



Informant

A Success Story: Partners in Policymaking

Inside This Issue

Success Stories.....1-2

Circles of Support.....2

A Life Saved.....3-4

Capability Chronicles.....4

Effective Advocacy.....5

Aktion Club.....5

Holiday Dance.....5

National Update.....6

Annual Award Recipients.....7

Calendar of Events.....8

Mission Statement

Providing education, advocacy and supports to children and adults with disabilities to foster empowerment and full inclusion in the community.

Board of Directors

- Corinne Hofmann.....President
- Becky Nygaard.....Vice President
- Shantell Meidinger.....Sec/Treas.
- John Glaser.....Director
- Teresa Larsen.....Director
- Jason Yeager.....Director
- Cindy Vollmer.....Past President

Message from Marisa Bengtson-Loerzel...

Language is powerful, I knew that! – I wondered why we needed to have a class about language in Partners in Policymaking. As a parent of a child who has a disability and as an employee of an organization that supports people with disabilities, I surely didn't need somebody telling ME how to talk about people. Well, I was wrong! I didn't realize how powerful language was until the People First Language training in Partners in Policymaking. And while I enjoyed every session and every presentation, the one about People First Language was the one that really made me stop and think and the one that I use every day of my life!



Marisa taking notes in a Partners in Policymaking session.

Before I even graduated from Partners in Policymaking, I decided to share the message of People First Language. It was too powerful and too important not to share! The first presentation I did was to a group of 40 employment support staff. I was nervous, sweating, shaking and thought it was never going to end BUT I knew I was doing something positive and helping to change perceptions. After the presentation, I received many compliments and many comments such as "I never thought about it like that" and "more people need to hear this." I also heard some personal stories of frustration about how people with disabilities are treated and talked about. With that, I knew I had done the right thing and decided to continue with my presentations! I have now done about 6 presentations with the most recent in front of 120 people!



Marisa giving a PowerPoint presentation about People First Language

Joyce has been there for me every step of the way; even though I graduated from the Partners class a couple of years ago. She has spent hours on the phone reviewing the presentation, coaching me and giving me helpful tips. She has been my biggest cheerleader and has made me even more motivated to spread the word!

I will be happy to do this presentation (or help you do the presentation yourself!) in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Please contact me at MBLoerzel@yahoo.com if you need my assistance.

A Success Story: Partners in Policymaking

Declaration from Dorothy Laybourn...

Dorothy Laybourn of Fargo is a 2009 graduate of the Partners in Policymaking Program. She applied to the class as both a parent of a child with a disability and a self-advocate. In reflection, Dorothy says that before she came to Partners it felt like she had "hit a wall". She lacked the confidence she needed to be involved in her community and felt she simply lived "inside of a box". During her time in the training program she found out what the community, state and country has to offer. The information she gained has been helpful not only for Dorothy and her family but others in her life that she has, in turn, been able to help. Dorothy says she learned new skills in Partners and while she practices them, she makes and keeps new connections. As Dorothy accepts new leadership roles, she is "taking off pieces of the wall" she had built around herself. She says her experience in Partners is helping her live "outside my box".



Circles of Support

Circles of Support have been in every society since the dawn of time. It is about how we take care of each other in families and communities. It is the 'structure' of our relationships. In Western societies, as wealth and mobility have increased, we are increasingly isolated from one another. We need to remember old wisdom, and learn new habits about how to take care of one another. Circles of Support is about this kind of life-long dynamic. Circles of Support is not a program. It is a way of living. It has an underlying philosophy of inter-dependence. Most of us are not good at admitting this truth, so we need a hand. Noticing who is in your life from time to time, and then being more intentional about trying to connect and reconnect with the people we need to be with to have healthy lives.

A Note from Joyce...

Over the years, many Partners in Policymaking participants have indicated in post-graduate surveys that using the Circles of Support tool led them to take life-changing action. After taking an honest look at their lives, they took deliberate steps to make or renew and keep connections.

The activity itself is easy to do...following the diagram right, draw four circles around yourself in the center. Starting with the outer-most circle, think about folks you do business with...people who are paid to be in your life...your doctor, mechanic, support staff or personal trainer. Indicate each person with an X on that circle. Proceeding to the next circle, think about folks you participate with in the community in volunteer, civic or faith-based groups, co-workers, folks you regularly see at your children's activities or at the gym. Then document your friends...those reciprocal relationships. These are the folks you remember with a birthday card or present, you share meaningful smiles and laughs, give each other encouragement, socialize with and are present at the important events in each other's lives. Lastly, complete the circle of intimacy...the folks you can't live without, those who you safely share your deepest secrets with and who you can call even in the middle of the night in an emergency and they would be there for you or you for them. Now take an honest look at this snapshot of your life. Decide if you like how your life looks today. If you do, you are fortunate and must feel blessed. But if not, think about what small step you can take today to make your inner circles grow. Who would you like to know better? Is there someone in your circle of participation that you would like to move into your circle of friendship? Why not call that neighbor you've been meaning to invite over for a cup of coffee? What are your hobbies? What community group could you join to meet people with similar interests? Date the paper. Repeat the activity in six months or a year to check on your progress after taking some deliberate steps to make changes. I hope the following article will inspire you to check on the people in your life and see how you're doing!

A Life Saved By Circles Of Support OR Pigs Don't Know Pigs Stink

By... *Emma Lewis Sullivan*



Emma finds a lot of reasons for celebration in her life today!

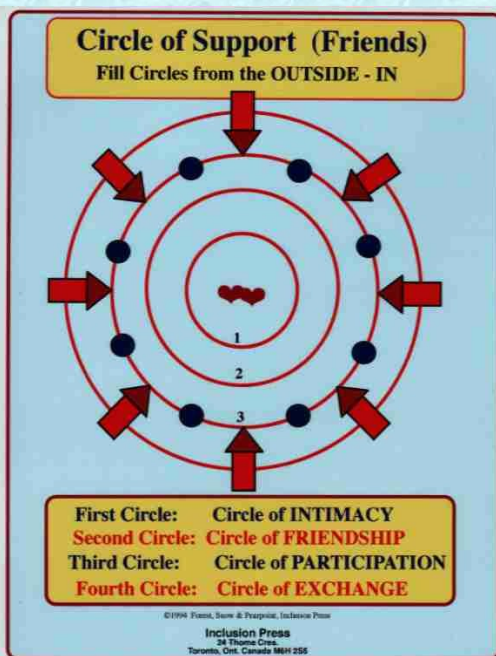
In the early 1990's I had the opportunity to attend my first Creative Facilitation course with Jack and Marsha. I didn't know them – had never heard of them prior to a month or so before the training. A co-worker of mine came into my office with a flyer saying that I just had to go with her to this training being held somewhere in Connecticut. Having never been to Connecticut and being willing to do just about anything once, I said sure... why not. I had absolutely no idea what was in store for me.

Picture it if you will. There I was, the good little social worker. I had managed to figure out that there was something wrong with social work. Not to offend any of you reading who wear the social work badge with pride – but I had found that doing it by the book didn't lead to people being very social; to society being better; to communities (or the people in them) working together or to unity or peace or growth or positive social change or any of the other 50 things that I thought it would lead to. In fact, doing social work the way I had been taught only led to paper work, deadlines, fitting people into their straight jacket labels and convincing them that they should be grateful for the space society had allowed them to occupy and teaching them to obey the rules. What I didn't realize was that, as I was pretending to throw lifelines to those in need, I was the one about to go under for the last time.

My eyes were opened when, as a part of the training, we were introduced to a little activity called Circles of Support. Dutifully I followed the instructions – I drew the circles on my piece of paper. In my mind I was wondering when we were going to get to the real stuff, the hard hitting training that I could really use. When were we going to be done with all this cute stuff? Sitting there, smug in my social work degree, in Connecticut, I listened to the instructions and I drew my circles. I sat in silence and began to think about my inner circle. I listened as Jack explained how and why his computer and Father Pat was in his inner circle. We were told to put down the people or things that were in our inner circle and I did. I had my children and one friend. So there I sat with three little marks on my inner circle. But

that was o.k. I told myself because I was strong and I was a survivor and I was very capable. We moved on to the second circle – I had two marks on that one. Then on to the third circle – the one for participation. Well, I thought, I'll make up for it here – only to realize that I was involved in several things for my children and nothing for myself. Then came the circle of exchange. It seemed so very odd to me that there were so many people involved in my life because they were paid to do so. Then I looked at the whole thing and I saw it. I was about to self-destruct. I was one crisis away from losing everything, including my life.

Six years prior to me sitting in that room staring at circles on paper, I had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and had not told anyone. Two years prior my husband had died. One year prior, I had adopted a child who came to me with labels. I had unwittingly yet successfully built a wall and a moat around myself. So much so that, sitting in that room, I finally felt and saw how alone I really was. I kept everyone at arms length and shared only my strength. I showed no vulnerability. Continue reading on the next page.



A Life Saved By Circles Of Support, Continued

I didn't allow anyone else to be strong for me or to give to me or to nourish me. There I was, a stinky pig. I had been smelling something all of my adult life. It just didn't smell right. Sometimes it smelled really bad. Sometimes I would run fast and far to get away, only to have it catch up and overtake me again. This time, I had caught a plane, flown from Indianapolis to Connecticut and come to a training, only to have that smell fill the room. All that way to realize that the smell, the stink in my life, was me. I sat there, listening to Marsha as she held up a set of circles that looked cold and barren – just like mine. She asked the group what we thought kindergartners and high school students said they would do if their life looked like mine. I heard her say, almost as if a whisper in my ear, that they said they would kill themselves. I then realized that I had whispered the same response.

While I was supposed to be teaching or helping others in crises learn coping skills and get their lives back on track, there I was, dying a little bit each day. I was supposed to be a social worker, but I wasn't very social and my life wasn't working. That day, I knew that my life stank. I say that Circles of Support saved my life because doing that little fluff exercise showed me what I would not have seen in any other way. I saw a life/a family on the brink of destruction. And it was mine. I made a vow that day to reach out to people, to be vulnerable with people, to let people into my life – into my heart and to share my life – not just live it.

Since then I have had a few crises as well as many opportunities to learn and grow. There have been disappointments and times when I have been afraid or unsure of which way to go. But through all of it, my circles of support have grown; my relationships have been deeper and more meaningful. My children and I have been supported by and have provided support to real friends. I have let my pleasure and my disappointment, my strength and my weaknesses, my joy and my sorrow all have their time in the sun.

Whatever you do, don't underestimate the power of the tools that we use and don't forget to use them on yourself. Don't ever get so caught up in how much you know and how much you help others to forget that you too are a part of the quilt that we are weaving. If you haven't done your own circles in a while, I encourage you to take out a piece of paper right now. Honestly evaluate yourself. How are you doing?

The Arc of Bismarck & Dakota Media Access Release New Program

The Arc of Bismarck in partnership with Dakota Media Access has produced a new program, Capability Chronicles. This series highlights the strengths and contributions of people with disabilities in our community, with the purpose of showing the unique value all individuals possess by featuring the achievements and successes of people who have a disability through media.

This disability awareness program has various half hour segments, which were filmed in the summer and fall of 2010. The Capability Chronicles is focused on featuring different subjects that are important to all and have thus far included: performing arts, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Designer Genes, volunteerism and disability etiquette. With the purpose of promoting community inclusion, The Arc of Bismarck and DMA along with self-advocates, family members and professionals are looking for interested people to get involved with the project. For more information on the Capability Chronicles or to learn how to get involved visit www.thearcofbismarck.org/ccpage. This program is now available to the public for viewing on Bismarck's Community Access Cable Channel 12 and online at www.freetv.org.



On the set of Capability Chronicles.

Effective Advocacy

North Dakota's 62nd Legislative Assembly will convene on January 4, 2011. That means its time to put on your advocacy hat. Remember that our state has a very open legislature and all citizens have the right to testify on any bill. While the chance to testify comes only during a committee hearing, there are many ways to make contact with your legislator including, mail, fax, email and phone. Regardless of the method there are some definite do's and don'ts when it comes to communicating with a legislator.

Tips for Successful Communication

- Address your Senator or Representative properly.
- Identify yourself immediately at each contact. Public officials meet too many people to remember everyone.
- Know the status of the legislation. Refer to a bill by number whenever possible.
- Use your own words.
- Be brief and explicit, courteous and reasonable.
- Establish your own credentials or expertise on the subject of legislation under consideration.
- Give legislators succinct, easy to read literature; highlight important facts and arguments. Their time is limited.
- Write the chair or members of a committee holding hearings on legislation in which you are interested if you have facts that you think should influence his or her thinking.
- Get to know legislative staff and treat them courteously. Their cooperation can make or break your chances to reach the legislators themselves.
- Write to say you approve, not just to criticize or oppose.
- In a letter include your address and sign your name legibly.
- Keep the door open for further discussion in spite of any apparently negative attitudes.

Individual communication is often the most effective way to influence your legislator. It is important to establish yourself with your legislator and express your opinions in a knowledgeable way. If you are interested in staying on top of disability-related issues in the upcoming session plan on attending Legislative Working Committee at 10 a.m. on most Saturdays during the session. Meetings are located at Myhre Elementary School, 919 South 12th Street, Bismarck.

Take Aktion in Our Community

A new group sponsored by Pride, Enable, Community Options, Support Systems and HIT, Inc has formed in our community, the Bismarck/Mandan Aktion Club, Friends in Aktion. Aktion Club is a Service Leadership Program that provides adults with disabilities opportunities to give back to their communities, build leadership and decision-making skills, and develop and use their talents. Ultimately, Aktion Club helps to improve the self-esteem of participants. People living with disabilities—more than anything—want to be treated like everyone else, and Aktion Club helps that to happen. Membership dues are free for the first year so call Carol at 667-8665 for more information or to join.

Meetings will be held at HIT, Inc from 7:00 - 8:00 p.m. on Dec. 13, 2010; Jan. 10, 2011; Feb. 14, 2011; March 14, 2011; April 11, 2011; May 9, 2011; June 13, 2011; July 11, 2011 and August 8, 2011.



The Arc of Bismarck Holiday Dance

December 18, 2010

1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Mandan Moose

111 11th Street NE

Music by Borderline

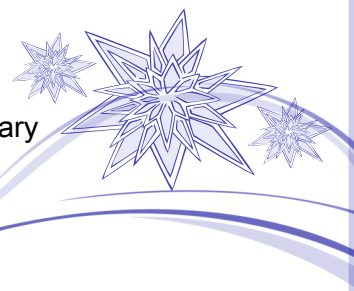
Sponsored by

The Arc of Bismarck

Mandan Moose

Mandan Eagles Auxiliary

American People



The Arc of US & Autism NOW Initiative

The Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD), within the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, recently awarded The Arc \$1.87 million to establish a national resource and information center on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other developmental disabilities.

The Arc, in collaboration with several key partners will implement an innovative and dynamic initiative, called *Autism NOW: The National Autism Resource and Information Center* to engage and leverage a national network of disability, aging, military, and family organizations to deliver information and resources relevant to individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities.

“The Arc and our partners are primed and ready to build a dynamic resource to address the needs of people with ASD and other developmental disabilities through this national network. We are proud to have the opportunity to launch Autism NOW, a much needed resource. It is especially significant that self-advocates will have a meaningful role in leading, implementing and realizing the goals of this innovative project,” said Peter V. Berns, CEO of The Arc.

Other partners include the Autistic Self Advocacy Network and Self Advocates Becoming Empowered to provide ex-

pertise from the self-advocate perspective. For research expertise in key areas across the lifespan in ASD and other developmental disabilities, The Arc has partnered with members of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities Network, the Institute for Community Inclusion from the University of Massachusetts, the Developmental Disabilities Institute from Wayne State University, and the Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies from the University of Maine. For deep policy expertise in areas of autism, family support, health care implementation, and aging, partners include Brandeis University’s Heller School of Public Policy and the National Council on Aging .

Sharon Lewis the Commissioner of ADD was excited to award this grant because people with ASD and other developmental disabilities face significant challenges in accessing the supports they need and this new center will serve to connect people with ASD and their families to services and activities that promote self-determination, independence, and inclusion in the community.

Ann Cameron Caldwell and Tonia Ferguson from The Arc will be leading this initiative and have laid out the plans for the four-year project. Resources are expected to be available at www.thearc.org in January of 2011.

Spotlight on National Convention

The Arc of US held its National Convention in Orlando, FL in early November. The kick-off event was the highlight of convention with Lauren Potter and Robin Trocki, actors from the hit TV show Glee. They were presented with the Inclusion and Image Award for their positive portrayals of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Emmy award-winning actor Jane Lynch offered congratulations via video as The Arc presented the awards to these two amazing women. The actors sat down for a question and answer session and discussed their experiences on the show and their hopes and dreams for increasing awareness and challenging stereotypes.

Another exciting part of convention was a keynote address by special guests Sharon Lewis, the Commissioner for the U.S. Administration on Developmental Disabilities; Melody Musgrove, the Director of the Office of Special Education Programs for the U.S. Department of Education and Kathy Greenlee, Assistant Secretary for the Administration on Aging. These three prominent members of federal departments who oversee a large portion of services for people with disabilities shared information on our government’s plans for the future and reassured us that they are very interested in listening to our concerns as we move forward with the implementation of new policy. Convention was very informative if you don’t want to miss out, mark your calendars for National Convention to be held in Denver, CO September 14-16, 2011.



Robin Trocki & Lauren Potter accepting their awards at national convention.

The Arc of Bismarck's Annual Celebration

The Arc of Bismarck held its 2010 Annual Meeting on October 19 at The Kelly Inn. The night focused on organizational achievements obtained over the past year and hinted at steps to be taken in the future. The Arc also recognized several members of our community who's actions reflect The Arc of Bismarck's vision of creating a united community where everyone belongs. Congratulations to the award recipients and thank you for the positive impact you have on people with disabilities in our community.

The Arc of Bismarck Recognized The Mandan Moose for Community Support

The Moose has been hosting The Arc's annual holiday dance for over 30 years; providing volunteers, entertainment, refreshments and presents for people with disabilities, their families and community members. The Arc is thankful for The Moose's continued community support of people with disabilities through the sponsorship of social events. The Moose was nominated by Anna Anderson of Mandan.

Shantell Meidinger Honored for Years of Service

Shantell Meidinger was recognized for her six years of service on The Arc of Bismarck's Board of Directors. She has truly shown commitment and dedication to serving individuals with disabilities by working towards achieving The Arc's vision of an inclusive community. Shantell has been an incremental part of The Arc showing dedication as an officer of the board and through participation on several committees. Shantell has given her time and heart to The Arc and we will always be grateful for her contributions.



Shantell Meidinger, The Arc of Bismarck's Sec./Treas. & Corinne Hofmann, The Arc of Bismarck's President

Bismarck Tribune Receives Employer of the Year Award

The Arc of Bismarck's Employer of the Year Award is given to a business which has exceptional records of providing inclusive competitive employment opportunities for people with disabilities. This year's winner is The Bismarck Tribune. The Tribune provides gainful employment opportunities to multiple individuals with disabilities in our community. The Tribune focuses on the strengths of each individual and makes adaptations as necessary. The Tribune continues to retain and generate integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The Bismarck Tribune was nominated by Darcy Severson of Pride, Inc.



Chad Kourajian, Tribune HR Manager & Brian Kroshus, Tribune Publisher

Tahna Stetson Named Professional of the Year

Tahna Stetson, a support coordinator with Support Systems was named The Arc of Bismarck's Professional of the Year. This award recognizes an individual employed in community services or supports for people with disabilities. Tahna has demonstrated sensitivity and the ability to provide outstanding support which has resulted in increased independence for people with disabilities. Tahna inspires the people around her with a positive attitude and hands-on work ethic. She truly makes a difference to those she supports as they pursue their dreams and accomplish their goals. Tahna was nominated by Julie & Don Wald of Support Systems.



Tahna Stetson,
Professional of the Year



P.O. Box 2081
 Bismarck, ND 58502-2081
 Phone/Fax: 701-222-1854
 ED/Editor: Veronica Zietz



Newsletter is available in alternative
 formats upon request!

Calendar of Events

- American People Membership Meeting—December 6 @ 7:00 pm
- Legislative Organizational Session—December 6, 7 & 8
- Legislative Working Group—December 11 @ 10 am
- American People Business Meeting—December 13 @ 7:00 pm
- Moose Holiday Dance—December 18 @ 1:00 pm
- Opening of the 62nd Legislative Assembly—January 4
- Partners in Policymaking—January 7 & 8

For more information on events visit our website at www.thearcofbismarck.org.

Membership Information

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

- Self-Advocate \$1
- Individual \$15
- Family \$25
- Patron \$50
- Business \$100
- Builder \$500
- Other (donation) \$____
- Renewal \$____

Members of The Arc are entitled to a 10% discount at The Arc Thrift Store!