Farewell to Stairs
As aging baby boomers begin to complain, “Oh, my aching knees,” The Arc buys its first ranch house. More are needed.

It’s a little harder for Jane to use the stairs these days. Like other aging baby boomers, life would be easier if she lived in a ranch-style home. Jane is one of many Baby Boomers in Anchorage who experiences an intellectual disability.

The Arc of Anchorage has gotten the message, loud and clear. “As the people we serve age, their needs change, just like they do for any senior citizen,” said Gwen Lee, Executive Director. “We need to adjust the services we offer to meet those changing needs. And the prime change is the need for accessible housing.”

As a result, The Arc has begun investing in one-story housing, starting with a three-bedroom home on Old Harbor Road in Muldoon. Proceeds from the sale of two-story and split level properties funded the purchase.

“The board of directors looked at the demographics. Accessible housing is already in great demand – both for aging baby boomers and for people with complex medical conditions,” said Rod Shipley, chair of the board. “The demand is only going to get larger, which is why accessible housing for the people we serve is one of our highest long-range priorities.”

Plans to move three women and a staff person into the house on Old Harbor Road are well underway. The Arc plans to build a new wing on the house to accommodate up to four more people with complex medical conditions.

Guest Chefs Are Key to Success
ArtFull Plate Raises Three Times As Much As Past Dinners

Chefs Mick Hug and Adria Dorff of Mixx Grill created a four-star fall harvest meal for nearly 150 guests at the fifth annual ArtFull Plate benefit dinner in October. Hug created the menu and Dorff directed a team of volunteer cooks in the preparation of the meal.

With your help, The Arc raised more than $6,000, allowing us to continue providing recreation and other services for adults in our community who experience intellectual disabilities.

In addition to the dinner, each guest received a ceramic plate of his/her choice hand-made by the artisans of The Arc.

The evening could not have happened without the generous support of our sponsors, including Blaine’s Art Inc., Cascadia International, and Value Village, as well as our in-kind donors (see list in sidebar).

Volunteers from East High School’s Key Club, Wells Fargo Bank’s Disability Awareness Committee, TOTE, and The Arc’s staff, as well as individuals, created a congenial atmosphere.

And, as the saying goes, “a good time was had by all.”

Guest chefs Adria Dorff (left) and Mick Hug of Mixx Grill pause during preparations for the ArtFull Plate dinner.

Thanks to Our Sponsors!
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The Change We Need

To continue providing the services people deserve, we need to be reimbursed based on actual costs. We’re just asking to be treated like other social service and health care providers.

Alaskans are keenly aware of the rising prices of…virtually everything. The effect this has on ordinary families has been at the center of national debate during this year’s elections for good reason.

Rising costs have another insidious, but virtually invisible, effect: the negative impact on the not-for-profit organizations that serve the children and adults of our state who experience developmental disabilities.

The Arc of Anchorage and other provider agencies throughout Alaska take pride in offering services of the highest quality to the families who seek our help. Of course, it costs money to provide these services. Most of The Arc’s funding comes from Medicaid, a joint federal/state program that reimburses providers like The Arc.

In other venues, I and many others have spoken against the state’s failure to fully fund Medicaid services for people who experience disabilities. That failure leaves more than 1,000 people – people whom the state knows need help – on the state’s waiting list, unable to get the services they need. This is tragic.

But what will happen when they finally get to the top of the waiting list, only to find that there are no agencies to provide the services they need? Eeyore’s doom and gloom, you say? Chicken Little crying “the sky is falling!”?

Perhaps, but consider this: Reimbursement rates to community-based organizations have been stagnant for five to nine years. Before 2008, The Arc’s reimbursement rate for disability services had not changed since 2003. For mental health services, we are still being reimbursed at a rate set in 1999.

In 1999, a gallon of gas cost $1.10. A gallon of milk cost $2.88. Bread was $1.90. A pound of ground beef cost $1.51. Today those figures are $3.19 for gas, $3.99 for milk, $2.19 for bread, and $2.99 for ground beef. The cost of health insurance premiums for our hardworking staff would have increased more than 100% over the last five years if we hadn’t cut their coverage and increased co-pays and employee contributions. We’re facing a 50% increase for next year.

After nearly a decade of finding ways to do more with less, there is no more “fat” to cut. We simply cannot continue to provide services for less than it costs to deliver them.

The state’s short-term rate increase in mid-2008 was a step in the right direction. We’re grateful for any help we can get – but the truth is, a rate increase of 4% is not sufficient – not when inflation over the last five years was 9%.

“Not-for-profit” doesn’t mean we can operate in the red. The Arc and its sister agencies provide valuable services that the State of Alaska would otherwise have to provide directly. The state would not think of telling gas stations that state-owned vehicles will pay 1999 prices for gasoline they are buying in 2008. Why should it be different for the not-for-profit agencies that provide services to Alaskans with disabilities and mental illnesses?

In 1999, legislation guaranteed Alaskan hospitals and nursing homes fair compensation for the services they provide and that the rates would increase over time to reflect actual increases in the cost of providing those services.

It is time for the providers of home and community-based services to people who experience disabilities and mental illness, like The Arc, to have a similar system of rate review and adjustment that will enable us to keep our doors open, ready and willing to serve Alaska’s most vulnerable citizens when they knock on our door.

Farewell, Joe

Longtime Foundation Board Member Joe Laird Dies at 65

Joe Laird, chair of the Board of the Foundation of The Arc of Anchorage, died September 24 at Providence Alaska Medical Center.

Joe was born June 15, 1943 in Cleveland with triplet brothers James of Glendale, Arizona and Jack, who receives services from The Arc of Anchorage.

Joe was a leader of the disability rights movement in Alaska since 1982. Joe served as a board member at The Arc for many years and was president of the board in 1994. He became a trustee for the Foundation of The Arc in 1994 and served until his death, acting as chair of the Board of Trustees since 2002.

Joe was a founder of the Key Campaign and a leader in shutting down Harborview and replacing that institutional setting in Valdez with community-based services all over the state.

Perhaps his greatest legacy is the creation of neighborhood housing for people who experience developmental disabilities.

Joe also served on the board of Anchorage Community Mental Health Services for 23 years.

Focus on: Lenise Casey

Since Lenise Casey joined The Arc family in June, she has shown a genuine enthusiasm for The Arc’s mission and core values and the people we serve. Lenise is the case manager for Core Services, working with families who meet the eligibility requirements for Developmental Disability Services, but have been put on the state’s waiting list. Lenise’s program serves about 100 people.

When The Arc started discussing how to respond to “Tropic Thunder,” the summer block-buster film that uses the R-word extensively, Lenise said, “Women and African American people had to stand up for their rights. To stand up and say ‘I do not deserve to be treated as less than a human being.’ People with disabilities need to stand up, too, and we need to stand up with them.”

She volunteered to be a captain at the Rally for Respect held on August 9, 2008. Afterward, she commented, “I liked the way the people we serve got into the role of being self-advocates. I picked up one gentleman so he could be there. I watched him as he gleefully carried his sign and expressed himself. Others spoke in front of the camera and told how it feels to be made fun of.”

Joe Laird, longtime advocate for people with disabilities and mental illness. As Joe’s generation of activists ages, The Arc needs younger people to fill their shoes.
Over the past year, four members of The Arc family have won the prestigious Hainsey Award, which is presented quarterly to the employee who best represents The Arc’s people-first philosophy and a standard of excellence that transforms the lives of the people we serve.

Each winner represents a different department at The Arc, although that is “a happy accident,” says Gwen Lee. “The winners were chosen because of quality of the care they provide and the inspiration they are to others.”

David McQueen is lead ISP (Individual Service Provider) in the Rec Center.

Kay Harvard is primary staff and case manager for the Student Living Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students.

Willie Taylor is a job coach for Supported Employment Services. With eleven years of service, he is among the small group of a few dozen employees who have been part of The Arc family for more than ten years.

Tim Slade, Director of Nursing, is, at thirteen years, also in that category of longtime employees.

Congratulations to all four winners! Thank you for your hard work and dedication—and the joy you spread each day.

From Willie Taylor’s nomination:

Willie has worked for The Arc for eleven years. As a job coach, he is unsurpassed in his dedication and “people first” approach. His commitment to the people he serves goes beyond the realm of service into true concern for their well-being. He extends similar care and concern for his co-workers.

The people Willie serves love him; they always want to do well so he will be proud of them. He’s a good teacher and a good role model. Even after the normal measures of success are achieved and his people have become independent, Willie keeps checking in to make sure things are going well.

The employers with whom he works also love him. They always have good things to say about him, but noticing how much he respects the people he is coaching is always at the top of their lists. He is always willing to help employers and their staff find better ways to communicate with the people he serves.

Willie’s greatest gift is his commitment to seeing every situation through the eyes of the people he serves. He understands the way they see their struggles so the help he offers is authentic and “just right.” There is no better example of “people first” service.

From Tim Slade’s nomination:

Tim Slade’s first job with The Arc was respite provider, but he jumped at the chance to become The Arc’s first traveling nurse, providing support, information, and encouragement to rural families. In the early days, he traveled with a sleeping bag, for he often ended up on a gym or health clinic floor—and sometimes still does.

Tim’s quiet personality and compassionate professionalism allow him to slip into different cultures, villages, and homes in a way that is genuinely helpful and completely respectful. Tim shares his knowledge, commitment to a standard of excellence, and enthusiasm for rural nursing with nurses at The Arc, as well as other agencies. He is universally acknowledged as a great team leader.

Perhaps Tim’s greatest accomplishment is his ability to balance the very highest standard of nursing care with the need to adapt to rural conditions that are very different from the hospital environment. As a result, Tim is held in high regard by both state regulators and the families he serves.

After thirteen years, Tim remains passionate about serving rural Alaskans and completely committed to The Arc’s mission. No one could be more deserving of the Hainsey Award.
As government grants dwindle and the cost of providing services increases, The Arc of Anchorage relies increasingly on the generosity of community members to continue our work. We are grateful to the following people and businesses who have made recent monetary or in-kind contributions:

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- Alaska Community Share
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