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Letters to the Editor

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The Spechts' story sparked real reform

Denny Specht's obituary is a tribute to the thousands of families in Maryland and nationwide who have raised their family members with Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities in their homes and communities ("Dennis W. Specht, 52, bowling fan who coped with Down syndrome," Aug. 24).

The Spechts' story is one very familiar to families in The Arc, many of whom were told to institutionalize a child but rejected that advice to raise their own family.

These individuals and their families have made enormous contributions by educating their communities and the public about the richness of our diversity and the need for a just society that includes everyone, regardless of the severity of their disability.

The Arc is grateful to Mr. Specht and his family for allowing Sun reporter Diana K. Sugg to tell their story to put a face on the issue of waiting lists for services for those with developmental disabilities ("The Forever Children," March 23, 1997).

The Spechts' story appealed to public officials and helped lead to a five-year initiative launched in 1998 to cut the waiting list for services. This effort ultimately aided more than 8,000 children and adults and their families ("Glendening asks funds to take care of disabled," Jan. 16, 1998).

However, today there are 16,000 people on the waiting list for community services for people with developmental disabilities - for family support, residential, day and employment programs.

Every county in Maryland has a person on this waiting list.

They include people living with elderly or very ill caregivers, young families struggling to meet the needs of their children and people who - with the right opportunity - will contribute to our communities.

Cristine Marchand
Annapolis

The writer is executive director of The Arc of Maryland Inc.