IMPACT REPORT

The Arc
Texas

2020
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Human rights don't disappear during a pandemic.
The Arc of Texas

Founded in 1953 by a group of parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), The Arc of Texas has been instrumental in the creation of virtually every program, service, right, and benefit that is now available to more than half-a-million Texans with IDD. Today, The Arc of Texas continues to advocate for including people with IDD in all aspects of society.

Mission
The Arc of Texas promotes, protects, and advocates for the human rights and self-determination of Texans with IDD.

Vision
The Arc of Texas envisions a world where Texans with IDD are included in their communities, where quality supports and services are available to meet their needs and choices.

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IMPACT: 2020

Our Charge

Human rights shouldn’t disappear during a pandemic, but that’s exactly what Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) faced in 2020.

As the year progressed, Texans with IDD, their families, and direct support professionals had to contemplate serious questions:

Would students who receive special education services be left behind as schools closed and virtual instruction began?

Would Congress pass legislation that would support their choice to live safely within their communities instead of in an institution?

Would Texans with IDD receive the same level of lifesaving care as someone without a disability if they had to go to the hospital, or would their lives be perceived as less worthy?

How will Texans with disabilities exercise their right to vote during a pandemic?

Could those who lived in congregate-care settings, like state-supported living centers, avoid being infected by the rapidly spreading coronavirus?

How could Texans with IDD avoid negative, or even deadly, interactions with the criminal legal system?

What is IDD?

An intellectual disability occurs before age 18 and is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, such as social and practical everyday living skills. A developmental disability is a severe chronic disability attributable to mental or physical impairment or combination of mental and physical impairments that manifests before age 22. Examples of developmental disabilities include autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, and Down syndrome.
On March 19, 2020, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott announced that all schools in Texas would be closed through April 3, 2020, leaving open the possibility of virtual instruction.

Of top concern for our members and allies: Would Texas students who receive special education services be left behind as schools closed and virtual instruction began? Although we didn’t know what instruction would look like, we got to work making sure our community knew students’ rights.

If a local education agency continues to provide educational opportunities to the general student population during a school closure, the school must ensure that students with disabilities also have equal access to the same opportunities. Neither state nor federal law provide flexibility to schools in times of emergency regarding their obligation to provide free and appropriate public education to students receiving special education services.

The Arc of Texas shared this information on social media, which reached more than 4,000 people who were now equipped with the facts.
The Arc of Texas had planned the 27th Annual Inclusion Works! conference for an in-person gathering in Denton, Texas, but 2020 had different plans. For the first time in its history, the leading inclusive education conference in Texas was held virtually.

Session tracks addressed the current challenges educators faced during the pandemic.

Around 280 participants attended sessions covering virtual learning, valuing and supporting diversity, encouraging employment and postsecondary education, and proactive approaches and individualized interventions.
As the number of people infected with COVID-19 grew, Texans with disabilities began to wonder: Will I receive the same level of care as someone without a disability if I have to go to the hospital, or will my life be perceived as less worthy?

The Arc of Texas Takes Action

In early April, The Arc of Texas signed on to several letters to Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, the state Medicaid director, and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission executive commissioner requesting support for Texans with IDD in relation to the novel coronavirus, and asked Gov. Abbott to issue guidance to healthcare providers about their obligation under federal law to prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities if healthcare rationing is needed.

Speaking Out Leads to Success

In late July, The Arc of Texas joined Disability Rights Texas, ADAPT of TEXAS, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities, Texas Appleseed, Protect TX Fragile Kids, and five individuals in filing a healthcare discrimination complaint over COVID-19 treatment rationing guidelines for people with disabilities in North Central Texas.

In January 2021, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) announced the approval of revised crisis standard of care guidelines to ensure their compliance with federal disability rights laws, and that they cannot discriminate against people with disabilities and older adults, even when public health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitate rationing medical resources.
IMPACT: COMMUNITY

Cases of COVID-19 Surge in State-Supported Living Centers

By the end of March, it was clear that residents of congregate-care settings, including state-supported living centers and nursing homes, were at high risk of contracting the rapidly spreading coronavirus.

On March 30, The Arc of Texas CEO Jennifer Martínez was invited to appear on Capital Tonight, a news program produced by the Austin-area Spectrum News station. Martínez discussed the COVID-19 outbreak at the Denton State Supported Living Center, highlighting issues that Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families were facing.

Martínez explained that The Arc of Texas calls for high-quality care for all residents of state-supported living centers, as well as appropriate supports and services for all Texans with IDD, so they can live in their community rather than congregate-care settings that expose them to the risks of COVID-19.
George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Daniel Prude, and Rayshard Brooks—all Black Americans—were unarmed victims of law enforcement in 2020. Calls for systemic changes in the criminal legal system against racism and inequity boiled over in the summer, and put the spotlight on another alarming commonality among victims of law enforcement: many also had a disability.

“...There is no reliable national database tracking how many people with disabilities, or who are experiencing episodes of mental illness, are shot by police each year, but studies show that the numbers are substantial—likely between one-third and one-half of total police killings.”

TIME, June 25, 2020
Preparing for a Presidential Election in a Pandemic

A Voting Plan for All

The risk of contracting COVID-19 left many people with disabilities uneasy about voting in person in the 2020 Election. Although Texas has allowed mail-in voting for certain residents, including those with disabilities, the process can be confusing.

The Arc of Texas created a campaign to inform eligible voters about deadlines for registering to vote, requesting mail-in ballots, and their rights at the polls. Our plain-language, printable checklist made it easy for people to plan their vote, from ensuring they had the right identification information, transportation method, and even notes about the candidates.
Pandemic Relief Negotiations Stall

By late summer 2020, Texans with IDD and their families were left wondering: *Would Congress pass legislation that would support their choice to live safely within their communities instead of an institution?*

“The Arc of Texas Speaks Out

Private insurance typically doesn’t cover the specialized supports and services people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) need, which can include personal tasks like dressing and bathing, or skills coaching to live independently. Medicaid does.

In addition to calls for action for Texans to contact our senators, CEO Jennifer Martinez penned an opinion editorial for *The Houston Chronicle* calling on Sens. John Cornyn and Ted Cruz to support and pass legislation that would provide funding for the Medicaid home and community-based services that ensure these Texans can live in their communities.

Jennifer Martinez, CEO, *The Houston Chronicle*, September 11, 2020
We are problem-solvers creating solutions that improve the lives of all Texans with IDD.
The Master Pooled Trust, a pooled special needs trust managed by The Arc of Texas, was asked by the Blind Children’s Program to provide Future Planning 101, which outlines the basics of person-centered planning, transition, community, benefits, trusts, and guardianship.

CEO Jennifer Martinez serves on the Texas IDD Strategic Plan Workgroup, created to identify gaps in the behavioral health services system for Texans with IDD and the IDD system across the state.

Director of Public Policy & Advocacy Ginger Mayeaux was appointed chair of the STAR+PLUS Pilot Program Workgroup, which is tasked with developing a managed care pilot program and testing its capacity to serve Texans with IDD.

Deputy Director of Public Policy & Advocacy Ashley Ford serves on the Advisory Council on Post-secondary Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), which is studying and recommending improvements to promote accessibility of higher education for Texans with IDD. Ford also serves on the board of the Texas chapter of Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE).

Public Policy & Advocacy Manager Alex Cogan was appointed to the Texas Commission on Jail Standards Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Task Force created to complete a comprehensive study on best practice standards for the detention of those with IDD.
We still have work to do. Let's do it together.

Throughout an unprecedented year, our commitment to promoting, protecting, and advocating for the human rights and self-determination of Texans with IDD never wavered.

Support The Arc of Texas as we respond to and take action on emerging issues. Join us in working toward a future that is more inclusive; where everyone with intellectual and developmental disabilities can be part of their communities and make decisions about their own lives.
Trusted experts with achievable solutions to enhance the lives of Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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