***Direct Support Professionals National Recognition Week***

***Message from the Executive Team***

Dear Direct Support Professional,

As we near our 50th year of service to our communities, I reflect on our past. We began with just one program - our preschool that is still in operation today.

Much of our early years were focused on advocacy efforts to ensure every child, adolescent and adult had equal opportunity and access to all of the resources that our community had to offer. We made great strides and the fact that we are celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act is a testament to the work of The Arc’s across the nation.

30 years ago, President George H.W. Bush [signed the Americans with Disabilities Act](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gsGiszvyjQ&feature=youtu.be) (ADA) into law. The ADA has transformed American society and enabled a generation of Americans with disabilities to thrive and to enjoy the same opportunities and access that those without disabilities enjoy. At the same time, we recognize that many barriers to equal opportunity still remain.

Certainly, the pandemic has made us acutely aware of the areas the opportunity and access that continue to be a challenge for those with disabilities. Our advocacy efforts have shifted to ensure all individuals with disabilities continue to have access to the services and supports that are vital to their health, safety and welfare. Legislation has already been drawn to address the need for individuals with disability to have access to their support staff/ family while in the hospital or in a residential facility. In addition educational support for those who cannot access or use virtual platforms for learning and recreational/ social opportunities for those with a disability are important advocacy topics.

One of the most pressing advocacy matters is the need to ensure that our most vital asset, our workforce, is treated and compensated in an appropriate manner. Without a strong, reliable and consistent team of Direct Support Professionals and other team members, our progress towards a fully inclusive community for those with disabilities will be difficult to achieve. As such we work with advocacy leaders such as The Arc of NJ and the Coalition for a DSP Living Wage to help present a united voice for all of our advocacy efforts.

During this historic anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, we recommit to our work of making the promise of the ADA a reality, enabling all Americans with disabilities to achieve their dreams and reach their full potential.

Please see the websites below to learn more about the advocacy efforts in NJ:

The Arc of NJ 🡪 [www.arcnj.org](http://www.arcnj.org)

The Coalition for a DSP living wage🡪 [www.njdspcoalition.org](http://www.njdspcoalition.org)

Please join us in our continued efforts towards advocacy for and with our citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities! Feel free to contact me directly for more information.

Be safe, Be well and stay strong!

**Lauren Frary Christopher Corvino**

Executive Director Associate Executive Director