



For more information contact:

Chris Hall

907-777-0340 (office) or 907-331-9506 (cell)

chall@thearcofanchorage.org

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Busy Baker Cookie Dough provides jobs for Alaskans

Anchorage, Alaska: Busy Baker Cookie Dough, a tasty locally produced and sustainable product is hitting store shelves in Anchorage. Two organizations have developed a unique partnership benefiting Alaskans who experience intellectual and developmental disabilities. Under this partnership The Arc of Anchorage provides employees to package and prepare the dough for shipping and Illusions Food Company will provide a dedicated space at their commercial baking facility. The employees receive a competitive wage and a percentage of the profits are donated to The Arc of Anchorage to help provide services to other Alaskans who experience intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Illusions Foods Company is owned by Dave Walker and his wife, Trace. Dave and Trace Walker intimately understand the challenges facing a person who experiences a disability in the workforce. As a child, Dave was very close with a family member who experienced Down's syndrome and Trace experiences Multiple Sclerosis. The Walkers wanted to give back to the community by developing a sustainable product that would employ and pay Alaskans who experience disabilities a competitive wage.

The Arc of Anchorage's Supported Employment Program has a long history in Anchorage of training Alaskans who experience disabilities to enter the workforce. The program began by assembling rotary phones in a work shop. Gwen Lee, Executive Director of The Arc said, "The people we serve are very capable of learning skills and maintaining meaningful employment in the community. Just like any other employee, they need training to help them with the basics of getting and keeping a job. Work is an expectation. The biggest challenge is finding a job that pays competitive wages."

Currently, there are 29 Alaskans in training at The Arc. When those people complete the program they will head out into the community to find employment. The Arc also provides job coaches once the person is employed to help the person maintain the job.

The head of baking at Illusions designed the recipes for the casual home baker. Currently, Busy Baker Cookie Dough comes in two varieties, Chocolate Chip and Peanut Butter and is available at Chevron Stores and soon at Fred Meyer. Over the next year, The Arc and Illusions will work to make it widely available throughout South Central Alaska.

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