



FEBRUARY, '26

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

It's a big month for people with developmental disabilities!
Read what The Arc of NJ's [NJ Self-Advocacy Program](#) has to say...

Developmental Disability Awareness Month is an opportunity to promote respect for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and to increase awareness

of the daily obstacles faced by these individuals and their families. This month is also a chance to provide understanding, encouragement and opportunities to help persons with developmental disabilities lead productive and fulfilling lives.

Ways to Celebrate:

- **[Donate to The Arc of NJ](#)**
Support the statewide advocacy and services we provide throughout the state!
- **[Outreach with Legislators](#)**
Each year, self-advocates share resources and answer questions from legislators from districts across the state about current issues affecting the lives of people with IDD.
- **[Introduction and Resources](#)**
On this page you will find resources about people with IDD, related laws and proclamations, as well as sample letters you can use to spread awareness.
- **[Social Media Tools](#)**
In celebration of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, we encourage you to educate others and spread awareness online!
- **[DD Awareness Month Templates](#)**
View an image gallery of submissions from self-advocates using our templates from years past.

“Segregation and discrimination still cast an ugly shadow over the lives of millions of people with disabilities. This month, we must amplify the voices calling for true inclusion—in our schools, workplaces, and communities. When we listen to self-advocates and remove unfair barriers, incredible contributions shine through.”

– Katy Neas, CEO of The Arc

Here's to work with impact,

Jen



Neurodiversity Celebration Week!

Neurodiversity Celebration Week is a dedicated time to recognize and celebrate the neurodiverse community. This includes individuals with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, Tourette's syndrome, and other neurological differences. The week aims to raise awareness about neurodiversity, promoting understanding and acceptance while challenging stereotypes and misconceptions. It's a time for schools, workplaces, and communities to engage in activities that foster a more inclusive environment for all.

How will you celebrate?

[Click here to learn more!](#)



**And now a bit about...
Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and YOU!**

THIS MONTH'S BLOG:

Activism, Advocacy, or Applause: How should we recognize Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month?

By Jennifer Harrison

While I am technically not a professional fisherwoman – most likely because I have never been fishing - I do often watch “Survivor” while on the treadmill, which is essentially the same thing. So it is only fitting that I take to the waves when weighing the most effective approach to celebrating March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. After all, agile anglers often succeed in snaring sea creature according to their personal preferences:

Some use flies.

Some use worms.

Some open their arms under water and hope a halibut will swim in for a hug.

The fact is, like that old adage about skinning a cat, there’s more than one way to trap a trout. And when we want to recognize Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (DDAM), the options are limitless and the world, as they say, is our oyster.

But why should we acknowledge DDAM at all?

It comes down to one word: *marginalization*.

According to petition generator and advocacy aid, [Change.org](#), marginalization is “one of the most critical social justice issues of our time... [wherein] a more powerful group excludes a less powerful group or community from opportunity and equal treatment.” These populations often face exclusion from social groups, enjoy fewer rights, and receive less access to important resources such as healthcare and employment opportunities.

To wit, [Change.org](#) found in 2023, “only 22.5% of differently-abled people were employed, compared with 65.8% of people without a disability.” (While that fact is staggering, our [Project HIRE](#) is working tirelessly to change those numbers!)

Because of this disparity and others, self-advocates have been fighting to be seen as whole human beings – not simply embodiments of their disability – since the mid-1900s. The civil rights movement of the 1960s brought with them an even stronger voice, as people with disabilities worked to rupture injustice alongside people of color (some people belonging to both groups!). As they gathered steam, the mostly-local efforts soon expanded to pursuit of national initiatives, and the movement continued to grow.

So, in the spirit of those who fought before us, we take on the challenge.

...But how? With advocacy or activism?

Aristotle.com illuminates the difference between the two as such:

- **Approach:** Advocacy most often involves dialogue and persuasion, using tactics like lobbying, policy proposals, and working with lawmakers. Meanwhile, activism is more vigorous and potentially subversive, aiming to “challenge the status quo” via protests, boycotts, or campaigns.
- **Focus area:** Aristotle (yes, the firm, not the philosopher) explains that advocates use existing frameworks and legislative processes to promote change; activists often target social norms and challenge existing conditions.
- **Engagement Level:** While they find advocates operating in more formal settings such as town hall meetings, shoulder-to-shoulder with decision-

makers, activists will exert their energy in “highly visible public places” where the public is more likely to witness their work.

Aristotle goes on to emphasize that these tactics can be applied simultaneously, as well, using either approach when appropriate. After all, adding a megaphone to a microphone can bring down the house that much harder.

And then there's applause, the acknowledgement of what amazing things people of all neurotypes can do. We need to see them, speak about them, appreciate them, and - when necessary - shout about them from the rooftops. Because part of awareness is shining a light on the beauty people haven't necessarily noticed yet. And that support, love, and encouragement can be as effective as the work others are doing in other ways.

It's up to each of us to select the mechanism that works best for ourselves, whether loudly and proudly or slowly and steadily or with pen or sword or marching through March, fists in the air. We've got fish out there to catch. And we'll catch them.

Pick your bait.

UPCOMING WEBINARS:

PLANNING FOR ADULT LIFE: Wednesday, March 25, 7:00pm

Please note: this month's webinar will take place on the 4th Wednesday

"Grandparenting on the Spectrum" with Jennifer Kaufman, M.A.Ed.L., M.S.E.T.

Join Jennifer Kaufman - speaker, school principal at a specialized school for learners with autism, and grandparent of a child with autism spectrum disorder - for an enlightening interview about the role of grandparents in the lives of people with developmental disabilities. She'll explore the potential role of becoming a guardian or supported decision-maker, the struggles grandparents face, and how being a grandparent differs from being a parent when a child has a developmental disability. Bring the whole family!

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

The 4th Wednesday this month, 7pm

**March 25: "Grandparents and the Transitioning Individual"
with speaker Jennifer Kaufman, M.A.Ed.L., M.S.E.T.**

Explore the special and important role as grandparent of someone with a developmental disability - the relationship, the responsibilities, the challenges, the joy



[Click here to register](#)

CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY: Wednesday, March 4, 12:00-1:00pm

"Empowering Athletes of All Abilities: A Conversation with Dan Minko"

In this webinar, Dan Minko - co-founder of Spectrum Sports, an inclusive sports and fitness program that focuses on helping individuals of all abilities get active and engaged - will share his journey, starting with his early volunteer work at the Special Olympics and continuing through his career as a teacher and now as a leader in the inclusive sports world. He'll discuss how Spectrum Sports uses basic sports skills,

obstacle courses, fitness activities, and games to support athletes in a safe, social, and loving environment.

[Click here to register](#)

CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY: Wednesday, March 18, 12:00-1:30pm
"New Jersey Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Fund"

Learn all about the Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Fund, a financial assistance program established in 1989 to help families in New Jersey cope with the high costs associated with catastrophic medical conditions affecting children. The fund aims to alleviate the financial burden of medical expenses that are not covered by insurance or other sources, ensuring that families can maintain their quality of life while caring for their sick children.

[Click here to register](#)

Enjoy information, respite, and a whole lot of fun with our two upcoming **LIVE** events!

Join The Arc of NJ's Planning for Adult Life, Community Access Unlimited (CAU) and The Arc of Essex County for a "**Dinner and Deets (About Transitioning to Adulthood)**" event! Learn all about helping your child - and yourselves - through the transition, meet other parents, have dinner on us, and enjoy some respite while your loved ones with IDD engage in supervised activities on site!



MARCH
18
WEDNESDAY
5:00-7:00PM

WITH A SUPERVISED
ACTIVITY ROOM AND
DINNER FOR YOUR
STUDENTS!

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](#)

Thinking about college? Not sure where to begin? Join PFAL at our **Great College Fair**, brought to you in conjunction with The Arc of Monmouth County! Enjoy dinner while meeting students and college professionals from more than 17 of New Jersey's greatest schools with transition programs! You can also sign up for a private session with a university disability coordinator to find out everything you want to know about 504 accommodations. It'll be a great time!

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 here to register](#)

SCLS NEW JERSEY



**Step Up for The Arc
Shamrock Shuffle
5K/1 Mile Fun Walk**

MARCH 15, 2026

Oak Ridge Park, Clark
Rain or Shine!



SAVE THE DATES!

**SWING INTO SPRING
GOLF INVITATIONAL**



**May 11, 2026
at 8:00 am**

Shackamaxon
Country Club
Scotch Plains, NJ



The Arc
of New Jersey

JOIN OUR YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

There are 3 exciting ways to join!
Third Meetings:
3/10/26 @ 6:00 pm for 14-17 year olds
3/10/26 @ 7:00 pm for 18-21 year olds
3/11/26 @ 1:30 pm for 18-21 year olds*
*Ideal for transition classes!
Questions? DM or email
youthadvisoryboard@arcnj.org

GET READY!





Supports Program and
Community Care Program
Policies and Procedures:

A Quick Guide for Families

Developed by
The New Jersey Department of Human Services
Division of Developmental Disabilities
In collaboration with
Regional Family Support Planning Councils

Want to show the world exactly what people with disabilities can do when entering adulthood?

Join our social media campaign with Community Access Unlimited (CAUNJ.ORG) with 5-10-second videos featuring teachers, parents, guardians, and especially individuals with developmental disabilities showing off their talents and showing what you can do!

Some examples include:

- "I can ride the bus!"
- "I can create a sculpture with clay!"
- "I can take a college class!"

Send in your WE CAN DO THAT! to helpdesk@planningforadulthoodlife.org



New Jersey Self-Advocacy Program & New Jersey Statewide Self Advocacy Network

A program of The Arc of New Jersey since 1983

Promoting Advocacy and Independence for People with
Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

How did you like this email?



The Arc of New Jersey | 985 Livingston Avenue | North Brunswick, NJ 08902 US

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