Celebrating 60 Years of Service in the Community

September 17, 2020

2020 Awards

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2020! Wow… what a year.

This year, The Arc Maryland celebrates 60 years since our incorporation in Maryland. As The Arc’s local partner organizations also recognize their distinguished decades of service, it is important to reflect on all we have collectively achieved in this time, and how we have facilitated the achievement of others in their pursuit of independence and full inclusion. We have come a long way since the 1950s when The Arc began from the wishes and dreams of parents who persisted to create the change they wished to see for their children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We have accomplished much as a community, and yet there is still far to go before we can say that children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities have and enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

Through our advancements, we are careful to respect and honor our past. With each attack or attempt at a roll-back on the policies we helped to create, we are reminded that not everyone experienced and can appreciate what our world was like before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and other life-changing laws.

The Arc remembers, though, and we will continue to be here to ensure rights for people with disabilities continue to advance, and that children and adults have opportunities for full inclusion and participation in their schools and communities. It is also important to take moments like tonight to celebrate all we have accomplished and to cast a vision for what we will celebrate in the years ahead!

Our sincere appreciation goes out to the chapters, organizations, and individuals who submitted nominations for The Arc Maryland 2020 Awards so that we may honor those who exemplify excellence and those who work to create a world where everyone has opportunities to live, work, and play in their communities. Tonight, we present to you some of Maryland’s finest!

Thank you for being here to experience this with us!

Sincerely,

Laura Carr, Board President
Ande Kolp, Executive Director

Achieve, Respect, Celebrate!

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Outstanding Advocate of the Year

This award is presented for advocacy leadership on behalf of persons with I/DD and their families, including systemic change, legal advocacy and professional endeavors that increase the rights of persons with I/DD to inclusive lives.

Carol Custer, Self-Directed Advocacy Network of Maryland

Carol Custer has worked as a special educator, resource coordinator, and support broker for individuals in DDA’s self-directed services programs. When DDA proposed major changes that raised concerns about the integrity of self-direction services, Carol threw herself into an effort to educate and advocate to preserve what has been a remarkably efficient and effective program. She co-founded the Self-Directed Advocacy Network of Maryland Inc. (SDAN), now a 501(C)(3) nonprofit, in 2016. She serves as SDAN’s Secretary and works relentlessly to promote and preserve participant choice and control of services. Carol has volunteered literally thousands of hours to protect the rights of self-directing participants, all while juggling family and professional responsibilities. As a result of Carol’s efforts, Marylanders who self-direct and their families have a powerful voice from a person on their side.

Employer of the Year

This award is presented to a private employer, business or firm with an exceptional record and ongoing commitment to provide competitive employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Garrett A. Pfeifer, Maryland Brand Management, Inc.

Maryland Brand Management was looking for dependable employees when they reached out to The Arc Baltimore. Since then, it has been a win-win relationship; The Arc Baltimore now has numerous interns in the company who learn skills and explore work options in Maryland Brand Management’s production and distribution facility. From the excellent crop of interns, the company had the opportunity to hire three of them as employees!

Maryland Brand Management is all about encouraging growth and giving employees the opportunity for cross-training and advancement. Aimee, who was hired on to the team, now works in all aspects of production and helps train new staff members. Additionally, she had the opportunity to design a shirt for their “Puppy Love” Line. Maryland Brand’s leadership sees potential in all people and gives them a chance to show the world their skills!

Stanley S. Sidle/William Ohge, Jr. Memorial Citizenship Award

This award honors an individual with intellectual/developmental disabilities, (who is affiliated with The Arc) for outstanding participation in or contribution to their community. Achievements may include community leadership, contributions to his/her community and/or self-advocacy. This award carries a $100.00 stipend provided by the Stanley S. Sidle Memorial Fund of The Arc Baltimore.

Christine Towne, The Arc Howard County

Christine has been involved with The Arc for quite some time in multiple facets! She began her journey with The Arc of Howard County in 2005 through her school work-study program doing data entry which lead to a full-time position as an administrative assistant and front end receptionist. Then, in 2009, she began receiving services from The Arc of Howard County.

Christine is not only a valuable member of The Arc team, volunteering for the event committee, but also a very involved member of the community. Christine participates in the New Horizons with The Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts and is an avid horsewoman.

If you are searching for a leader in Howard County, look no further than Christine! She is a Global Messenger for Special Olympics Maryland and represents Howard County Special Olympics in the Maryland Athlete Council. Christine is a wonderful advocate for disability rights and has worked hard to achieve a rich, full, and meaningful life!
Professional of the Year

This award recognizes an executive/manager of a community service program or community professional. Honorees’ work will have direct relevance to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They may have demonstrated sensitivity and the ability to provide outstanding quality services which results in increased independence and inclusive lives for people with I/DD. The recipient may demonstrate excellence in any of the following areas: residential supports, family support, individual supports, employment supports, health supports, behavior intervention or support. Up to two awards will be presented. Staff of The Arc employed at any level are not eligible for this award.

Christie Burnett, Hooks & Hangars

Christie Burnett is the Director of Retail Sales at Hooks & Hangers, a quality resale store in Southern Maryland owned and operated by Spring Dell Center, a provider organization based in La Plata. One of her greatest joys is seeing people of varying abilities try and thrive at new things in life. When a group of folks supported by The Arc Southern Maryland came by for a tour and some shopping for a fashion show they were planning, she was eager to help. To help guests express their inner fashionista, Christie allowed them to dress up mannequins, select jewelry to go in the display case, and learn how the donated items are processed and priced. To the joy of the visitors, Christie gave all the visitors an unexpected gift, as she presented each of them with a gift certificate to receive free outfits to bring home for the fashion show!

One guest from The Arc Southern Maryland had such a wonderful time that they are coordinating with Hooks & Hangers to start a volunteer position at the store after the COVID-19 pandemic. Being in a position where she can grant this opportunity to so many makes Christie love her job more.

Outstanding Employee of the Year: Administration/Program Management

This award is presented to an employee of The Arc in Administration/ Program Management at the state or local level who has made the greatest contribution to his/her organization and the mission of The Arc through both personal and professional efforts. This award recognizes the vital role of Arc employees in complementing volunteer efforts.

Norma Dallas, The Arc Southern Maryland

Norma Dallas is the Assistant Director for Community Supports Programs at The Arc Southern Maryland. She oversees the Transitional Youth Program, Autism Waiver Services, Day Program, Personal Supports, and DDA funded Community-Based Services. While Norma contributes to a variety of programs, her work with students is among her most important roles. She regularly meets with students beginning their journey with The Arc as young adults, which sets the foundation to support them in achieving their goals throughout their adult lives. Norma also partners with local businesses and other non-profit organizations to ensure inclusion through work and volunteer opportunities.

During the pandemic, Norma took on another new challenge; She has been vital in the chapter’s stable transition of Day Services. She ensured that the Residential houses were properly staffed to handle rapid changes occurring because of the virus. Her calm demeanor, keen insight into situations, and positive attitude consistently shine through in her work. Norma is a great asset to The Arc Southern Maryland and truly cares for all of the individuals that the chapter supports along with their staff!

Tracy Davis, The Arc Central Chesapeake Region

Tracy Davis is the Director of Fiscal Management Services (FMS) at The Arc Central Chesapeake Region, where she oversees enrollment, program quality, compliance, and stakeholder communications. She has been a major factor in holding together FMS operations during a crisis that many Marylanders with I/DD are currently facing. Through it all, Tracy keeps a fantastic attitude and takes the time to talk to everyone she comes across, addressing their concerns with much-needed recommendations.

People who self-direct can stay calm through the turbulence with Tracy’s guidance. She loves her job and is glad her work reflects her passion for self-direction and for promoting equal rights and opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She shared, "It is such an honor to be recognized for something I feel so strongly about, and that I love to do! I am continually inspired by the work of my colleagues and by the advocacy of self-directed stakeholders."
Chapter Volunteers of the Year

This award is presented for dedication to The Arc’s mission to create a world where children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities have and enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

Jennifer Balzano and Matt Spooner, The Arc Baltimore

Since 2008 Jennifer Balzano and her husband, Matt Spooner, have been official Arc Buddies to Missy Howard who is supported by The Arc Baltimore Community Living program. While they are considered volunteers, they have really just been friends to Missy, who is supported by The Arc Baltimore. Over those twelve years, Jennifer and Matt have walked many miles in neighborhoods and malls alongside her. Missy has visited their home for special occasions. She has also made friends with first, their dog, and then their baby!

Jennifer and Matt have been through many of Missy's changes of staff and addresses, and through her good times and bad, as friends do. Since the pandemic, their contact has unfortunately been limited to the phone, but Missy knows that they are there for her, and after all these years; they are not just volunteers of the year, surely they are volunteers of the decade.

Kristen Zihmer, The Arc Carroll County

Kristen Zihmer is the owner of a local business, Windchimes LLC, a senior living consulting agency. As a Volunteer, Kristen leads The Arc Carroll County's monthly women’s group, part of their day program. Each monthly meetup focuses on a topic or activity recommended by the group. Kristen has guided the group of women in the day program through potlucks, holiday celebrations, and discussions about hobbies and other interests of the women in their day program. They are so pleased to nominate Kristen as their chapter’s 2020 Volunteer of the Year.

Edward Worff, The Arc Central Chesapeake Region

Ed Worff has been a volunteer with The Arc Central Chesapeake Region for over 20 years. He has served as President and Past President of their Board of Directors. He currently serves as a member of their Quality Committee and is the Secretary of the Board for their subsidiary, Chesapeake Neighbors, that focuses on affordable housing. Ed’s enthusiasm and dedication are evident in his service for the people they support. His active listening, global thinking, resourcefulness, and diligence have greatly benefited their Quality Committee.

Last year, the chapter transitioned certain Committee functions to a digital platform; Ed took the time to master multiple functions and helped other members of the committee do the same. At the start of the pandemic, Ed's questions and recommendations augmented COVID-19 employee protocols, enhancing the organization’s response to the health crisis. His willingness to be vocal, ask the tough questions, and lead by example are invaluable assets. He continues to keep the focus on the person’s independence, rights, and safety. The Arc Central Chesapeake Region is grateful for everything Ed has invested in advancing The Arc’s mission over the years!

Adriana Toro, The Arc of Frederick County

Adriana has supported The Arc of Frederick County as an incredible Director on The chapter’s Board. She has worked tirelessly to help execute and sustain The Arc of Frederick County’s Hispanic Outreach efforts. Additionally, Adriana became a better advocate this past year for people supported by the chapter as she graduated from Maryland's Partners in Policymaking program last fall. Adriana regularly connects with families and has enabled our support groups to continue throughout the pandemic. Support group members are thankful for her help to keep the community close-knit during tough times. The Arc of Frederick County thanks Adriana for her dedicated work!
Alex was born in Columbia, MD, and currently resides and works in his home community. He is also an alumnus of the Ivy Mount School and Wilde Lake High School. Alex has vast experience as a self-advocate presenter, talking to students and teachers at Together We're Better school assemblies about autism and what it is like to grow up with the condition. He aspires to practice law one day, which he credits to tv shows such as “LA Law” and “Night Court.” He plans to continue with online classes in Psychology at UMUC to earn a bachelor’s degree before going on to law school. He considers himself lucky to meet some famous people, such as Debbie Allen and Henry Winkler.

Alex is being honored for his work and partnership to break down barriers to school inclusion. Alex is a natural in front of a crowd of school children, and his passion and vulnerability are qualities that draw students in to make long-lasting changes. Alex has also been instrumental in his grassroots advocacy efforts. He regularly responds to action alerts and encourages the response of others. He is a true change-maker and a role model to many. Alex has served on the Board of Directors of The Arc Maryland for several years. As he ends his board service at this time due to term limitations, we hope he will continue to be a part of the work of the organization to create a world where children and adults with I/DD have and enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

**Alex Barnes, The Arc Maryland**

This year, during the pandemic, John put together short films of the many photographs of the chapter's DSPs and people they support. He even reached out to a musician friend and had him create the music for the videos. The Arc Howard County extends its gratitude to John for his generosity and creativity, especially through difficult times.

John Reasner, of John Reasner Studios, has been an amazing friend of The Arc Howard County. He is a graphics designer who has donated his time and his many talents to help the chapter in their fundraising efforts. Over the past two years, John has designed the artwork for their annual gala event, The Chocolate Ball. He has prepared the work for their invitations, programs, and all event signage, saving The Arc of Howard County thousands of dollars. John works closely with the Resource department and is always willing to help, sometimes coming in to save the day at the last minute for an event or fundraiser. John is easy to work with and a complete professional.

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Natalie Wermers, The Arc Montgomery County

The Arc Montgomery County is incredibly grateful for the dedicated and enthusiastic service of Natalie Wermers. Natalie joined their team as a social media intern in the summer of 2019 with the task of designing and implementing the chapter's social media blitz, #ADayintheLife. Through the project, Natalie took carefully crafted photos of people supported by The Arc Montgomery County and their support staff to shed a spotlight on the organization. Natalie made the best of this opportunity, familiarizing herself with people across all program divisions and administrative departments.

Natalie also captioned and prepared the images for social media, ensuring they were timed and queued for publishing. Throughout the project, which included a good deal of coordination and a steep learning curve, Natalie never wavered, and the results were wonderful. Thanks to her work, The Arc Montgomery County garnered an upswing in social media presence in the community. It is paramount that we share the message and mission of The Arc, and Natalie’s carefully crafted work did just that!

**Natalie Wermers, The Arc Montgomery County**

Bob Scott has been an active volunteer with The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region since March of 2019, assisting with the organization's Community Partners Carnival, and working with their Supported Employment Training Group, the Discovery Class. Members of the Discovery Class learn different employment skills, such as interview techniques, money management, and more.

Bob assists the group twice a week to help in any way he can. Class members look forward to seeing Bob and are comforted by his calm and supportive presence. Bob has been a great help to the training class instructors and always comes with a great attitude. Bob consistently demonstrates his dedication to The Arc’s mission, and the training class is honored to have Bob as a member of the group.

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Dana Hinnant, The Arc Prince George's County

Dana Hinnant is an outstanding volunteer with The Arc Prince George's County, strengthening the organization from within and opening the doors to new connections in the community. Dana has been an instrumental host of events like The Arc Spiritual Community Collaboration workshops, Transition 101 meetings, the Take Control Summit, and Brunch Bunch. Dana has also assisted with the chapter's Benefits Enrollment Center, where she provides presentations to community stakeholders on how to enroll in disability benefits. Additionally, she has connected the chapter with other organizations and support groups who are unfamiliar with The Arc. Members of the chapter admire her advocacy for people with disabilities to be fully included in all aspects of community living. The Arc Prince George's County thanks Dana for creating a better-connected community.

Andrew Bandstra, The Southern Maryland Blue Crabs, The Arc Southern Maryland

Since 2012, the Southern Maryland Blue Crabs, a professional baseball team based in Waldorf, have been an outstanding community partner of The Arc Southern Maryland. Each year, the organizations join together for a day of fun, where people supported by the chapter play softball with the team. Throughout the day, the Blue Crabs play alongside supported individuals and assist them in hitting the ball and rounding the bases, all in the spirit of competition! Over these past eight years, countless amazing friendships have formed between players and supported individuals. You could even say The Arc Southern Maryland is part of the Blue Crabs' team!

Everyone supported by The Arc Southern Maryland eagerly awaits the big day each year, as do the players! Along with the softball game, players hand out autographed baseballs and take plenty of time to hang out and chat with their visitors. Andrew Bandstra, the team's Broadcaster & Media Relations Manager, is incredibly humbled to receive the much-deserved award. The Blue Crabs continue their support of The Arc Southern Maryland through fundraisers and even an Employee Appreciation Day for the organization. Thank you to the Blue Crabs for strengthening the bonds within the Southern Maryland Community!

Howard "Blackie" Bowen, The Arc Washington County

Howard “Blackie” Bowen has a lifetime of achievement as a volunteer with The Arc of Washington County. Blackie has held many roles in the organization throughout the years, most importantly, as a parent. Blackie has served selflessly as a past director on the chapter's Board in a variety of leadership roles. He has also chaired The Arc of Washington County’s Dancing with The Arc Stars fundraising committee that has generated over $400,000 for the organization since 2011. When The Arc of Washington County decided to embark on an unprecedented Capital Campaign project with a fundraising goal of $7,200,000, they knew that their success would need to be driven by a dynamic and well-respected community leader; their choice was obvious. They are honored for Blackie Bowen to have accepted this challenge. While this is the chapter's first capital campaign, Blackie has led or participated in approximately 50 capital campaigns throughout his career. His contributions to the community reach far past just The Arc.

Blackie shared, “I support The Arc of Washington County because the people we serve deserve the best. Please join me in making sure they can continue to provide excellent support to our community, well into the future,” setting the tone for their fundraising success. Blackie has graciously and passionately “told the story” of the chapter, educating the community, business partners, family, and friends on the importance of their mission and the goals of their capital campaign. Leading by example, Blackie has helped secure $5,000,000, 70% of The Arc Washington County's fundraising goal. They are thankful for his friendship, commitment, and leadership!

The Lorraine Sheehan/Bernard A. Gould Volunteer Governmental Affairs Service Award

This award is presented to an individual who has demonstrated outstanding volunteer service in governmental affairs in one or more of the Association's priority goals areas. This award will be conferred at such times as the Awards Committee feels warranted, to only those candidates whose contributions have been exceptional.

Lawrence "Chris" Collins

Lawrence "Chris" Collins is a young man with a lot of influence. He began advocating for himself and the broader community of people who receive or provide supports to others with developmental disabilities a few years ago, and he has not slowed down yet. During DD Day in 2019, Chris lead the rally cry to
Chris Cook is the Principal at Homestead Wakefield Elementary School in Bel Air, where a foster care child in The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region’s Treatment Foster Care program began school last September. When the child joined the school, Principal Cook immediately saw their potential and spoke with the chapter's social worker about how excited the school was to have the new student. Chris also arranged for an Educational Surrogate Parent to be appointed as quickly as possible so that the student received an IEP and evaluation within their new school system.

Throughout the year, Principal Cook ensured that the student received breaks as needed during class time when they first began school. In the new environment, however, the student needed less and less "break time" as the school year moved along. During the school year, the student was even recognized as an award winner in their music class, and at a school-wide awards ceremony. This was a huge accomplishment that would not have happened without Chris’s constant support and the importance he placed on including the child in all aspects of school life. After a few months of attending the school, the child made sure to tell their foster mother, "I love school." We thank Principal Cook for all he has done to support this foster care child, and for seeing the same potential in all his students.

Cecilia Warren

As the Emergency Preparedness Director for the Maryland Department of Disabilities, it is her job to help our state be prepared for emergencies and what people with disabilities need under typical emergency circumstances. Nothing could have prepared us, however, for the pandemic. Cecilia has been working dawn to dusk (and beyond) every single day to improve the response and recovery of the Maryland State Government to the COVID pandemic for people with disabilities. She has been a driver in policy changes that improved access to services, supports, and care for people with I/DD, and advocated for the inclusion of appropriate accommodations in COVID testing sites and hospitals, as well as hospital visitation policies.

Cecilia worked in partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS) to create the Feeding Program to provide groceries and meal delivery to people with disabilities who were unable to get to other food distribution sites, and to expand SNAP benefits to include delivery services. She authored the letter authorizing group homes and congregate facilities being able to purchase supplies above limits imposed in stores. In her work with the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), Cecilia was able to help procure Personal Protective Equipment for DDA/BHA to distribute. She worked with MEMA and MDH on the accessibility of the Governor’s Executive Orders and all Public Service Announcements for screen readers and captioning. Her work continued with Maryland State Police and MDH on face-covering mandates and ADA accommodations. Her tireless work on behalf of people with I/DD over the last six months has been incredible. The extraordinary amount of time, initiative, and effort to create programs and policies that fill in gaps in services for people with disabilities during this time has been above and beyond what any of us could have expected and we are grateful!

Caprice West

Caprice is the Special Education Teacher at Southern High School in Anne Arundel County, where she works to ensure the inclusion of her students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She was instrumental in starting the school’s Special Olympics Unified Sports program, where students with and without disabilities compete together. Since Mrs. West kick-started the inclusive sports program, there has been a cultural shift in Southern High School in
During the 2020 session, Senator Lam championed legislation to create adult changing stations so that individuals with physical disabilities would have equitable access to the community. He also sponsored a bill to support parents of children with medically intensive needs and tried to increase the pay rate for their in-home nursing support to improve the quality and retention of this essential workforce. Although neither of these bills advanced due to the abbreviated session, we are immensely grateful for his efforts, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Senator in the coming months and years. We also recognize the Senator’s service to our community during the pandemic. As a physician, Senator Lam was on the front lines of the pandemic, providing essential and life-sustaining care to some of Maryland’s most vulnerable citizens. We thank him for his dedication and tireless work to restore health to those affected by the pandemic.

Students' attitudes towards their classmates with disabilities and vice versa.

Recently, Mrs. West welcomed several new students into her classes. These students were previously isolated in separate educational programs because of "behavioral concerns." Thanks in part to their awesome teacher, Mrs. West, these students were able to break through barriers, successfully join their classmates, and participate.

Legislators of the Year

This award is presented for outstanding leadership in the Maryland General Assembly on behalf of the rights of persons with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. This honoree(s) is selected by the President, Executive Director, and Chair of the Governmental Affairs Committee of The Arc Maryland.

Senator Clarence K. Lam, District 12, Baltimore County and Howard County

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Senator Melony G. Griffith, District 25, Prince George’s County

Senator Melony Griffith serves on the Budget and Tax Committee and chairs the very important Health and Human Services subcommittee that oversees the Developmental Disabilities Administration budget. This past year, the DDA budget was initially under review with the Governor’s recommendation of a funding cut. The funding that was promised, through the Minimum Wage Act of 2019, was necessary to assist DDA Providers to keep pace with the scheduled increases in the Maryland minimum wage, but that critical funding was on the line. Senator Griffith took the time to meet with people with disabilities, providers, and families to understand the weight and potential impact of the cut. She shared concern that the workforce, and the providers that partner with them to provide critical healthcare supports, would not be left behind. Ultimately, through her advocacy and intervention, the funding cut recommendation was rejected by the General Assembly, and we remained intact! We look forward to continuing to work with Senator Griffith to advance policies that improve the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families in Maryland.

Senator Craig J. Zucker, District 14, Montgomery County

Senator Zucker sponsored, co-sponsored, and championed several pieces of legislation aimed at improving the quality of life, and advancing the rights of, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the 2020 session including, but certainly not limited to, SB 783 (Special Education- Judicial Actions- Attorney’s Fees and Related Costs) and SB 885 (Voluntary Developmental Disability Self-Disclosure Cards). In the case of the former, we appreciated how the Senator took the time to truly listen to the interests and concerns of self-advocates to preserve their privacy and rights. Senator Zucker brought everyone together, multiple times, to achieve a win-win outcome of the bill.

We don’t say it enough, but we want Senator Zucker to know we are thankful for these efforts, and his work behind the scenes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities: to ensure their systems of support continue to be of high quality, their supporting workforce is stable, and their family members have peace of mind. We are grateful to have Senator Zucker working for and with us, and we look forward to continuing our work in the years ahead!

Delegate Joseline Peña-Melnyk, District 21, Anne Arundel and Prince George’s Counties

During the 2020 session, Delegate Peña-Melnyk stood for accountability as she worked to make sure that people with developmental disabilities, the workforce, and the providers that support them, would not be left behind in budget and policy proposals. In hearings, as part of her role as co-chair of the Health and Government Operations committee, she
Shelby Anderson was a program director for The Arc Northern Chesapeake’s Employment Discovery before COVID-19, which was successful at launching job seekers into positions of their choosing with assessments, on the job experience, and classroom instruction. When COVID-19 struck Maryland, Shelby stepped up and became a House Supervisor for a medically fragile house in the chapter’s Community Living Program. She quickly began her 24/7, on-call, and in-person position managing staff, medical needs, and behavioral support needs of the people who live there. Shelby’s quick, critical thinking skills made her a great fit for the position, but it is her endless care for people with I/DD that sets her apart from others. Shelby voluntarily stepped into the front lines of COVID-19 and has faced every challenge since March with patience and gratitude. Among the chaos, she provides steady and thorough leadership that helps staff and individuals in the house thrive during uncertain times.

Delegate Geraldine Valentino-Smith, District 23-A, Prince George’s County
Delegate Valentino-Smith was nominated for this award by The Arc Maryland’s Governmental Affairs Committee for her work on behalf of people with I/DD during the 2020 Legislative Session and her interest and support of The Arc Prince George’s County. Early on in the 2020 session, the Delegate met with advocates to discuss our needs and concerns. She showed genuine interest in working with The Arc on pro-disability policy and the concerns we had with the transformation of our state developmental disabilities systems. She introduced a bill that would create a tax break to people with physical disabilities and worked hard to educate her fellow legislators on the need to protect funding in the Developmental Disabilities budget. Through the BRFA language she championed, she demonstrated her commitment to families of transitioning youth, who are struggling to obtain adult day supports upon graduation from high school. We are immensely grateful to Delegate Valentino-Smith for her support and we look forward to continuing to work with her in the coming year.

Catalyst Award for Community Champions During the COVID-19 Pandemic
This award conveys official acknowledgement, honor, and appreciation from the Association to individual(s) or organizations that have made significant contributions and/or sacrifices on behalf of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The recipient(s) shall have demonstrated unprecedented, tireless work and/or proposed creative solutions to prevent illness and encourage continued physical and emotional health of people with I/DD and their families. The honoree(s) of this award is considered an innovator or “catalyst” of change, committing selfless acts and advocating for something bigger than themselves.

Shelby Anderson, The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region
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Rhonda Braswell, The Arc Howard County
Rhonda Braswell is the Senior Residential Manager for The Arc of Howard County. When the COVID-19 crisis came to Maryland, Rhonda rose to the challenge and beyond! She worked tirelessly to ensure houses were staffed and that the staff members were caring for the people they serve safely. Rhonda also took the time to recognize and address the self-care of her staff, a vital and sometimes overlooked challenge of their demanding position.

Rhonda made sure that all of the houses had personal protective equipment, food, and activities to keep residents and staff healthy, happy, and safe. She also fortified her team of residential DSPs and DSMs with training on new regulations and assured that they were following those policies in supported homes. During the pandemic, Rhonda is recognized for her sign she proudly displays, which states, “Heroes Work Here!” Thanks for enabling our community’s heroes, Rhonda!
Dr. Michael Greenberg

Dr. Michael Greenberg has worked tirelessly for over six months to ensure positive outcomes for a population that is extremely vulnerable to this virus. He has used his expertise as a physician and a parent of an individual with a developmental disability to ensure an impact in the community in almost unbelievable ways. When the pandemic reached Maryland, and in the absence of guidance from the Department of Health in the initial days of the crisis, Dr. Greenberg immediately provided healthcare advice to service providers as the initial outbreaks occurred in group home settings, developed policies, trained direct support staff, and provided support to nurses to manage positive COVID cases.

Dr. Greenberg was also instrumental in the distribution and understanding of the correct and safe way to use personal protective equipment (PPE) in Maryland. He created videos online teaching proper mask-wearing tips and tutorials on creating masks at home. All the while, Dr. Greenberg was busy with a mask-making production workshop he set up in his home. Additionally, Dr. Greenberg made an impact on legislation, advocating for I/DD support staff to be designated as essential workers, and for the provision of PPE to DSPs. It is undeniable that Dr. Greenberg is an exceptional human being. His thorough research, respectful and passionate interactions, and dedication to the safety of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are just a few of the reasons we recognize Dr. Michael Greenberg for his heroism.

Rachel London, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

As the Executive Director of the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, Rachel London's expertise, advocacy, and commitment to people with developmental disabilities are revered. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Rachel acted swiftly and decisively. She immediately assessed the need of providers across the state of Maryland through a grant initiative to provide $85,000 in funding to providers across the state that went towards the purchase of iPads, puzzles, arts and crafts supplies, weighted blankets, and more. Other Councils across the country even replicated the project that affected close to 3,000 people. Organizations reported that the initiative directly affected individuals’ feelings of safety, calm, self-worth, and connectedness, thus improving communication and understanding, and decreasing anxiety, which resulted in positive changes to behavior.

As an advocate for inclusive education, Rachel sits on numerous boards, commissions, councils, and committees to ensure free and appropriate education is accessible to all students with developmental disabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic caused an abrupt end to in-person instruction, and students engaged in distance learning programs through the end of the school year. Immediately, Rachel assessed the need of local school districts, and with the support of the Executive Committee and the Council, funded a time-limited demonstration project to five local school systems, including the Maryland School for the Blind. The project will ultimately alleviate unnecessary hardship due to a lack of access to assistive technology and promote continued engagement with peers, teachers, and other educational support by providing funds to fill gaps in services that students are experiencing due to the school closures.

It is without question that Rachel works tirelessly to advance the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in all facets of community life. Her legislative presence, over the last 15 years, is also a testament to her ability to create systems change, positive policy advancements, and a more just and inclusive state for people with developmental disabilities.
Heather Edwards, The Arc Baltimore

Heather Edwards is a Direct Support Professional at The Arc Baltimore who has made an outstanding impact on the lives of both the individuals she supports, Anthony and Jake. She is dedicated, hardworking, and always goes beyond the call of duty. Heather’s passion to serve others and lift their spirits exemplify the vision of the chapter. Heather has opened the eyes of those she supports and their families to the endless opportunities available to them. Anthony and Jake have both increased their confidence and independence, and are living a more meaningful life because of Heather’s commitment, encouragement, and heart.

Heather is also dedicated to furthering her education as a DSP to provide the best support possible. In February, Heather was accepted into The Arc Baltimore’s E-Badge Academy, in partnership with the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals. Through the Academy, DSP staff earn electronic badges based on the competencies they demonstrate and the education they receive through videos and direct training. Three levels of certification are available. The chapter is proud to celebrate Heather, as she was their first participant to achieve the DSP-1 Certification in July! Heather said it best, “it is an honor and a blessing, not just for myself, but for the people I support. It’s amazing!”

Chanel Cason, The Arc Carroll County

For almost five years, Chanel Cason has been working at The Arc Carroll County as a Residential Advisor. Chanel’s confident and calm demeanor has made her a respected part of their residential team. She has helped the ladies that she supports to achieve their goals and helps them find new and unique activities to explore their communities. Chanel is always willing to help at any of The Arc Carroll County’s residential homes and has stepped up and assisted at homes that are without a Residential Advisor. Chanel is currently pursuing her Bachelor’s degree with the hopes of becoming a Pediatrician. Even with a course load, she manages to work over full-time hours to support the residents. Her dedication has helped The Arc Carroll County continue to provide residential support through the pandemic, an essential service for the organization and everyone it serves.

Dwight Wilson, The Arc Central Chesapeake Region

Dwight Wilson has been with The Arc Central Chesapeake Region for eight years, where he provides personal supports on the Eastern Shore and has proven to be a tremendous DSP. Dwight’s ability to form and sustain strong interpersonal relationships has made him highly successful in his role. His patience and calm temperament under duress make him excellent at de-escalation, and ensure the family he works with feels comfortable and confident in his ability to handle any complications that may arise. There have been occasions where Dwight’s exceptional de-escalation skills have even prevented severe injuries. In the face of difficulty, Dwight maintains his composure and consistently approaches situations with understanding, fairness, and diligence.

Moreover, Dwight’s commitment and dedication to The Arc’s mission is evident in the ways he goes above and beyond the call of duty. Dwight has supported the family above and beyond the scope of his role. He has coached the family on how to approach de-escalating a situation and has even called the family, outside of his scheduled hours, to support them through it. He consistently does what is needed and more to ensure the person and family he supports are safe and satisfied. The Arc Central Chesapeake Region is proud to have Dwight on their team. He is making the impact they strive for!
John Michaels, The Arc of Frederick County

John is a Direct Support Professional at The Arc of Frederick County. He has creatively worked with individuals served by the chapter throughout the pandemic, making him an integral member of their team. John's strength comes in his ability to make supported individuals feel less isolated and more connected with the local community, which is paramount when stuck at home. Thanks to John, every day feels a bit more "normal."

According to John, working for The Arc of Frederick County has never felt like work; he truly enjoys all that he does with the organization! His passion for the job and willingness to go above and beyond are amazing qualities to find in a person and in a Direct Support Professional.

Sarah Moorefield, The Arc Howard County

Sarah Moorefield has worked for The Arc Howard County for almost 14 years. Her first position with the chapter was in the Day Habilitation program, working as a one on one. Sarah excelled at this position, creating strong relationships with the people she supported and ensuring they were living their best lives!

Five years ago, Sarah saw an opening in the Employment department as an Employment Specialist. Her natural ability with people, along with her strong work ethic, was a perfect fit for Employment. Sarah quickly established relationships with both the employment companies and the people she served.

When Covid-19 struck the world and The Arc Howard County, Sarah was one of the first people to respond and offer her services in residential. Currently, Sarah is working in both the Employment Department, providing much-needed safety and support while also covering shifts in our Residential homes. Sarah has proven herself to be a selfless and dedicated member of The Arc team!

Deric Gross, Creative Options, Selected by The Arc Maryland

Deric is a Direct Support Professional who is employed by Creative Options and supports a gentleman with I/DD in the Baltimore Area. Deric has been instrumental in developmental disability advocacy for fair DSP wages, and statewide recognition of the DSP position as an essential healthcare profession. During the legislative session, Deric provided testimony and has been a major leader in rallies and other advocacy efforts. All of his actions were to ensure elected officials remember people like him when they write policy and make budget decisions, and that DSPs are the backbones of our community-based service delivery system.

During the pandemic, the gentleman that Deric supports contracted coronavirus. Without hesitation, Deric packed a bag, left his home, and went to stay with the individual, providing excellent around-the-clock care and support, until the gentleman beat the virus. We are so grateful to Deric for his commitment, compassion, heroism, actions, passion, and inspiration to others.

Justina Nelson, The Arc Montgomery County

Justina Nelson has been a loyal and dedicated DSP with The Arc Montgomery County since 1995. For more than 25 years, she has faithfully supported people with I/DD in meaningful and redemptive ways. Tina is a strong advocate in the community and on the job site. The best interests of the people she supports are consistently at the forefront of her decisions. She also values positive relationships with the families of the people she supports, focusing on the best quality of life possible for each person as she answers questions and makes suggestions.

As the pandemic unfolded and situations were uncertain at times, Justina again proved her heart and dedication. When no one else would, Justina went above and beyond by stepping up and working in a home that had tested positive for COVID-19, again working diligently for the health, welfare, and wellbeing of each resident. She tenaciously took ownership by thoroughly cleaning and bleaching everything consistently to ensure safety and no virus spreading. Justina modeled a strong example during this time.
Additionally, Justina, on her own initiative, implemented virtual supports and actively engaged the people they support. She was quite proactive during this time of transition before her job site opened back up. During this time, she maintained contact with her employment crew and their families. Justina is a prime example of lifetime achievement as a DSP, and for that, we thank her!

**Michael Solis, The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region**

Michael started as a Direct Support Professional in The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region's Personal Supports Program. Due to COVID-19, however, the program had been drastically reduced. There was a sudden and urgent need in our Community Living Program, so Michael quickly offered his services in one of the homes to help support people. Two of the three residents in the home Michael worked in tested positive for COVID-19, making this a daunting task.

Michael did not hesitate to jump in and continue to provide supports while the gentlemen were on isolation, and the home continued to be under quarantine. He worked twelve-hour, overnight shifts for several days in a row, putting the rest of his life on hold to self-isolate when he was not working. He kept a positive attitude and did what was necessary to keep people they support, team members, and the community safe. His energy and compassion are vital assets to the organization, and The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region cannot thank him enough!

**Habim Brown, The Arc Prince George's County**

Habim Brown is a Direct Support Professional at The Arc of Prince George's County, who always jumps in to help others. When The Arc Prince George's County began using Twinsis, a virtual information management system, Habim took the time to study the system thoroughly. When others ran into trouble with the new technology, always reliable Habim was there to assist, even when it meant after-hours calls.

Additionally, Habim understood the importance of virtual learning during this new age, making sure not to miss online training on the topic even while sick. When seeking input on creative ideas to engage people supported by the chapter, Habim was at the forefront, specifically when addressing the needs of people they support who are non-verbal. Thank you, Habim, for keeping people comfortable during difficult times.

**LaFayette Booth, The Arc Southern Maryland**

LaFayette Booth is a Van Driver for The Arc Southern Maryland who also provides daily support to ensure people with I/DD are provided opportunities to enjoy their everyday life. He has a natural ability to communicate with and listen to the individuals he supports. Due to the pandemic, it was necessary to adjust his job responsibilities so that he could still provide his valued support to people served by The Arc Southern Maryland. LaFayette took on this challenge and willingly transitioned into his new role supporting individuals in the chapter’s Residential program. With his new job duties, LaFayette was exposed to COVID-19 and ultimately tested positive for the virus, resulting in him being hospitalized.

The virus did not deter LaFayette from returning to the Residential program after his health improved. His gentle demeanor and determination to return to his clients have greatly benefited the individuals of the program, and for that, we cannot thank him enough. LaFayette is a valuable employee and role model for everyone at The Arc Southern Maryland. When we look at the sacrifices made by support staff during this time, LaFayette is a shining example.

**Hannah Leidig, The Arc Washington County**

Have you ever met someone that can motivate you to be the best version of yourself through just a smile? Well, that is Hannah. Her commitment to the people she supports, her team, and the Agency are inspirational. Hannah is someone who will not hesitate to lend a helping hand, and she will always do so with that infectious smile and great attitude. Throughout the pandemic, Hannah has demonstrated a great level of adaptability and positive energy. She continuously engages the people she supports in creative opportunities, like sending care packages to families, facilitating virtual community engagement, and requesting at-home activities and supplies.
Hannah also regularly offers her assistance to support other residential sites and team members with tasks and errands as needed. Her greatest achievement, however, is the impact of her actions. The people she supports are more active and engaged. Fellow support staff are becoming more person-centered and reciprocate support received. She has made such a positive impact thus far at The Arc Washington County.

**The Legacy Award**

This award is presented on those occasions where the individual's lifetime work leaves a legacy for the future and mission of The Arc.

**Liz Burley**

Liz Burley spent over 40 years working for the Prince George’s County Public School (PGCPS) System, where she dedicated her time, as a Transition Specialist, guiding middle and high school students with I/DD to better futures. Over the decades, Liz encouraged countless parents to stay involved and praised the importance of self-determination. She was instrumental in the establishment of Project Search in Prince George's County, which aims to secure competitive integrated employment for people with I/DD, alongside partners including The Arc Prince George's County, the Prince George's County Public Schools System, and Joint Base Andrews.

While Liz retired in 2018, her impact was undoubtedly felt across generations of Prince George's County residents. Her tireless advocacy with students and their families, a commitment to quality, and for helping launch so many Transitioning Youth students into their careers as adults sets a bar, and a legacy, others will endeavor to match. Thankfully, Liz continues to provide support to the Prince George's County School System as a consultant so she is never too far away from those who need her.

We thank Liz for her lifetime of achievement that has touched so many children and young adults in the school system, workforce, and greater community.

**The President’s Cup**

This award is selected each year by The Arc Maryland’s state president and honors those who have contributed to the mission and vision of The Arc by providing exceptional commitment to improve the quality of life for people with I/DD.

**Shawn Kros, The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region**

Shawn Kros has excelled in her advocacy to promote true community inclusion and quality supports. She has achieved this while wearing multiple hats, as CEO of The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region, as a member of Maryland Conference of Executives of The Arc, and as Board President of the Maryland Association of Community Services (MACS). It is no coincidence that the tagline for The Arc NCR begins with the word “Advocate.” Shawn lives and breathes the values of respect, self-determination, inclusion, and community through her extensive advocacy on the individual, local, and state levels.

During the legislative sessions, Shawn has made herself available whenever needed, day or night, to be a strong presence in Annapolis with legislators. Shawn has testified at hearings, met with legislators, supported action alerts, and helped strengthen the relationship between the Senate Minority Leader and the DD community. Last session, there was more than one day when Shawn made the trip to Annapolis twice in one day because she had to be at meetings and events in both Annapolis and Harford County. That is just one expression of her true commitment to doing whatever it takes to get the advocacy job done.

Shawn embodies the traits of what it takes to be a powerful advocate. She speaks truth to power, even when it is difficult. Shawn shared, “I am not just advocating for the people I support. I am advocating for everyone who uses supports across Maryland.” As MACS President, Shawn has embraced the responsibility of representing the provider community and, by extension, the people providers support.

It is hard to imagine a more difficult time being an advocate for community supports. The system changes we face are unprecedented, funding is at risk, and most recently, we are in a long-term pandemic. Lucky for us, Shawn embodies the grit and determination to keep advocating with the understanding that it is more important now than ever to be a champion who doesn’t give up.