

Achieve

Spring 2025



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4th Annual Jon's Ride for Autism Drives Support for Local Families

With 215 bikers and even more guests, we had a wonderful day on Sunday, June 1st, for the 4th Annual Jon's Ride for Autism motorcycle ride.

Special thanks to The Valley Pub in Whittinsville for hosting the after party with food and music, and Sheldon's Harley-Davidson for hosting the registration and start of the ride. Without the Worcester Chapter HOGs (Harley Owners Group), Procopio Family, and the incredible volunteers, none of this would have been possible.

In previous years, the funds from the event have supported families and individuals living with autism. This year will be no different, as over \$11,000 will be allocated to support people with autism and their families.



Achieve with us.

Donna Brown Awarded The Arc of Massachusetts' Commitment to Excellence Award



The Arc of Massachusetts proudly hosted its Annual Meeting Celebration this week, an event dedicated to

honoring the remarkable members of The Arc community.

We are thrilled to announce that our very own Donna Brown, Vice President, has been awarded

the prestigious Commitment to Excellence award! This accolade recognizes her extraordinary 45 years of unwavering leadership and profound dedication to those served by The Arc of Bristol County.

Join us in extending our warmest congratulations

to Donna for her exceptional contributions, which continue to inspire us all!



The Arc of Bristol County proAbility Sets the Standard with Near-Perfect DDS Rating

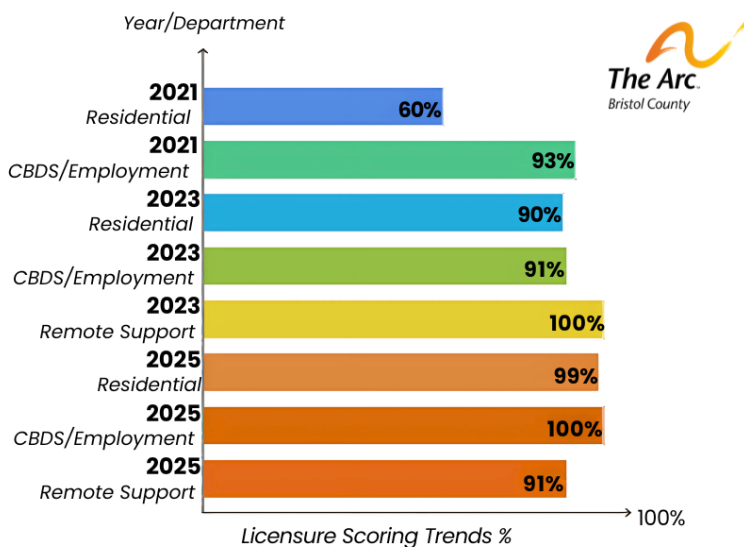
By Katie Baril, Director of Quality Assurance and Data

In March 2025, The Arc of Bristol County proudly achieved an impressive overall organizational rating of 99% during the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Office of Quality Enhancement licensure and certification review. The DDS service providers must undergo licensing every two years across various service groups, including Residential (ABI and Turning 22), Individual Home Supports, Placement Services (Shared Living), Remote Monitoring, Employment, and Day Supports. The licensure review is a comprehensive process emphasizing essential safeguards such as personal and environmental safety, effective communication, health considerations, human rights, a competent, skilled workforce, and the development and implementation of individual goals.

In addition to the licensure expectations, the review process encompasses certification indicators assessing universal service

expectations and organizational standards. The Arc of Bristol County's focus on quality improvement initiatives, fostering supportive relationships, and promoting meaningful activities and community integration were key areas of evaluation relative to these certification indicators.

Achieving a 99% score during this review cycle is a testament to The Arc of Bristol County's unwavering commitment to providing exceptional services to the individuals and families it supports. This accomplishment reflects the agency's dedication to quality and reinforces its mission to enhance the lives of those served.



Advocacy in Action: State and National Highlights

This spring, The Arc of Bristol County participated in major advocacy events at both the state and national levels. On March 6, over 600 advocates gathered at the Massachusetts State House for the 47th Annual Legislative Reception—the largest IDD and autism advocacy day in the state. With the theme “Safeguarding Our Rights through Advocacy,”

the event highlighted key issues, including education, fair wages, and healthcare.

Just weeks later, from April 7–9, over 900 advocates, including 70 from Massachusetts, came together in Washington, D.C. for the 2025 Disability Policy Seminar. After two days of expert-led sessions, advocates met with lawmakers on Capitol Hill to

push for critical policy changes.

In early June, proAbility staff joined over 300 Rhode Islanders to rally and advocate for the protection of services statewide.

We thank all who represented The Arc of Bristol County dba proAbility at these events and continue to prioritize disability rights at every level.



Expanding Employment Services through Virtual Reality

At The Arc of Bristol County proAbility, we harness Virtual Reality (VR) to help individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) develop essential workplace skills. Since 2016, proAbility has provided employment supports in Rhode Island. In 2024, we expanded into Massachusetts to help even more people in Bristol County find jobs that include everyone.

With VR technology, people can safely practice real job tasks in a fun and realistic setting. They can try things like customer service or working in a factory—without the pressure of a real job.

This kind of training builds confidence and helps people feel ready to work. By using new technology, The Arc of Bristol County proAbility is opening doors to more



job opportunities and independence for people of all abilities.

We thank the John E. Fogarty Foundation and Bristol County Savings Bank for helping make this important work possible.





WINTER CH

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While initially planned for February, we were joined by c



We were delighted to see and engage with a diverse crowd of families, staff, board members, caregivers, and individuals supported by The Arc.



Each table included a handmade centerpiece filled with fidgets and sensory-friendly toys.



A big thank you to our two DJ teams! Jon, Kyle, and Rob kicked off the event with high-energy tunes, setting the perfect tone. Later, Nick and Ryan kept the dance floor alive with their incredible dance music!



CELEBRATION

25

over 200 attendees at our March 9th winter celebration.



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proAbility



2025
fun



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We enjoyed every minute of the Magic Mirror interactive photo booth from Westchester Party Rentals.



Thank you to our fantastic staff who organized and coordinated this year's event. These events always reenergize our mission and vision and continue to help create inclusive spaces within our communities.

We look forward to seeing more people at the upcoming Jon's Ride for Autism on Sunday, June 1st.

The Arc Partners with New Hope to Support Survivors with Disabilities

The Arc of Bristol County is proud to partner with New Hope, a domestic and sexual violence agency, on a federally funded project through the Office on Violence Against Women. This initiative is part of the Disability Grant Program, which works to improve how organizations support people with disabilities and Deaf individuals who experience sexual or domestic violence.

“Research shows that people with disabilities face a higher risk of being victimized, and many of these incidents go unreported. This collaboration will focus on educating staff, individuals, and families about the high rates of violence against people with disabilities, and on steps we can take to reduce those risks.

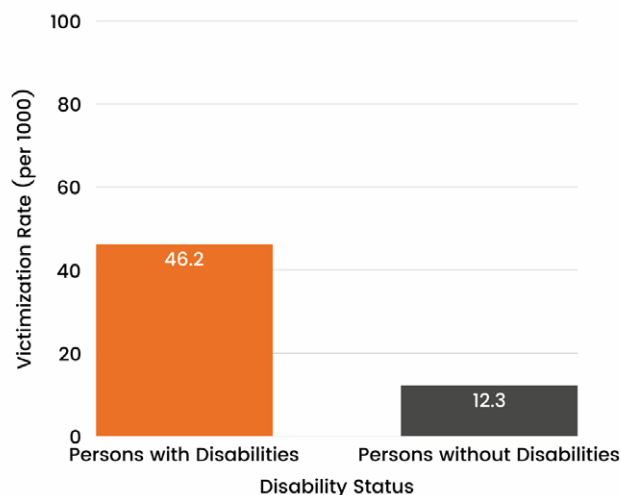
The Arc of Bristol County has welcomed Emily Lucas, MPA, as

Project Director to lead this important work. Emily brings valuable experience in victim services and an educational background in public administration.

We look forward to the positive impact this partnership will have in making our community safer and more informed.

This project is supported by Grant No. 15JOVW-23-GK-00738-DISA awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Violent Victimization Rates per 1,000 People (Age 12+), 2017–2019



Harrell, E. (2021). Crime against persons with disabilities, 2009–2019 – Statistical tables (NCJ 301367). U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://bjs.ojp.gov>

New Voices, New Energy: How Young Advocates Are Sparking a Self-Advocacy Revival

proAbility self-advocates began monthly meetings in late winter. These sessions were productive, with attendees deciding on the following topic each time. They have discussed human rights, elections, and the appropriateness of political discussions. The meetings emphasize that differing viewpoints and values are helpful and necessary.

The proAbility self-advocates include about twenty individuals, with around ten attending each meeting. Meetings are scheduled on alternating days to accommodate participants' varied schedules.

The revival of the self-advocacy group sparked a proposal for a spin-off focused on self-care, particularly relationships. This idea emerged from an individual seeking a romantic

partner and wishing to learn how to navigate that process. Currently named Self-Care Groups, they are organized by gender to encourage open discussion on hygiene, body image, and health issues specific to each gender.

The Self-Advocacy and Self-Care Groups are led by DSPs and driven by participants, with coordinators attending the meetings to offer support as needed. According to Sandy Nardillo, Assistant Director of Community Supports, the engagement and participation have been amazing, fueled by the participants' excitement and energy. If you or someone you know receives proAbility services and wants to attend, please contact your coordinator at proAbility.

How to be a Self-Advocate

- Speak up for yourself
- Make your own choices
- Tell people what you need
- Be involved in decisions about your life
- Make sure your voice is heard
- Know your rights and stand up for them
- Live the way you want



Embracing Neurodiversity: A Family's Story of Advocacy, Autism, and Community

The Arc's mission emphasizes creating opportunities for growth and innovation through its services. We are inspired to share how the Family Support Center family has evolved and embraced neurodiversity.

"Before Tress, I didn't know anyone with ASD," said Erica, Tress's mom. "Tress has opened our eyes to the world, and I wouldn't change a thing!"

The Arc's Family Support Center has supported Tress and his family since childhood. Tress is now a teenager with autism. His mother, Erica, shared how she recognized his challenges with emotional self-regulation and overstimulation as a child, often intervening before public meltdowns. Tress struggled, preferred to play alone, and ignored classmates who would say "Hi!" in public.

There were no therapies that helped Tress feel more comfortable in social settings. They would plan to include Tress in attending social gatherings, explaining that all outings would not be his type of fun. "We would leave early or change plans if he had a hard time. We adapted and would try again next time," Erica said.

With his family's support, Tress formed genuine social connections in the 5th grade when he became involved in the school band. His mom recalls all the activities the band participates in outside of school; Concert performances, movie nights, Bands-Giving, a trip to Disney in 2023, and Texas in 2025. Through these outings, Tress interacts with peers regularly and thrives in social settings.

"Band opened a whole new world for him. He has been in the band since 5th grade, but it all clicked for him socially in 9th grade when the band started playing at the football

games," Erica said. Tress performed at football games with the Concert Band, advanced to the Symphonic Band, and now participates in the Ensemble Band weekly after school. He spends quality time with his peers in band. "They watch out for him but treat him just like everyone else—even the football players!"

Kelly Ledoux, Director of Family Support, notes that Tress's engagement through social outings with The Arc has also increased over the last year. The Arc offers Respite Innovations Outings for caregivers of children aged 16-22 to address caregiver burnout by providing opportunities for children to attend various weekend activities. These activities, funded by the Massachusetts EOHS, include outings like sporting events and interactive museum tours.

Erica reports that Tress particularly enjoys Family Support Center outings that include meals at restaurants. In addition, Ledoux noted Tress's excitement at a Providence College Women's Basketball Game this past winter. The Arc was seated near the college band, and Tress was thrilled.



Erica and her family value the support from The Arc's Family Support Center. Agencies like The Arc, are "here to help, so reach out," Erica advises. She also reinforced strong guardian advocacy: "No one knows your child like you. Trust your instincts. You are your child's biggest advocate!"

In closing, Erica states that Tress's social growth, challenges, and experiences have positively impacted the family. "We realize that everyone, disabilities or not, is different and unique. We need to accept them for who they are."



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Greater New Bedford
a division of The Arc of Bristol County

Monday, September 22, 2025
11-12:15pm Registration & Box Lunch
12:30pm Shotgun
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Please call Janice at 1-888-343-3301 x3108 for more information. Sponsorship opportunities available.