

THE ARC OF THE GULF COAST OUR STAFF

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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KRISTINA MOTIEJUNAS

LORIN FURLOW

SAMANTHA DAVIS

BOARD MEETINGS

2ND TUESDAY OF THE MONTH

5:00 PM TO 7:00 PM

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

By MELISA MCNEIL

What an exciting year 2017 was! From Hurricane Harvey to our own Houston Astros winning the World Series to the first and only snow of the year. At The Arc of the Gulf Coast we have done a lot of wonderful things in 2017 and 2018 will be just as great. During 2017 we reached 519 individuals and families through advocacy and outreach. Employees and volunteers of The Arc of the Gulf Coast attended 92 educational events where over 3,000 people were able to learn more about what The Arc does. We started our Parent Training Series and offered 5 parent trainings in Galveston/Brazoria Counties where we were able to reach 45 families. Our hope is that we will give parents the tools they need to advocate for their children. All trainings are for individuals, families and professionals, free of charge. We increased our social media presence across all platforms to try to reach families that might not have ever heard of us. In just 8 months we tripled our likes and activity leading to more families and individuals learning about our events and having the opportunity to get involved.

We had a very busy year with fundraising! We had our Top Golf Fund Raiser on May 4th, BJ's Restaurant on August 17th and Joe's Bar B Que in November. We also signed up with the Amazon Smiles and Kroger Share Program. We received grants from Women Brazoria County for new computer equipment, Texas Mutual to cover the office expense during Hurricane Harvey, Specific Assistance from the Arc US and we are now part of a large funding source with The Arc of TX and Texas Council Developmental Disabilities for families effected by Hurricane Harvey.

In addition to all the things that we have done we have had time to have fun at The Arc of the Gulf Coast! We volunteered at the Night to Shine where everyone was royalty for a night, we partnered with Alvin Community College and had our first Luau where over 60 individuals and families came to socialize and have a great time, we partnered with Pearland Exchange club and had our annual Halloween dance where over 100 individuals and families came out to dance the night away. We also partnered with New Hope Church and hosted our 2nd annual Santa with The Arc event.

Along with all the great and wonderful things we have done and offered to our families this year we have also assisted the Gulf Coast Self Advocates. From going to Austin to speak with their local legislature to advocate on the behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities, to their Fiesta Taco Dinner, hosting their garage sale, to helping them go to the Self Advocate Conference, and assisting with decorating and entering a float in the Alvin Home Town Christmas Parade.

At The Arc of the Gulf Coast we have had a wonderful year with new opportunities for individuals and families to learn and advocate for themselves. We will continue to grow and do more for the community that we work, live, and worship in. Thank you to everyone who helped to make 2017 a fantastic year.

See inside for details about our upcoming annual Board Meeting and upcoming election!

This will be our last printed newsletter. Please update your e-mail address to receive future news.

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ANNUAL BOARD MEMBER MEETING & ELECTION MARCH 31, 2018 2PM TO 4PM ALVIN SENIOR CENTER

Now Accepting Applications for New Board Members

Want to be part of an exciting and growing organization? The Arc of the Gulf Coast is currently accepting applications for new board members to help shape The Arc for 2018.

We are particularly looking for:

- * persons with a passion for The Arc's mission of inclusion;
- * professional and business leaders in the Gulf Coast communities;
- * professional and business leaders well-connected in the Hispanic community; and/or
- * persons with marketing/PR/events experience or interest

Please contact us at info@arcgulfcoast.org for more information or to apply.



CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS! By Judy Zavalla

Do you volunteer? Would you recognize a volunteer if you saw one? Just look at the Texas Medical Center, which is the largest medical center in the world, and you will see thousands of volunteers. Look at your neighborhood school campus. The educational success of that campus is due in part to its volunteers. Most 501(c)3 organizations use volunteers and please do not think that volunteers are not paid because they are worthless, but rather, those volunteers are not paid because they are priceless.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics report, approximately 626 million Americans volunteered between September 2012 and September 2013. Men, pay attention: historically, a higher percentage of women volunteer than do men. If these organizations were required to pay their volunteers for their service, they would have to shell out \$24.14 per hour for each volunteer. That would certainly remove a big chunk of money from the company's annual budget.

Often, high school students begin volunteering just prior to entering college. Believe it or not, most college applications ask potential students how many volunteer hours they have completed prior to entering college. Some people begin volunteering for agencies because they believe in the mission statement of that organization. Some volunteers improve their work skill set by their volunteer life. Those improvements make the employee eligible for raises and a promotion. Some volunteer at food banks because they realize that what they do helps low income families to have their next meal. One Alvin resident has proudly volunteered at E. C. Mason Elementary School reading books to the students for more than 30 years. Can you top that track record?

Many volunteers enjoy lifting the spirits of patients who are suffering from physical and mental illnesses. Public libraries are filled with volunteers, which helps the staff members of the library to get the returned books back on the shelves faster. Therefore, the book is available to another reader much more quickly than if the books were just simply sit on a cart in no particular order. Blood donors, who give the precious gift of blood, are volunteers. These volunteers save lives. Many Americans have signed their drivers license to be organ/tissue donors at the time of their death. They are giving additional years of life to those who are in need of an organ/tissue donations and their families. These volunteers go way beyond what is expected.

Winston Churchill admitted that we make our life by what we give rather than what we get. So, consider giving to The Arc. Volunteers are needed by our organization during fundraising activities, as office assistants and during our holiday Breakfast with Santa. So, what are you waiting for? Call The Arc today and volunteer.

ABLE ACT UPDATE

By Kyle Piccola Chief Government & Community Relation Officer for The Arc of Texas

The new tax plan passed by congress and signed by President Trump made significant changes to how people with disabilities can use their ABLE account. As a reminder, ABLE accounts are a new way people with disabilities can save money without it affecting their Medicaid benefits. Some of the changes are positive and some of them may have negative consequences for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. One change that disability advocates are applauding is allowing people to transfer 529 Education Savings accounts into an ABLE account if the individual is not planning to attend college or did not attend college by the time ABLE accounts were available. Individuals will also now be able to save \$15,000 per year instead of \$14,000.

A Piece of the law that has advocates wondering how it will work is the availability to save an additional \$12,060 of their own earnings (up to \$27,500). This additional amount of money will be counted as income like all earnings are, but will be invisible to SSI and Medicaid as assets. The Social security Association will have to provide new regulations or POMS on how these new policy changes will work. As a side note, Texas does not have ABLE Accounts yet but people can open an ABLE account in states that have opened their ABLE program. For more information, visit <https://www.texasable.org/>. You can also contact The Arc of Texas for more information about ABLE accounts and if they are a good option for you or your loved one.

8.5% CAP ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services released their findings from their 15 month investigation into the allegations that Texas denied thousands of students with disabilities the right to special education services through an arbitrary 8.5% cap on special education enrollment—breaking federal IDEA law.

Their report finds that Texas did not comply with federal law and failed to:

1. ensure that all children with disabilities residing in the State who are in need of special education and related services were identified, located, and evaluated, regardless of the severity of their disability, as required by IDEA.
2. ensure that FAPE was made available to all children with disabilities residing in the State in Texas's mandated age ranges (ages 3 through 21), as required by IDEA.
3. fulfill its general supervisory and monitoring responsibilities as required by IDEA for implementing regulations to ensure that ISDs throughout the State properly implemented the IDEA child find and FAPE requirements.

In response to the report, Governor Abbott calls on Texas Education Agency Commissioner, Mike Morath, to take immediate steps to prepare an initial corrective action plan draft within the next seven days. He stated that, "no plan crafted solely by the agency could possibly serve the needs of all students around the state, the draft should be shared with representatives of parent groups, special education advocacy groups, as well as administrators and educators throughout the state. There must be full and meaningful input before the final plan is put into action." This gives students, families and advocacy organizations like The Arc the opportunity to help craft a plan that will benefit Texas' special education system.

While this is a significant step forward for students with disabilities in Texas, there is a lot of work that must be done to recover the years that Texas denied students their federally protected right to special education services. This truly highlights the importance of advocacy and what we can do when we are engaged with our local, state and federal officials.

EMPOWER

Enhancing and Measuring Parent Outcomes with Education and Resources

Join the Arc of the Gulf Coast for FREE parent trainings! The Arc's EMPOWER Program assists families of children and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities get the services and supports they need to be successful in school by providing trainings to teach parents how to collaborate with their child's educational team to ensure positive outcomes. Connect with other families and gather valuable resources while learning how to be a better advocate for your child.

February 1st

Behavior Strategies for
Home and School
Brazosport High School

5:30 pm - 7:30 pm

April 9th

Make Your Child's
Introduction Page
Angleton Public Library

10:30 am - 12:30 pm

March 6th

How to Effectively
Advocate for Your Child
Angleton Public Library

10:30 am - 12:30 pm

April 26th

How SMART Are Your
Child's IEP Goals?
Lake Jackson
Middle School

5:30 pm - 7:30 pm

May 23rd

Guardianship & Alternatives
Brazoria County Center
for Independent Living

10:30 am - 12:30 pm

March 23rd

How to Get the Most
Out of Your Child's
ARD Meeting
Angleton Public Library

10:30 am - 12:30 pm

May 9th

What Parents Need to
Know About Transition
Brazoria County Center
for Independent Living

10:30 am - 12:30 pm

**Contact The Arc of the Gulf Coast for
More Information**

CONTACT US AT 281-388-1161 or info@arcgulfcoast.org
WWW.arcgulfcoast.org

WHAT THE ARC MEANS TO ME....

By Jeanna TenBrink

When my two youngest daughters were both diagnosed with Autism, life as I knew it changed. It was heartbreaking to find out that two of my children had a condition with which I was not familiar. I had no clue how to help them and I was afraid of the unknown. In the beginning I immersed myself into any book I could get my hands on about Autism. What caused it? What could I do to fix it? I spent countless hours either reading or googling about Autism. I felt isolated, angry, and sad. Most of my family and friends couldn't relate to what our family was going through and I desperately needed someone in my life who understood.

When my girls were very young, I found The Arc in Michigan. They were a group of caring moms who were on the same journey I was on. It was an immediate connection that wrapped me with comfort. Not only were they there to guide me to resources, they offered a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. When our family moved to Texas, our girls were entering Kindergarten and First grade. Because of my knowledge of the Arc, I knew I had to find the closest Arc in our new area. Before we even touched Texas soil, The Arc of the Gulf Coast spent many hours on the phone with me helping to prepare me for the move.



The girls started school and soon after, tensions mounted. It was very different in Texas than where we came from and I became frustrated and worried that my girls would regress. Communication with teachers and administrators became very difficult. I needed help! I found hope at the Arc of the Gulf Coast. Their advocates listened, they cared, and they understood. The advocates at the Arc took me under their wing and taught me the language I needed to know to help get the educators, administrators, and myself on the same page. They taught me the power of a well-crafted individualized education plan (IEP) when it focused on the student's needs rather than their label. I learned that inclusion is an experience that you create, not a place my child goes to and after every meeting I had with them, I left feeling more empowered and ready to work to get my girls what they needed to be successful in school. Because of the Arc of the Gulf Coast, I developed confidence in myself as their advocate and I'm passionate about helping other families on this journey.

PAST FALL EVENTS

HALLOWEEN DANCE

The Pearland Exchange club once again teamed up with the Arc of the Gulf Coast to host their annual Halloween Party for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental disabilities. The dance was held at Turner High School in Pearland, Texas to the delight of many ghosts, goblins, and other assorted dressed characters on a spooky October Saturday Evening from 7 to 9pm. Guests enjoyed pizza, and other thirst quenching libations throughout the event. A local D.J. provided the music for the one hundred plus attendees who danced the night away.



SANTA WITH THE ARC

On December 9th, The Arc of the Gulf Coast held our annual Santa with the Arc party for families in the community. We welcomed 75 guests throughout the course of the day. Families were able to enjoy a meal and meet with other families. We had a wonderful visit from Santa and Mrs. Claus, and each family had their picture taken and received a goodie bag. Our Arc elves worked at multiple craft tables to ensure all had a magical time. We sincerely appreciate our many sponsors and volunteers who helped make this event another success! We appreciate the time and effort put in to make this a safe and inclusive event. Big thanks to New Hope Church, Chick-fil-A, Beyond Family, Sam's Club of Pearland, Nothing Bundt Cake, Oriental Trading and the Arc's BOD for their generous donations.



Our GCSAs float for the Alvin Hometown Parade

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 24, 2018 GCSA Garage Sale

Please start bringing your donations to the Arc Gulf Coast office. Call first and please do not leave donations at the front door.

August 3-5, 2018 Annual GCSA Conference
Grapevine, TX



The Arc of the Gulf Coast

Thursday
May 3rd, 2018
3pm-6pm

Tournament Fees

\$100 Per Person
\$600 Per Team (Team includes 6 Players
and one reserved hitting bay)

Tournament fees include two golf
competitions, swag bag, bottomless
non-alcoholic drinks, one beer bucket and
buffet

Swing FORE the Arc *Fundraiser*

Top Golf
21401 Gulf Freeway
Webster, TX

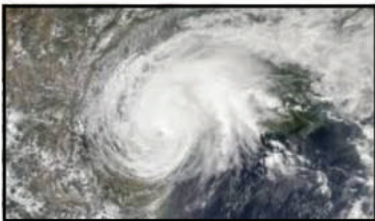
Benefitting services for individuals with intellectual
and developmental disabilities in Brazoria and
Galveston Counties.



For more information and sponsorship opportunities,
please contact tomhutchinson@arcgulfcoast.org or
281-388-1161



If You or Someone You Know



Has been Impacted By Hurricane Harvey

The Arc of The Gulf Coast has Obtained Access
to Funds to Assist Individuals With Intellectual
Disabilities and Their Families. If you Know
Someone That is Experiencing Difficulties in
Finding Resources to Help With Harvey's Destruc-
tion. The Arc of the Gulf Coast May be Able to
Help. Call and Tell us What You Need.

281-388-1161 Ask for Tom

A tip of the top hat to our new Arc of the Gulf coast Member
Dahria Driskell

The Arc salutes our renewing members:

Edwin Anderson
Daniel Armond
Matt Baker
John Barron, Jr.
Anna Bell
Gil & Kay Choppin
Mark Cottrell
Donna Dean
Frances Fowler
Bessie Ford
Beverly Frauenberger
Gilbert Freitag
The Gulf Coast Center
Michael Hamrick
Edward Herklotz

Tom Hutchinson
George James III
Peggy Jobes
Retta C. Jones
Amanda Miles
Stephanie Mitzner
Nelson Olavarria
Pearland Lumber Company
Caroline Rickaway
Mary Ellen Ried
Amy Rowland
Don Stoeltje
Sylvia Todd-Hammersley
Jamie Travis
Maureen Viaclovsky
Jack Winston



SUPPORT THE ARC

As a non-profit, The Arc of the Gulf Coast depends on grants as well as support from the community. To broaden this scope and make better use of our supporters, we are now registered with Amazon Smile, Kroger Community Cares, and The Arc's Car Donation Program. See below to learn more and see how you can support us through these programs.

AMAZON SMILE

You Shop, Amazon Gives!

Shop Amazon using smile.amazon.com/ch/74-6245736 every time and a portion of your sale is donated to The Arc!

Login with your Amazon account details and designate The Arc of the Gulf Coast as your charity.



KROGER COMMUNITY REWARDS

You can support The Arc of the Gulf Coast with your Kroger Plus Card! All you have to do is sign up for Kroger Community Rewards®! Once you sign up, every time you shop and swipe your Kroger Plus card, The Arc will earn rewards.

To get started, login in to your Kroger account and update your Community Rewards Selection to The Arc of the Gulf Coast or enter our Non-profit organization number 14889.



THE ARC'S CAR DONATION PROGRAM

Done with it? **Do GOOD with it!**
DONATE your vehicle to the Arc
tax deductible and free towing



CALL (877) ARC-CAR-0
or VISIT thearc.org/donate-my-vehicle
MENTION THE ARC OF THE GULF COAST

Donate today and give someone with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) the key to their independence. We accept any vehical with a title and will arrange free, convenient pick up or towing. Plus, we'll take care of all the paperwork you need to take advantage of a tax break for your donation.

To donate your car, simply call 1-877-ARC-CAR-0 or donate online at www.thearc.org/donate-my-vehicle and be sure to specify our chapter, The Arc of the Gulf Coast.

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UPDATE YOUR INFO!

The Arc will move to an electronic format newsletter going forward. This will be the last paper mailout you will receive. Please contact us to update your information to ensure you continue receiving our latest updates.

THE ARC OF THE GULF COAST
PO BOX 1484
ALVIN, TX 77512

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All future newsletters will be sent electronically.**

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www.ArcGulfCoast.org**