



December, 2025

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- College and camp summer programs (it's never too early!)
- Executive Director Celine Fortin on disability advocacy
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- Celebrate the wins!



From the desk of Jennifer Harrison - Director, Planning for Adult Life

People tend to get introspective in December, but in different ways.

Some ask, "Where will the new year take me?"  
Others wonder, "Where will I take the new year?"

The people who ask the second question are self-advocates, people who figure out what they care about, decide what they want, and take action to get it. It is our goal to bring out the self-advocate (and advocate, in general!) in every member of the families who turn to The Arc of NJ for advice, information, referrals, and services.

So, how can we make our voices heard? Sometimes, we need a little inspiration...

The Arc of the United States announced in a [press release](#) earlier this month that it has joined Massachusetts' Somerville Public Schools in their lawsuit "to protect the Department of Education and the rights of students with disabilities." The legal motion comes in response to the layoffs of nearly half of the Department of Education's 4,133 employees, including the majority of workers in both the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and the Office for Civil Rights (OCR). With the responsibility for ensuring that schools follow the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, distributing education funding to states and schools, and investigating discrimination complaints - to name a few - the Department of Education is critical for the well-being of students with disabilities.

According to the press release, "The Arc joined this lawsuit to defend the rights of students with disabilities to a free, appropriate public education guaranteed by federal law. The Arc's involvement ensures that the voices of families and people with disabilities are represented as the case moves forward."

And like The Arc of the United States, we want to make everyone's voice heard!

I recently spoke with Anvesha, a New Jersey high school student who spearheaded the nonprofit [Action Autism](#) and co-created our new Youth Advisory Board for self-



advocates and allies aged 14-21. Here's what she had to say about advocacy:

**Q:** What does self-advocacy mean to you?

**A:** To me, self-advocacy is to understand that everyone has different needs, wants, and values that should be addressed through a wide range of communities. As an ally, it means to use my voice to support others when some systems fail them.

**Q:** Why is self-advocacy important?

**A:** Self-advocacy is important because it ensures that people are heard and respected for the decisions in their life. It builds awareness as it breaks down the misunderstandings and stereotypes while creating a more equitable outcome for our society.

**Q:** What will participants get out of the experience?

**A:** Participants will gain leadership and communication skills by learning to build confidence by sharing their experience, seeing the real-world impact, and creating a peer-network where allies and neurodivergent people can interact and communicate.

**Q:** What do you hope for the people who join the board?

**A:** I hope that for the people who join the Youth Advisory Board, we can...make everyone included and confident, create a space where everyone is comfortable to share, and help create a tangible impact towards our community.

To add your voice to the conversation (whichever conversation you are passionate about!), join The Arc of NJ's Youth Advisory Board [here!](#)

Here's to good work!

Jen



As we always say here at Planning for Adult Life, it's never too early to, well, plan! Here are some great **SUMMER COLLEGE PROGRAMS** to check out now, thanks to [The Autism College Connection!](#)

**College programs have many goals:**

1. Many young people with autism and ADHD have never had the opportunity to attend a sleepaway camp and have missed out on other opportunities to gain independence. These summer programs are made for them. For the first time, these teens can spend a few weeks away from home and build adulting skills.

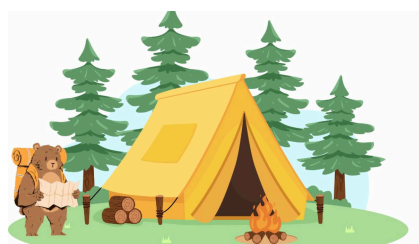
**Programs:**

- Mercyhurst University, PA, [IGNITE and CREATE programs](#)
- Beacon, [Summer for Success](#)
- Landmark, [Summer Programs](#)
- Aurora University, IL, [Pathways College Preparation Program for](#)

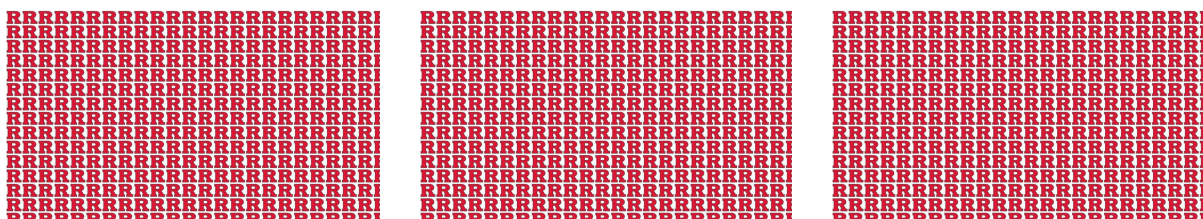
2. These programs build up the academic skills needed for college. Colleges know that too many students arrive at colleges without the necessary reading and math skills to be truly successful. These programs help students get on the right path with intensive, effective remedial work.
3. Students learn how to navigate a college campus and begin to understand college "lingo." They might learn where to ask for help with their math homework and where to find the gym.
4. Teens learn these new skills in a positive, neuro-positive environment with staff that "gets it." They learn how to advocate for themselves and why it's useful to self-identify as autistic.

**Neurodiverse Students**

- CIP, multiple locations, [Summer Programs](#)
- [The College of New Jersey](#)
- [Bridges to Adelphi University](#) (NY)
- [Fairleigh Dickinson's Summer Experience Program](#) (NJ)
- [Camp Akeela's College Readiness Program](#) (MA)



And while you're planning...  
 More of a jump-in-a-lake kind of person?  
 Check out [SUMMER CAMPS AT YOUR LOCAL COUNTY CHAPTER OF THE ARC!](#)



**NEWS AROUND CAMPUS:  
 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CELINE FORTIN ON DISABILITY ADVOCACY**

When Céline Fortin, SSW'91 arrived at The Arc of New Jersey as a Rutgers School of Social Work intern in 1990, she couldn't have imagined the experience would define the course of her professional life. Today, more than three decades later, Fortin serves as executive director of the organization—the state's leading advocacy and service provider for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families. Her journey serves as a powerful example of how a foundation in social work education and mentorship from experienced leaders can ignite enduring impact in the field.

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE ABOUT CELINE'S IMPACT](#)



## And now a bit about... Yes, self-advocacy!

This month's blog:

### **A Funny Thing Can Happen on the Way to 2026: Using your voice for advocacy** By Jennifer Harrison

There once was a pioneer who spent more time in his covered wagon than he did in the tin tub at Ye Olde Homestead (although the settlers weren't known for terrific hygiene, so that's not saying much).

One frustration of maneuvering around on his rickety, wobbling wagon so often was the din it generated beneath it. One persistent, annoying, whining wheel – see where we're going with this? – would scrape and squeal and wail as it bumped over hill, divot, or stone. As the idea of foraging for WD-40 sounded about as appealing as using a bar of soap (again, hygiene issues), the man attempted to ignore the noise.

But day after day, week after week, mile after painful mile, the wheel slowly wore him down. The man eventually pulled over, climbed off his mobile milk carton, and, with spit and a prayer, lubricated the arid axle. It did a doozy on his back, but his ears felt immediate relief. The frontiersman schlepped on...

This is not a new story. Nor is it a particularly creative one. But, really, it's all about the upshot.

Cliché be cursed, the squeaky wheel truly gets the grease.

And this is why:

If we don't let others know there is a problem, they don't know how to help us. Or even that they should.

If we don't let others know it loudly, they may too easily ignore us.

And if we don't let others know it loudly and often, they may wait and see if we'll go away.

### **Do not go away.**

Self-advocacy is about deciding what you need, knowing your rights, planning your strategy, expressing yourself, asserting yourself, and staying persistent. (Like the story above, this is not revelatory. But it is an important reminder.)



There is an element of growing up with an intellectual or developmental disability called “learned acquiescence,” or “the culture of compliance,” in which children are taught to behave, not to talk back, not to question, not to defy. After all, there are so many ways in which we need to tend to our children, it is important to keep the process as low-maintenance as possible. However, with no blame to parents or teachers but as just an unfortunate byproduct of learning proper behavior, kids with disabilities interpret this “just be good” mandate as advice against speaking up for their wants and needs. Adherence to obedience often becomes the default, sometimes to the detriment of the people to whom we tend.

We can rewrite the narrative, however.

- Encourage our loved ones with disabilities to identify what is important to them, help them discern the most effective way to advocate for change, and lend your voice to their efforts.
- Model assertive behavior by standing up for what you need, too! (Self-confidence is a huge part of self-advocacy and, man, it’s a tough one. But as activist Maggie Kuhn once said, “Speak your mind even if your voice shakes.” It will soon steady itself!)
- And seek out a community to fight alongside, like the [NJ Self-Advocacy Project](#) or [The Arc of NJ’s Youth Advisory Board](#).

Let’s make 2026 our most powerful year yet and make the change that matters in your world! Charles Ingalls would do it (he’d be ripe when he did it, but he’d do it); we all deserve to do it, too.

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### UPCOMING WEBINARS:

**PLANNING FOR ADULT LIFE:** Wednesday, January 21, 7:00pm

"Pro Se Guardianship" with Jennifer Case, Teresa Amorosi, Judy McDonough from SCARC Guardianship Services, Inc.

Is guardianship right for your family?

Do you have to hire an attorney?

Join us to learn everything you want to know about pro se guardianship (pursuing guardianship without an attorney) and its alternatives from the experts at SCARC. Come with questions, leave with all the answers!



### What is "pro se," you say?

"Pro se" derives from the Latin, meaning "for oneself."  
Learn about setting up guardianship or its alternatives without an attorney!



## Planning for Adult Life's MEET US IN THE MIDDLE WEBINAR SERIES

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every month, 7pm

### January 21: "Pro Se Guardianship"

Jennifer Case, Teresa Amorosi, Judy McDonough from  
SCARC Guardianship Services, Inc.

Join us to learn everything you want to know about pro se guardianship (pursuing guardianship without an attorney) and its alternatives from the experts at SCARC. Come with questions, leave with all the answers!

**Register below!**



[Click here to register](#)

**THE FAMILY INSTITUTE:** Thursday, January 15, 6:30-8:00pm

"What Every Family Needs to Know About Special Needs Trusts, Part 1"

This presentation will discuss what a Special Needs Trust is and how trusts aren't all the same. Attendees will understand the differences between each type of trust and the situations when each trust should be utilized to maximize the benefit for your child.

[Click here to register](#)

**THE FAMILY INSTITUTE:** Tuesday, January 27, 6:30-8:00pm

"What Every Family Needs to Know About Special Needs Trusts, Part 2"

This presentation will explain what families need to know about purchasing necessary items for their son/daughter with I/DD with money from the SNT. It will explore which types of expenditures are allowable, and which are not, in accordance with NJ Medicaid rules and regulations. The presentation will also explain the importance of keeping receipts for all expenditures from the SNT and what to do when the individual with I/DD needs an expensive item costing \$5,000 or more.

[Click here to register](#)

**THE FAMILY INSTITUTE:** Thursday, January 29, 6:30-7:30pm

"Virtual Tour with Us - Center for Adult Transition: Passaic County Community College"

Join us for a virtual tour of the Center for Adult Transition at Passaic County Community College!

[Click here to register](#)

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**CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY:** Wednesday, January 21, 12pm-1:30pm

"Lost in Transition: Understanding 'Failure to Thrive' in Teens and Young Adults with IDD"

Sometimes it feels like a teen or young adult with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) just... stop moving forward. Maybe they've lost interest in things they used to enjoy, struggle with motivation or seem stuck in routines that no longer work for them.

We'll look at why this happens, how to spot the signs early, and ways families, educators, and support teams can help young people re-engage, build confidence, and find new paths forward. Whether you're a parent, caregiver, teacher, or provider, you'll leave with tools, hope, and a better understanding of how to support continued growth during this tricky stage of life.

We'll talk about:

What "failure to thrive" can look like in teens and young adults with IDD

Why some individuals hit a plateau — and how to respond

The role of mental health, independence, and life transitions

Strategies to reignite motivation and progress

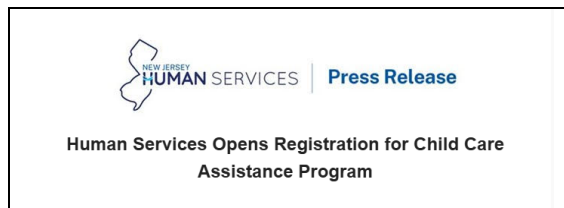


[Click here to register](#)

More resources: (Click the images to see more!)



The START program provides evidence-based community crisis prevention and intervention services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and co-occurring mental health needs. Click [here](#) to learn more...



Eligible families can now register to apply for Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) benefits! Click [here](#) to learn more...

**NEW JERSEY HUMAN SERVICES**  
**Division of Developmental Disabilities**  
Office of Transition to Adult Life & Employment

## TRANSITION THURSDAYS

Webinar Series

**MONTHLY**

- 2nd Thursday: 6PM – 7:30 PM**  
Intake Process & Transition Resources  
Learn about the DDD intake process and transition resources for students and families
- 3rd Thursday: Noon – 1PM**  
Topic of the Month  
Join us every month for a new transition topic

**QUARTERLY - OCTOBER | JANUARY | APRIL | JULY**

- 1st Thursday: Noon – 1PM**  
Welcome Session - General  
Learn the basics of accessing DDD services
- 4th Thursday: 6PM – 7:30 PM**  
Welcome Session (with Breakouts)  
Join breakout sessions covering key transition topics

Register at [www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/transition/transitionevents.shtml](http://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/transition/transitionevents.shtml)



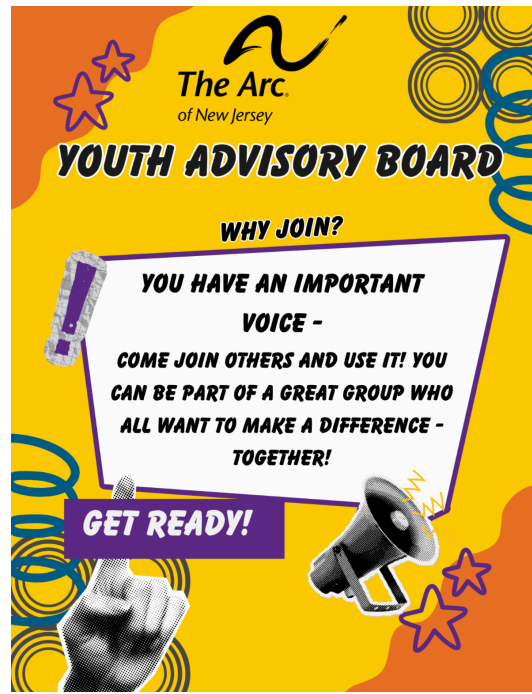
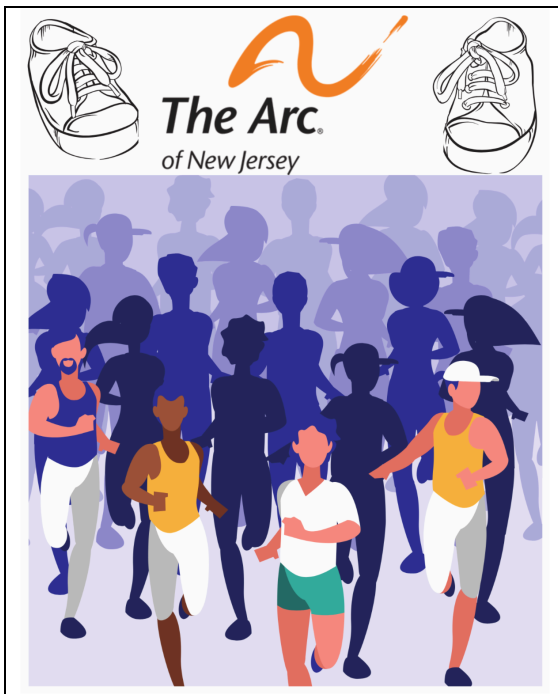
Scan our QR code with your phone camera to join our listserv!

State of New Jersey  
Phil Murphy, Governor  
Tahesha L. Way, Lt. Governor

HUMAN SERVICES  
Department of Human Services  
Sarah Adelman, Commissioner

Division of Developmental Disabilities





We may have mentioned our Youth Advisory Board once or twice already, but...

Click the image above to register!  
Make it a viewing party with friends!

And for our **teachers**, why not join the meeting with your **whole class**?

It's a great way to encourage self-advocacy...

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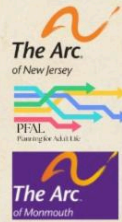
## UPCOMING PLANNING FOR ADULT LIFE EVENTS

Thinking about college? Ready to explore?

Join PFAL and The Arc of Monmouth for our first annual Great College Fair!

Meet professionals and students from NJ's best transition programs, get swag, enjoy a meal, and meet others looking forward to post-secondary education. It promises to be fun and informational! Register below...

# Join Planning for Adult Life for The Great College Fair



- ✓ Talk to professors and students
- ✓ Come when you want, stay as long as you like!
- ✓ Figure out which schools and programs work for YOU
- ✓ Dinner and swag
- ✓ For more information and to register, click here or scan below!



**A LIVE EVENT!**

**Wednesday, April 22, 5:30–7:30pm**

at The Arc of Monmouth

1158 Wayside Rd, Tinton Falls, NJ 07712

[Click to register](#)

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Join Planning for Adult Life, Community Access Unlimited, and The Arc of Essex for an in-person information session and dinner event! Bring your kids for supervised activities while you laugh, learn, and enjoy a little respite. Q&A to follow!





WITH A SUPERVISED  
ACTIVITY ROOM AND  
DINNER FOR YOUR  
STUDENTS!

MARCH

18

WEDNESDAY  
5:00-7:00PM

# DINNER AND DEETS

## ABOUT TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD

*Event*

register here:



With presentations from

THE ARC OF NJ'S PLANNING FOR ADULT LIFE:  
"SSI, MEDICAID, AND DDD SERVICES EXPLAINED"

COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED:  
"SELF-ADVOCACY FOR STUDENTS WITH IDD"

THE ARC OF ESSEX COUNTY: "ALL ABOUT THE ARC OF ESSEX"

*Come for the dinner, stay for the information!*

FREE PARKING | FREE EVENT

THE ARC OF ESSEX

50 BURNETT AVENUE # 3 MAPLEWOOD, NJ 07040



[Click here to register](#)

Ready to explore supported employment?

Want to know what Project HIRE can do for you?

Join Planning for Adult Life and Project HIRE for our online Employment Mentorship Panel -

Meet employers, Project HIRE participants, parents, and Project HIRE Director Colleen Collick to find out what successfully pursuing employment looks like - get your questions answered and get in the know!



Please join us for The Arc of NJ's  
Project HIRE / Planning for Adult Life (PFAL)  
**EMPLOYMENT MENTORSHIP PANEL**

ASK QUESTIONS - OR JUST LISTEN - AND GET ANSWERS!

Panel includes:

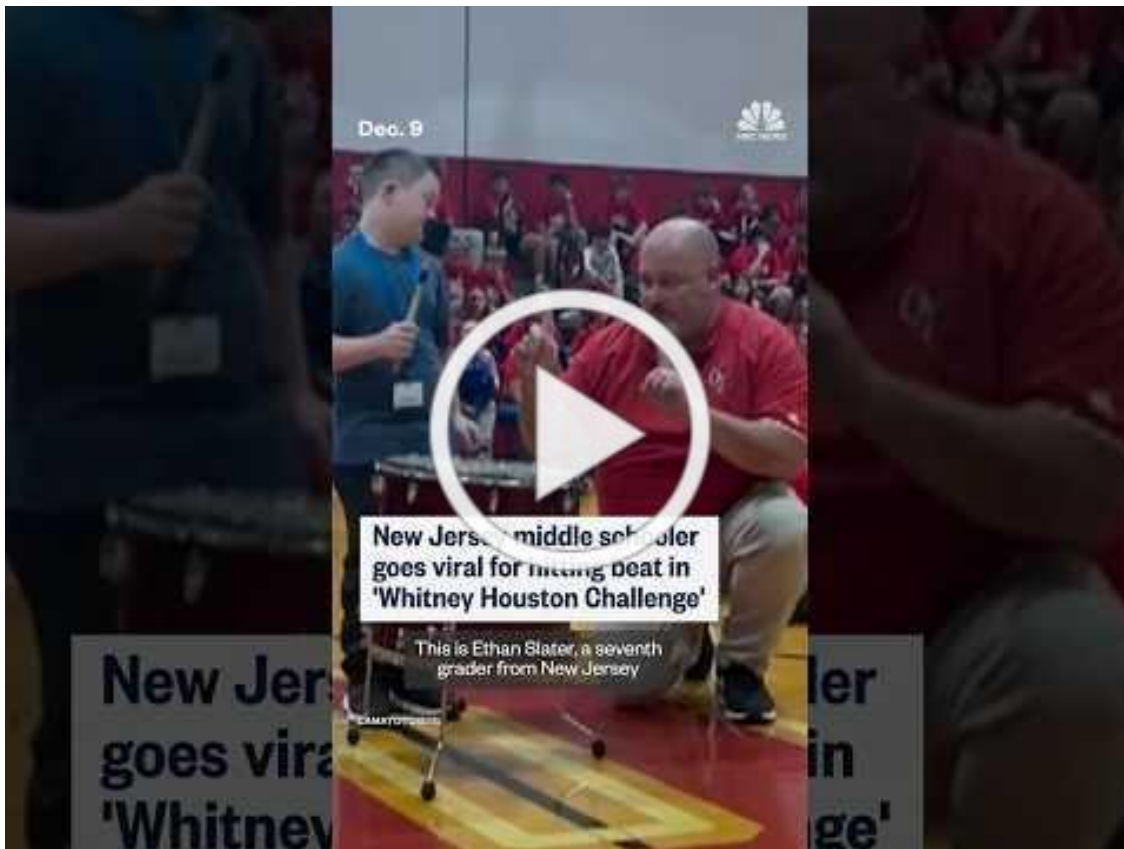
- Project HIRE participants
- Parents who helped them through the process
- Employers who can tell you what they are looking for
- And Project HIRE Director Colleen Collick, who oversees it all

**FEBRUARY 12**  
**1:00PM-2:30PM**  
**REGISTER HERE!**



[Click here to register](#)

And one more reminder to everyone as we head into the new year: life is busy, life can be demanding, but please make sure to stop and celebrate the wins, however big or small. They are important and they are YOURS!



Follow us on Instagram!



@Pfalarcnj

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