

The Arc of Massachusetts 2008 Update

Americans have felt the sting of our economic downturn. We have experienced a rise in unemployment and a decline in consumer purchasing. These conditions affect all families and individuals, including individuals with disabilities. We began FY2008 (July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008) with optimism that we could expand funding and services for children and adults.

We were successful, thanks to your generous support. However by the start of the new fiscal year, we had to change strategy in order to prevent major losses in services. Given the major changes in the economic environment, our update also covers part of our 2009 activities (beginning in July 2008).

As we started fiscal year 2009 on July 1, we saw the Massachusetts financial picture worsen. We didn't anticipate how much it would deteriorate, nor did anyone else. While other human service agencies experienced deep cuts, the Patrick administration did not subject DMR to the same level of reductions. However, some of our constituents did experience cuts – primarily children and families served through the Autism Division and an education account known as DOE-DMR (Department of Education, now Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). Additionally, the Extended Employment account at the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission was reduced. The restoration of budget cuts is part of our agenda as we look to the future.

Public Policy & Government Affairs

The Arc continued to be the leading voice on behalf of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) on Beacon Hill. Governor Patrick and Lt. Governor Murray joined The Arc and MDDC at our legislative reception in March. We also worked collaboratively with The Arc of the US on national issues. The budget increase for DMR totaled over \$20 million on an annualized basis for services, not including the Salary Reserve.

- The Arc of Massachusetts continues to be the **high scorer on supporting federal legislation and budget** items when email responses are compared to other state organization. One of the federal achievements this year is the "Amendments to the Americans with Disabilities Act"
- **FY09 Budget success:** new money for Turning 22, Family supports, DESE-DMR (helps children live at home as alternative to residential schools), Salary Reserve, Autism division/waiver, restoring cuts to community residential and early intervention
- Maintained the entitlement and rate setting **process for day habilitation services** by obtaining support of state officials and working on a national level with The Arc and others
- The Arc completed research on determining **access to quality health care** for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (supported by a grant from The Boston Foundation)
- Played key or active **roles on the passage of bills** initiated by other groups including DMR name change, Senate 65 to establish rates for purchase of service programs (S.2764), a bill which maintained Transition Age at 14 years for schools, and Self-Determination

- Played key role in Governor's decision to support **closing of Fernald**
- Representative plaintiff in Rolland Case, settlement will provide **new community housing** for almost all members of the class presently confined to nursing homes over the next four years
- Senators Kerry and Grassley introduced a new bill which would **address the institutional bias** –The Arc helped in the development of the bill

These major outcomes translate into services for thousands of individuals. Most of these outcomes also reflect the participation of organizational partners and others such as legal actions required the leadership of public interest and private law firms.

But The Arc continually works on process and building capacity in order to be an effective advocate for individuals with disabilities. Five new major activities this year included:

1. Developing a set of specific priority sheets to address our large constituency -- this allowed individuals to respond to the issues that they cared most about
2. Reviving a strategy session with legislators on the budget and it was hosted by two of the House leaders, Rep. Lida Harkins and Rep. Tom Sannicandro
3. Outreach to individuals who had filled out the 2007 unmet needs survey—this brought new faces into the State House and to hearings
4. Building a new grassroots network of legislative advocates across the state, the Super-Advocates
5. Reviving relationships with organizations serving multi-cultural communities in Greater Boston and Springfield as part of our work in health care research

Education and Outreach

Part of your support allows us to outreach to individuals, families and the general public. We do this through live educational trainings, events, conferences, information on our website or sent through email lists and, through publications such as *Advocate*.

- We recognize individuals and organizations through our **Distinguished Citizens Awards** - 12 people were recognized this year
- **Support Brokers** (formerly called Community Builders) began January 2008 after a kick-off conference led by a nationally known speaker. Visit www.supportbrokers.org
- **Educational training** included topics such as transition from high school to adulthood, planning for the future, estate planning and advocating for services/supports
- Hosted, with chapters, our second **Innovations Conference**
- Hosted a **board development session** for chapters of The Arc
- Participation with the **Alliance for A Healthy Tomorrow**, which works to limit or eliminate the use of toxic chemicals from products. Some of these are related to neurological conditions.
- Two different **billboards** are up in Massachusetts – encouraging the acceptance and employment of children/adults with disabilities
- Developed two new **brochures** – *Community Funding: A Priority*, and *Quality of Life- Living with Developmental Disabilities and Complex Medical Issues*
- Published an **op-ed in regard to the Rolland Nursing Home Settlement** which helped explain its human and civil rights benefits

Beginning in July, The Arc had advocated for community supports and services. We sent emails encouraging outreach to administration leaders and emphasized how tough any cuts by the Governor would be for our constituents. We also encouraged other organizations to advocate as well and kept groups updated with information. We communicated directly with the Governor's office, Secretaries Bigby and Kirwan and other leaders. Although still painful, we believe that cuts would have been deeper without The Arc.

During this period we also worked on:

- Passage of the Amendments for the ADA (noted above)
- Advocacy against passage of Question 1
- Organizing two public education campaigns in the state:
 - Tropic Thunder movie, which used the term "mental retardation" in a negative way
 - Michael Savage radio show where the host made disparaging comments about children with autism and their parents
- Laying the groundwork for the successful outcome on the Fernald appeal, in which we were ably represented by the Center for Public Representation

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