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Candles to cookies: The Arc of Anchorage uses for-profit models to fund operations

Anchorage, Alaska: The Arc of Anchorage is hoping its latest social enterprise endeavor appeals to Alaskans' sweet tooth. Long before social enterprise became a buzz word in the non-profit world, the founders of The Arc knew they would need to generate revenue in order for the non-profit to remain viable. In the 1960s, bake sales and candles provided some startup capital. Then in the 1970s, the organization operated two small thrift stores before partnering with Value Village in the 1980s.

Fast forward to 2012. The Arc's revenues from two business enterprises are approaching \$900,000. The main revenue generator is the donation pickup service. The Arc has a small fleet of trucks busy 5 days a week picking up donations of clothing and household goods throughout Anchorage, Eagle River, and Girdwood. Additionally, The Arc has partnered with non-profits in Fairbanks, Mat-Su, and Kenai to pick up donations. Value Village purchases those donations from The Arc to sell in their stores throughout Anchorage, Mat-Su, and Fairbanks. The funds from these sales are used by The Arc to provide a range of services for Alaskans who experience disabilities. The Arc also operates an espresso shop. Both businesses also serve as job training sites for Alaskans who experience intellectual and developmental disabilities that seek to work in the community.

The Arc's newest endeavor, Busy Baker Cookie Dough, is a delicious new product hitting store shelves in Anchorage. Illusions Food Company and The Arc have partnered to bring fresh locally-made cookie dough to Southcentral Alaska. Under this partnership, The Arc of Anchorage provides employees who package and prepare the dough for shipping and Illusions Food Company provides 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. Currently, Busy Baker Cookie Dough comes in two varieties: chocolate chip and peanut butter.

Gwen Lee, Executive Director of The Arc said, "For-profit business models supporting a non-profit mission will become necessary as public and grant funds continue to decline. Our partnerships with Value Village and Illusions Food Company demonstrate how the two models can co-exist to provide needed services to Alaskans."

The Arc of Anchorage uses the proceeds from each business to provide services to Alaskans who experience intellectual and developmental disabilities. Public funding continues to decrease despite the continuing increase in the needs of the people we serve. The Arc hopes revenue from the business enterprises will continue to partially offset the gap, so Alaskan families who seek help do not have to be turned away.