, enjoyed the rainbow parachute, and delighted in the treats from the Kona Ice truck.

With graduation on the horizon, Faisal isn't sure if he'll be there for the next field day. But the memories and friends will certainly remain with Faisal this year and on.

AFTER ALL



After-School and Summer Program for Pre-Teens & Adolescents

- Computer Skills Development
- Arts and Crafts
- Outdoor Recreation
- Indoor Games
- Supervised Homework Assistance
- Swimming during the summer

Students are encouraged to develop their independence and practice socialization skills. **Scholarships and grants available.** AfterAll is licensed by the Maryland State Department of Education.

For more information,
Doreen Engel, Director
Children & Youth Services
301.984.5777 x3353
Doreen.Engel@arcmontmd.org



EMPLOYMENT & MEANINGFUL DAY SERVICES

In a wonderful testament to the quality of services provided, the Employment & Meaningful Day Services (E&MDS) program has seen a rush of new people interested in getting supports. For those interested in competitive employment, an exciting development – our new team is ready to go! Additionally, inclusive recreational opportunities are being explored and expanded thanks to a recent grant awarded to the program for \$25,000 (see page 13 for more details).

E&MDS, along with many of our other programs, have entered into a partnership with The Arc of Northern Virginia to participate in their Tech for Independent Living program. This innovative technology allows our team to access and create text, image, and video tutorials for people supported so that they have trainings of their choosing right at their fingertips, day and night.

We have adopted a road! The stretch of road between Beach Drive and Summit Ave along Cedar Lane in Kensington has been adopted by E&MDS. Crews have been visiting the adopted roadway for regular maintenance and tidying. If you're interested in volunteering with a crew for clean-up, please email MeaningfulDay@arcmontmd.org.



PERSONAL SUPPORT SERVICES



We are thrilled to welcome Adam McArthur as the new Director of Personal Supports. Adam comes to us from Community Support Services and has experience as a live-in house manager, coordinator for a personal supports department, and an assistant director of a day program. “I plan on building relationships with the people we support, their families, and the DSPs to learn what is working, what we can improve on, and to provide the best services for the people we support,” said Adam. Here at The Arc, Personal Supports consists of around 40 employees who provide individualized support to 57 people. In the coming months, the department will focus on ensuring all people supported are able to access their community and that each person receives optimal support to accomplish their goals.

RESPIRE COORDINATION

Since the renewal of the Respite Coordination contract with Montgomery County, there has been a significant increase in the number of families with children applying for support. We are seeing more frequent requests to use respite hours for children to participate in enriching summer camps and therapeutic programs. These opportunities provide a break for primary caregivers and offer valuable experiences and growth for the children involved. Montgomery County has approved additional funding for the Respite Coordination program to help ensure families enrolled in respite have access to their respite hours and will remove some families from the waitlist. Additionally, income restrictions have been lifted by continuing this non-means-tested approach, we can empower more families to seek respite services without financial barriers.



COMMUNITY LIVING SERVICES



A gentleman who had been receiving Personal Supports has made a smooth transition into one of our homes. He is adapting well and enjoys the company of his housemates. A DSP who had been instrumental in his Personal Supports played a crucial role and continues to provide him support to him.

Two people supported by CLS participated in Developmental Disabilities Day in Annapolis. They were thrilled to participate in in-person advocacy events again. Read more about DD Day on page 15.

Exciting developments are underway with Spirit Club. Their Founding Director recently met with the CLS team to introduce their inclusive gym and personal training program for people of all abilities, sparking the beginning of a valuable partnership. We look forward to the positive impact this partnership will bring.

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE



Communication & Connection

All Direct Support Professionals have new iPads for work purposes and have been trained on Microsoft 365.



Workforce Crisis

All full-time employees now receive 11 paid floating holidays, to use at their discretion.



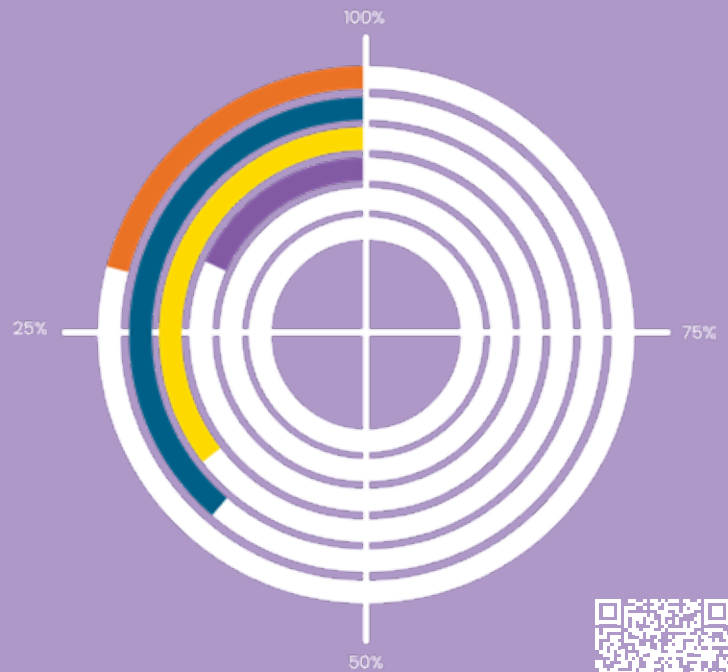
External Funding Security

Awarded \$250,000 in-kind grant to evaluate existing revenue models and possible expansion.



DEIB

New internal newsletter celebrates employees' personal and professional achievements and milestones.



More detail on the progress of the strategic plans available at www.TheArcMontgomeryCounty.org



New Work Groups Forming

Support Beyond Caregiving • Voice of the Customer
Contact DeborahM@arcmontmd.org to join a work group

AWARDS & HONORS

LEADING THE WAY

Brian Waring, Gorvergo Kollie, Keith Henrich, Justina Nelson, and Nick Sainvilier earned their ACRE certification

Carmen Frazier

was named to the board of Montgomery County Media

County Executive Marc Elrich nominated

Niambi Heyward,

to serve on the Montgomery County Childcare Commission

Laquoia Brown and Beth-Ann Carter are the new Chapter Liaisons for STAND Together

Loretta Howell

represented The Arc Montgomery County in a Public Service Announcement (PSA), shot and produced by students at Montgomery College

[Check it out on our website!](#)

Winners of The Arc Maryland 2024 awards:

Legacy Award

Clyde Agnew, Jr.
Director of Human Resources & Staff Development

School Inclusion Award

Niambi Heyward
Childcare Center Director

Outstanding Employee of the Year-DSP

Marie Rosaline Mathai
Employment & Meaningful Day

Chapter Volunteer of the Year SECU Maryland

All will be recognized at The Arc Maryland Convention on May 30.

PROFILES OF EXCEPTIONAL EMPLOYEES

Kiauna Alston
Medical Coordinator
Community Living Services



Niambi Heyward
Director, KFICCC
Children & Youth Services



Dwayne Johnson
Assistant Director
Employment & Meaningful Day Services



Yodit Emiru
Direct Support Professional
Personal Supports Services



How long have you worked at The Arc Montgomery County?

Since February 2023

Since February 2023

Since November 2022

Since March 2019

What inspired you to work in the field of developmental disabilities?

As a teacher, I was used to working with people with different needs. I enjoy helping people, with their daily lives, that's special to me.

Working with children with special needs is my passion. I want to make sure that those who do have disabilities will not struggle to get services.

I think my inspiration comes from my cousin with autism who I spent a lot of time growing up with. There weren't many resources.

I have a passion for helping people. My nephew has Autism and recommended I work at The Arc.

What has been your greatest challenge at The Arc Montgomery County?

Ensuring all homes are within compliance with medication needs; it's been a challenge, but organization is key. Once you get organized, you have a system set.

One of the greatest challenges is finding support for children that do require 1 to 1 when that's something we cannot provide. Finding the time and effort to give parents some resources to allow them to come to our center.

The biggest challenge is learning how the funding works. Learning about this and the resources people have helps me to guide people supported and their families to take advantage of what is available to them.

Sometimes communication is a speed bump with the person supported. When trying to communicate back and forth, they might get frustrated or upset.

What has been your greatest success at The Arc Montgomery County?

I would say getting everything where it needs to be from when I first came in to now was a great accomplishment.

I would say just meeting so many different people. I think that everybody has a passion for wanting to help in this field, be inclusive, and support all populations. We have teachers that have been here for 26 years and so they're a wealth of knowledge.

My greatest success so far is in bringing in new intakes. Transitioning seniors and their families want to keep the ball rolling. They gain skills and they want a job. That's where we step in to get them right back into it and help them accomplish their goals.

When a goal on the PCP is met and the person supported is happy and feels good about meeting a goal or having a new experience.

What have you learned since starting work with The Arc Montgomery County?

I've definitely learned a lot about medication. What people need in their daily lives. It is a blessing if I get a chance to see these ages – I would hope that someone else would advocate for me if I needed it.

Everybody has a story. Everybody has something to share, and I've learned to look at the bigger picture and find ways to take one person's ability and mold it into something that will benefit someone else.

This job really has taught me how to focus on the person supported and what they want. We all have a life that we want to live and fulfill. My goal is to make sure every person is supported in that. I can help them live out their full dream.

Each person I support is their own person. I respect the differences and preferences of each person, encouraging them to do things within their abilities and helping where they need it.

What would other people be surprised to learn about you?

I am a musician. I sing and play piano.

I love gardening. That's where I find peace.

I just love living a fulfilled life.

I value and take great pride in my religion.

2023 EMPLOYEE TENURE RECOGNITION

On Sunday, January 28, 2024, we recognized 30 employees for their dedicated service to people with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities, in five-year benchmark periods ending December 31, 2023.

5 Years

Ivo Ngwatumg Achumukala
Godwin Amenumey
Yaovi Atigan
Harine Besong
Caleve Bright-Davies
Meraf Derese
Joseph Duwana
Diana Francisco
Ayoola Oluyomi
Frederick Quansah
Catherine Shirima
Adriana VanDunk

10 Years

Maria Caro
Vanessa Ntolle

15 Years

Carrie Barrett
Lovelyne Ebong
Kekeli Kety
Rachel Thomas

20 Years

Francisca Polanco Alvarez
Chimene Diboma
Nathan Donald
Patience Ekpo
Rodney Hamilton
Hannah Weah

25 Years

Cynthia Lopreiato
Karen Sivulich

30 Years

Ciatta Johnson
Sybil Paul

35 Years

Mary Boylen

40 Years

Clyde Agnew, Jr.



Thank You for Supporting The Arc Montgomery County!

These people and organizations generously donated from July 1–December 31, 2023

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In Honor of: Mitchell Gildenhorn, Margaret Mulligan, Our Lady of Grace Sodality, Kate Wissman ■



WELCOME HOME

Building relationships and community between corporate groups and people who reside in The Arc's homes.

Contact Stephanie Benedetti at Stephanie.Benedetti@arcmontmd.org

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A FOND FAREWELL TO URBAN THRIFT



After more than a decade of operation, Urban Thrift, The Arc Montgomery County's thrift store, has closed its doors for the final time. Despite the shelves now being empty, the store was bustling until the end.

Located on a busy street corner in Kensington, the store was a favorite among customers, offering great deals on a variety of home goods and clothing. Throughout its years of operation, Urban Thrift not only raised funds for The Arc but also became a community fixture.

One of its most significant contributions was the Transitioning Youth Retail Training Program. Launched in 2014 and running for three years, the program trained youth with IDD in retail skills. It was a three-month course comprising classroom and hands-on job training, supporting 30 to 40 people annually.

According to Joyce Taylor, Manager of Urban Thrift, the program aimed to prepare people for competitive retail environments, fostering independence and well-being. It was the only program of its kind in Maryland at the time, making a significant impact on the lives of young people with disabilities.

While Urban Thrift's closure marks the end of an era, its legacy lives on through programs like the Employment & Meaningful Day program, which prepares people with IDD for competitive employment. The store's impact will be remembered and appreciated for years to come.



TODDLER BOOGIE

After a break since 2019, Toddler Boogie made a comeback, filling KFICCC with the sounds of joy and excitement. Current and former students, siblings, and community members went from room to room, sampling the different activities offered at the fundraiser.

In the storytelling room, they sat quietly and listened. In the movie room, they watched seasonal films. In the arts and crafts room, they made cotton-ball ghosts and decorated corn-on-the-cob and autumn trees. In the sensory room, children hunted for treasure in the sensory tubs and got their faces painted. Spooky and delicious snacks lined the hallway, providing sugary bursts of energy to the night. And, in the gym, festive Halloween music played as the children played games, knocking down towers of ghosts, tossing bean bags, and playing tic tac toe with colored pumpkins.

"My favorite part was just having the children come in and enjoy themselves," said Niambi Heyward, Childcare Center Director. "Also, the last part of the Toddler Boogie, the musical chairs, where all the children had to participate. To see them laughing and having fun and dancing as they're trying to find a chair to sit in. Just seeing the parents having fun and their children having fun and just having us all come together for one event."

Everyone was there to have a good time, celebrate Halloween, and fundraise for KFICCC. A total of \$3,000 was raised, which will go a long way in helping KFICCC provide a space for children of all abilities to learn, play, and grow alongside one another.

This year, the parents took over the preparations, excitedly bringing the Toddler Boogie to life in the image of what it was in years past. There was an eagerness to return to what once was and a joyous revival of the beloved tradition. It's what brought back alumna and brought in the community.

Next year, Niambi said they'll start the planning process earlier. With more time, she predicts it will just get better and will bring in even more of the community. If you're interested in helping, reach out to Ms. Niambi, KFICCC@arcmontmd.org.

OPPORTUNITIES ON THE RISE- THANKS TO GRANTS SECURED BY THE ARC!

Employment & Meaningful Day Services was awarded \$25,000 from a private foundation, giving us the opportunity to expand our offerings of inclusive recreational opportunities for adults with IDD. Too often we've found that recreational opportunities have been limited, and don't reflect the full range of interests and abilities of people supported. With direct input from people supported, their family members, and employees, we're challenging those limitations and seeing where the possibilities take us! Potential activities, brainstormed with people supported, include kayaking, swimming, rock climbing, sailing, and caving.

MoCo Transit awarded The Arc \$30,000 to maintain our fleet of 50 vehicles. The fleet transports about 300 people with IDD each year, averaging about 50 miles per vehicle per day, helping people supported to get to medical appointments, recreation activities, shopping, and other places they may need to go. With a lot of usage comes a lot of associated costs: fuel, maintenance, and repairs. This grant will help offset some of those costs and make sure we can continue to safely and reliably get people where they need to go.

Children & Youth Services was awarded a total of \$8,400 from Tower Cares that provided funding to both KFICCC and After All. For KFICCC, the grant supplied new mats for physical and occupational therapies, along with new books and toys. The youth from After All will be going on field trips and are enjoying new tech, recreation equipment, puzzles, and art supplies.

There are many exciting things in store for the people supported by our programs and we can't wait to share the progress with you—be sure you are tuning in on social media and subscribed to our e-news for updates!



DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL CAREER LADDERING

The Arc Montgomery County is proud to announce that we have been awarded a multiyear grant from the Maryland Department of Labor to spearhead a groundbreaking project. This initiative aims to evaluate and establish a career ladder for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) within our organization.

The primary objective of this project is to develop a comprehensive career advancement framework. This framework will provide DSPs at The Arc Montgomery County with clear pathways for career planning and progression. Starting from an entry-level position, DSPs will be guided through a micro-credentialing program. This program will lead them to the highest level of mastery in their profession, with corresponding increases in compensation.

A crucial aspect of this project is the active involvement of DSPs themselves. They are key members of the working group tasked with evaluating credentialing programs and proposing the laddering framework.

The project is structured into five phases, with the completion of phase 1 and the commencement of phase 2 already achieved. The working group, consisting of 10 DSPs, plays a pivotal role in shaping this initiative. They are compensated for their time and dedication.

As we move forward, we are excited about the possibilities this project holds for our DSPs. The ultimate goal is to create a supportive and rewarding environment that recognizes and nurtures the talent and dedication of our DSPs.

This project was funded in whole or in part by funds received from Direct Care Workforce Innovation Program, a Grant program of the Maryland Department of Labor.

TEEN

DIGITAL LITERACY

CAMP

FOR TEENS WITH IDD



LED BY DR. MARY JO
KRILE

Join us for a free digital literacy summer camp for teens ages 11-21 with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities the week of July 22 in Rockville. Participants will learn about risks and benefits of technology tools in a fun and safe environment.

Interested teens and families, please fill out our interest survey.

For More Information:
Engagement@arcmontmd.org



PARENT SURVEY

This project was funded in part through a SpArc Tank Innovations Grant from The Arc Maryland.

Volunteers Needed

The Arc Montgomery County provides inclusive childcare, summer camp, work skills training, employment opportunities, respite care resources, and advocacy for people with and without disabilities and their families.



FILL OUT AN INTEREST FORM TODAY!



WE NEED HELP WITH :

- KFICCC, our inclusive childcare center, preschool, and aftercare program
- After All, assisting in the youth after-school and summer camp programs
- Group Volunteers to create a meaningful project tailored to your group's skill set and availability
- Special events to help with one-day celebrations and charitable events

CALENDAR DAY

The energy in Annapolis was infectious on January 11 for Calendar Day 2024! This kick-off to the legislative session organized by The Arc Maryland each year, invites all Maryland chapters of The Arc to welcome their representatives back to session, advocate, and deliver a specially made calendar featuring personal stories from each chapter. The Arc Montgomery County is featured for the month of May, sharing Clare's story about her path from volunteering to employment.

Our chapter was represented by Adam McArthur, Daria Cervantes, Irene Djidou Ngueyon, Katherine O'Connell, Lauren Peirce, Pam Blodgett, Tumu Weeks, and Vadim Barashev.



DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES DAY

More than 700 advocates, family members, providers, and community members turned out for Developmental Disabilities Day at the Legislature! Attendees heard from legislative leaders, learned about important advocacy topics, and met with their representatives to discuss them.

Thank you to Aissatou Hellner, Debbie Henkin, Dwayne Johnson, James Gipson, Jim Seaton, Jordan Gould, Kim Jackson, Laquoia Brown, Lauren Peirce, Linda Kosiorowski, Niambi Heyward, Nicole Jackson, Tumu Weeks, and Zeev Gilat for representing The Arc Montgomery County.



The Arc
Montgomery County

Calendar of Events

April 1–September 30, 2024

KFICCC, After All, Employment & Meaningful Day Services, Headquarters Building—Closed*

Monday, May 27

Wednesday, June 19

Thursday, July 4

Monday, September 2

*The Arc does not designate holidays for employees, however select programs and locations are closed on certain holidays.

66th Anniversary Celebration

Membership Meeting

Board Installation

CVEA Awards

Saturday, June 8

The Arc Montgomery County
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BE OUR MISSING PIECE

**Become a member of The Arc
Montgomery County today!**

Membership benefits include:

- Bi-annual newsletter
- Monthly electronic newsletter
- Annual report
- Voting rights at chapter elections
- Voting rights at member meetings
- Membership in The Arc Maryland
- Membership in The Arc of the US