

## CORE VALUES

- People First
- Democracy
- Visionary Leadership
- Diversity
- Integrity
- Excellence
- Community Participation



Fall 2009

The Arc of Nebraska

# FOCUS Newsletter

## President's Letter

In October I had the opportunity to present at The People First of Nebraska Conference in Kearney. First, I want to thank them for letting me be there, it was so much fun and so exciting. The subject of my presentation was, "The Disability Community Needs You: Be an Advocate". I had the privilege of conducting this presentation with Sherri Shaffer, a self-advocate from Grand Island. We discussed the importance of being involved with legislation that impacts the lives of people with disabilities. Specifically, we focused on LB 610, a bill proposed during the last legislative session that has been carried over to the next legislative session.

We need to get LB 610 passed this year. LB 610 would create an exception process for people with disabilities to exceed the caps on Medicaid services. It also would ensure that families that have children with severe disabilities would not have to pay a premium until they made more money. Some aspects of these changes were stopped because of Nebraska taking the federal stimulus funds, but this is only temporary. All of the cuts/premiums go into effect on January 1, 2011.

LB 610 was introduced last year by Senator Heath Mello from the Omaha/Bellevue area, but it never got out of committee. So the entire legislature never got a chance to vote on it. We can get it out of committee if we all work on it. The Nebraska Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities (NCCD) has decided that the passage of LB 610 is the priority for the 2010 session. However, legislators only listen to organizations so much...they need to hear from you! Call, Email, Telephone or Write to your Senator and tell them you support LB 610.

Recently, I heard it said that if we don't pay attention to community services that when it falls apart it will make the Beatrice situation seem like a walk in the park.

If you don't know who your Senator is you can go to: <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/> or you can call The Arc of Nebraska at 402-475-4407 and we can help. We need your help to make this successful!

## **Updates from the Executive Director**

A lot has been happening at The Arc in recent months. The biggest updates are listed below

- **Tickets on Sale Now: "Jazz and Jewels" Fundraiser!!!**  
The Arc of Nebraska will be hosting its premier "Jazz and Jewels" fundraiser on Thursday, December 10<sup>th</sup> at Zen's Lounge, 122 N. 11<sup>th</sup> Street, in Lincoln from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The event will include a silent auction of a variety of unique, one-of-a-kind jewelry with a few extras!!! Each ticket is \$30 and includes jazz entertainment by Darryl White, a variety of hors d'oeuvres, desserts, and a free drink. A cash bar will also be provided.

A limited number of tickets are available, so please consider purchasing them in advance! To request tickets, contact us at 402-475-4407 or [arcneb@inebraska.com](mailto:arcneb@inebraska.com).

- **Website**  
Slowly but surely we are progressing on developing the new website. We hope to launch it by the end of November, so keep checking back. The web address will be the same: [www.arc-nebraska.org](http://www.arc-nebraska.org). We hope it is a useful tool to all who visit. We are always willing to accept suggestions on how we can improve, so if you know of a great resource we should add, please let us know!

- **Activities**

### **Sibling Handbook**

We continue to work with Jill Meile on the Sibling Handbook. We have visited several local Arc chapters to present the information. We were glad to meet with local members and greatly welcomed their questions. The presentations have shown us that there is a great need for resources, such as this and that we all can learn from the experiences of others. We are grateful to all of those who invited us to present and to the Nebraska Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities for making the Handbook possible. Finally, we will be revising the Handbook one last time and having it re-printed, as we have nearly depleted our 2,500 supply. The Handbook will also be available electronically on our website.

### **Voting**

We conducted our first voting presentation at the People First Convention in October. Nearly 350 people attended the convention this year, so our presentation was well-attended! We also worked with the Buffalo County Election Commissioner to have a voting machine on-site. Participants were able to gain a hands-on experience of using the voting machine. The machine includes features, such as large print, a touch screen, a navigational key pad, and ear phones so that the ballot may be read aloud. Those who tried the machine seemed to enjoy their experience. We also registered three people to vote! It's great to have self-advocates become a part of the political process. Voting is a fundamental right that we all have!

If you would like a voting presentation in your community or if you would like to conduct a voter registration drive, please contact us! We'll also keep you posted of our upcoming voting events across the state.

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#### **Public Information Committee:**

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*By: Jodi Fenner, Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities*

As the new Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities, I am honored to contribute to your newsletter. While only in my position for a short while, I clearly understand the need for communication and cooperation among the various stakeholders interested in services to people with developmental disabilities in Nebraska.

We have a window of opportunity to assess and make significant improvements to our service system, and we have an obligation to those that we serve to make the most of this incredible opportunity.

To begin with, I want to share with you the Division's priorities. We **will**:

- Increase opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities to access the most integrated, least restrictive services and supports;
- Continue implementation of the settlement agreement with U.S. Department of Justice (which impacts both BSDC and community-based services);
- Expand and improve community-based services through enhanced education and oversight; and
- Develop and deliver quality services that address the needs of people with both a developmental disability and a behavioral health diagnosis.

The Division currently consists of the Beatrice State Developmental Center (BSDC) and community-based services. While approximately 185 individuals currently reside at BSDC, we now serve over 5,000 individuals in the community. The Division currently certifies 33 community-based DD providers with 73 certified programs statewide, and provides technical assistance, payment and oversight for community providers.

We have expanded community opportunities through ENCOR, Mosaic and Integrated Life Choices to provide homes for individuals who have enhanced medical needs. We have also started to address the needs of individuals with enhanced behavioral challenges by expanding our Team Behavioral Consultation supports via contracts with OMNI Behavioral Health (serving the Omaha/Lincoln areas) and Pediatric Psychology Associates (serving Kearney and the surrounding areas).

We are **now**:

- Focusing the Division's efforts on the recruitment and certification of new community providers;
- Expanding service options available to individuals through amendments to our Medicaid waivers that will allow for more vocational opportunities and for alternative retirement services to individuals who are elderly;
- Coordinating with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and other stakeholders to revive a Business Leadership Network to encourage businesses to hire persons with disabilities; and
- Expanding professional services available through telemedicine and the licensing of the BSDC medical/dental clinic to serve individuals in the community with developmental disabilities.

The Division is also in the process of reorganizing its administrative structure to ensure accountability and quality for its programs across the state.

We have a lot going on, and we want your input. We are starting a Division newsletter in December to better inform our stakeholders as we embark on these new adventures. Please contact Joyce Werner, our Systems Liaison, to be added to our distribution list (471-6541 or [joyce.werner@nebraska.gov](mailto:joyce.werner@nebraska.gov)). Please get involved, whether that is through participating in your local ARC chapter, or through contacting us directly.



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Nebraska State Council

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### **Chapter Development**

Since August, The Arc has made visits to eight local chapters across the state. Most of the visits were made possible through Sibling Handbook presentations and a chapter development grant from the Heuermann Foundation for the Hamilton/Merrick chapter. We were glad to meet with local members and look forward to many more visits. We expect that this will be occurring even more frequently as we travel across the state presenting information about voting rights. If you would like us to visit your chapter, please let us know. We'd be glad to offer a presentation and to listen to how we can best support your local community. Just let us know!

### **Legislative Advocacy**

As you may know, the Nebraska Legislature has been meeting in a special session to examine ways in which the \$334 million budget shortfall may be remedied. The Governor's budget proposal included across-the-board cuts, but recognized the need to preserve funding for people who receive developmental disabilities services. The Governor also recommended keeping the waiting list appropriation as is. The Legislature has looked at returning \$500,000 to the General Fund that may go unused toward funding the waiting list for this fiscal year. This cut would not affect the next fiscal year. While it may be true that the \$500,000 may not be needed this year, it presents a need to examine next year's appropriation with caution. We do not want this to set a precedent for the way in which services for Nebraskans with developmental disabilities are rationalized. The waiting list still exists and the money is still needed. We will be following this closely into the regular legislative session and will be sending out regular communications about proposed legislation and how it affects Nebraskans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Stay tuned!