

# The Arc of Warren County Fall 2023 Newsletter



## Letter from the CEO of The Arc of Warren County, John Whitehead

A busy summer is winding down at The Arc of Warren County and a very busy fall season is underway. Throughout the agency big changes are coming that will help us to improve and enhance the services that we provide.

Camp Warren completed another successful camp season that provided great memories for all who attended. The camp has had extensive renovations over the past few years and is looking great. We have more upgrades planned for next year and welcome everyone to come out and take a look!

After purchasing the site of our former “respite” group home, we are near completion of the future Jonestown Road Group Home. We have taken great measures to ensure that this house will be a welcoming and safe home for the new residents. This home has been designed to accommodate all the needs of the new residents in a beautiful setting. It has dual HVAC systems and a whole house generator, a large rear deck with a ramp for accessibility, and a completely new interior (new kitchen, baths, walls, flooring...

you name it, it’s new). We anticipate opening this site soon.

Simultaneously, we are in the process of renovating a leased space that will be the new site of our Washington Day Programs. This will be located at the junction of Route 31 and Asbury-Anderson Road in Washington Township. At 4,000 square feet, this site is double the size of our current day program space. We will go from two small rooms to seven separate dedicated spaces including a horticulture area; a “living room” area with couches and recliners for when someone needs a rest (and will be the home of our fish tank(s)); a craft area with several tables, a large area for stationary bikes, a piano, and music therapy; a large kitchen; a lunch room; a sensory room; and a woodshop/tool storage area. This will make it possible to serve more individuals for day services as well as offer a large enough site for our Recreation department to hold dances, social club, and other activities. It is our hope that this new site will be opening in the fall.

We are very excited for the growth that we are experiencing because it



CEO of The Arc of Warren County  
John Whitehead

gives us the opportunity to do more for those in Warren County who enjoy and rely on our services. I regularly interact with my coworkers in all departments – Office Administration, Early Intervention, Community Based Supports, Recreation, Community Living Arrangements, Day Services, Development and Communications – and I see how they continue to go above and beyond to help us to achieve our Mission. It’s great to be part of an organization that is thriving in the present with an eye on the future!

## *Note from the Chief Development and Communications Officer, Annamaria Lalevee*

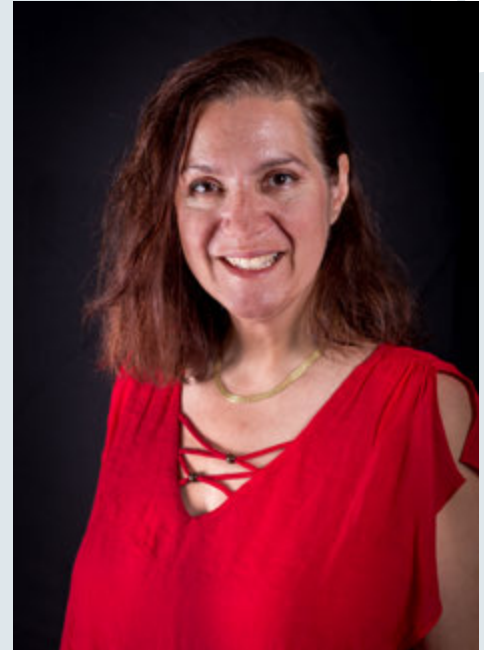
It is with gratitude that I write to you today. Thank you to all of you who support The Arc of Warren County whether you have done so once or continue to do so on a regular basis.

As our 70th anniversary is right around the corner, it is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the many accomplishments that the organization has achieved. We continue to serve 1,100 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. We have come a long way since we opened our first group home back in 1982. We now have 17 residential programs throughout the county and have one that is currently undergoing a complete transformation. The Arc of Warren County is one of the few Arc Chapters that has an Early Intervention program. Our summer camp program at Camp Warren in Knowlton

Township continues to provide wonderful opportunities for individuals to participate in fun activities at a beautiful venue and provides respite for parents. Our community-based supports program provides individuals with support to be able to thrive independently. Our Day Programs are growing, and our office space will be expanding as a result as our CEO, John Whithead, highlighted in his letter.

Some funds raised this year have made projects possible such as major renovations to Camp Warren, camperships and some renovations to our Jonestown Group Home.

Consider joining us for a future event and please consider attending or securing a sponsorship at our Community Excellence Awards at Bello Giorno Estates on November 16, 2023.



Chief Development and Communications Officer, Annamaria Lalevee

## *Meet RaeAnn Rowlin*



Development and Communications Associate, RaeAnn Rowlin

RaeAnn Rowlin has joined our growing organization in a new role: Development and Communications Associate for The Arc of Warren County. Rowlin brings a diverse background in digital marketing, communication, and creative design experience to the organization.

As a Warren County native, Rowlin was excited at the opportunity to play a role in improving the lives of individuals with disabilities in her community. Her passion for writing and creative design have proven useful in her efforts to increase inclusion and

accessibility through her work.

"I have always believed in the importance of supporting those around me to achieve and succeed in any environment," says RaeAnn. "I am deeply honored by the opportunity to help further the mission of such a vital and compassionate organization. The supportive, energetic, and focused culture I have found here is unmatched, and I look forward to helping ensure the continued success of The Arc and its people."

Her favorite part of the job so far?

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## Cont. Meet RaeAnn Rowlin

Collaborating with consumers to create social media content that empowers the individual to use their creativity and voice online. This exciting new initiative with members of The Arc of Warren County's Self-Advocacy Group is just one of the many rewarding aspects of Rowlin's experience thus far. Tied for number one on her lengthy list of favorites is helping fundraise, organize, and advertise for upcoming events.

As the Development and Communications Associate, RaeAnn Rowlin works directly with Chief Development and Communications Officer, Annamaria Lalevee, to support The Arc of Warren County's marketing,

fundraising, and public relations efforts. Additionally, Rowlin oversees the digital media strategy and enjoys using her creativity to promote awareness of The Agency.

Prior to finding her home at The Arc, Rowlin served as Creative Director for 107 Productions Entertainment Agency and honed her digital marketing skills at QuaverEd, Inc., an EdTech company based in Nashville, Tennessee.

She attended Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, where she studied Communications Studies and Commercial Music with a focus in Trumpet Performance. As a professional musician, Rowlin has

resided in several major cities along the east coast performing and working in the music industry, including Charlotte, Richmond, and Nashville.

Since returning to Warren County, Rowlin has enjoyed the opportunity to give back to her community. When she is not spending time with family and friends or performing in comedy groups throughout the Lehigh Valley, she can be found adventuring with her pup, Marco.

## The John G. Takacs Memorial Board Room



John G. Takacs former Board of Directors member

John G. Takacs, parent, former Board of Directors member, and donor, was honored this summer at a dedication ceremony for The Arc of Warren County's Board Room in his memory.

In attendance were current and former Board members, staff and his executrix Nanette Eberwein and her husband Michael, as well as personal friends of Mr. Takacs and current and former board members. Remarks were made by The Arc of Warren County Board members, Leslie Schott, Kerry Wolf, Karen Woodcock and the CEO, John Whitehead. Other attendees shared stories about John's commitment and how he inspired them.

John G. Takacs' son used The Arc of Warren County services and John's

involvement with the organization spanned many decades. John passed away in 2021. He made a significant bequest to The Arc Foundation.

After interviewing many individuals who knew and worked with John, it was decided that the Board Room would feature a plaque that would describe the essence of John's being - Compassionate. Dedicated. Charitable.



## *The Michael DiBiase Gazebo Dedication*

Michael DiBiase was a longtime resident of the Alpha group home who passed away in 2022. His family members wanted to honor his memory by donating a bench to Camp Warren and donated the cost of a gazebo and landscaping at the home where he lived at in Alpha.

When Michael's family came to visit from California, staff and residents greeted them and held an event in Michael's memory. Many people shared stories about their memories of Michael. It was a wonderful way to honor him and gave people the opportunity to share stories about how Michael inspired them!

### **Save the Date(s)**

It is a pleasure to announce that The 34th Annual Arc of Warren County Radiothon with WRNJ Radio is scheduled for

**April 25, 2024**

Thank you so much to Norman Worth and Larry Tighe for making this event possible and for all your support throughout the years.

**Food Truck Fest:  
June 1, 2024**

**Triathlon:  
July 13, 2024**

We are also pleased to announce that the Hackettstown High School Mini-Carnival for The Arc of Warren County is back! It is scheduled for  
**February 25, 2024**



## Employee Highlight – Meet Reni Piperata, LPN.

Sometimes an opportunity presents itself and at that time you don't think it is the ideal opportunity for you, but you try it anyway. It is possible that you can be pleasantly surprised and find your calling in the process. This is the case with Reni Piperata who is a Licensed Practical Nurse for The Arc of Warren County.

Reni was no stranger to hard work at a young age. At 15 years old, he washed dishes in a restaurant. This was the start of many years working in the hospitality industry. He disliked this job and worked one week before quitting. He stayed without a part-time job for a bit until his grandmother urged him to find a new position. His dad told him about a job at Harker's Hollow Golf Club and he started there as a dishwasher again. This time though he was quickly working in other capacities, such as preparing food and slicing meat. He then became a short order cook. He was pleased when they offered him a position outside of the kitchen, bussing and waiting tables and then ultimately bartending. He liked serving as a bartender. It was a fun, fast paced position with a lot of networking opportunities.

He decided, however, to pursue his degree in Speech Communication at Northern Kentucky University and left New Jersey for a while. During his time in Kentucky, he worked at The Hilton in Cincinnati and at a country club in Fort Mitchell, Kentucky. He decided to come back to New Jersey eventually and worked at Harker's Hollow Golf Club once again. He then worked in the finance industry for one year as a mortgage salesman. In 2008, the economy took a downward turn, and nobody was doing loans. He worked



Reni Piperata, LPN

on commission and needed a steady paycheck.

His friend, who was a longtime employee of The Arc of Warren County, suggested that he fill out an application for a Direct Support Professional position.

"It wasn't the career path that I considered before this," says Reni. "I decided I would accept the position and just plan to stay a year."

Reni quickly became promoted to a Manager and held other positions, such as part-time Crisis Management Trainer and taught other safety trainings upon request.

"It was fulfilling work, but after 10 years I felt that I wanted an opportunity to secure a higher salary," says Reni. After being with a resident who passed away during her final moments, Reni felt a calling to become a hospice nurse.

He enrolled in the Warren Tech Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) Program, which was operated out of Warren County Community College's Phillipsburg location. It was a program that took him eleven months

to complete. After he completed his LPN, however, he felt that working in a hospital or senior living facility did not appeal to him. He really wanted to stay with The Arc of Warren County and was pleased when the position of a Licensed Practical Nurse opened.

He has held this position for three and a half years and assists in nursing care for approximately 70 residents. Reni likes the diversity of his current position as every day is very different. Staff education is a significant part of his responsibilities. For example, he teaches staff how to take blood glucose, monitor blood pressure and vital signs and he provides various safety education classes for them.

When asked which staff members have inspired him through the years, he credits Kim Southard, Nursing Supervisor, for teaching him so much about the profession and Robyn Gardella, Assistant Director of Recreation, for her professional insight and her staunch commitment to the organization.

The Arc of Warren County community is fortunate to have Reni on our team. Thank you, Reni, for everything that you do!



## *The Arc of Warren County and The Arc Foundation Welcome Three Board Members*

The Arc of Warren County and The Arc Foundation, Warren County Chapter welcome three new Board members – three individuals to the Board of Directors and one to The Arc Foundation Board.

Thank you for your commitment to the betterment of this organization. They are as follows:

- Erik Schneider, Owner and Manager of Newbaker Funeral Home – The Arc Foundation Board and The Arc of Warren County Board of Directors

- Victor “Bud” Allen, retired Sales and Marketing Consultant and Sales Administration Manager– The Arc of Warren County Board of Directors

- Dr. John Fritz, Doctor of Osteopathy – The Arc of Warren County Board of Directors

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## *Community Excellence Awards*

Last year The Arc of Warren County honored several community members for their outstanding service to our organization during our inaugural Community Excellence Awards. This event was a resounding success with over ninety attendees. This year, our second annual Community Excellence Awards will honor six individuals for their commitment to and support for The Arc of Warren County and the individuals whom we serve.

The Community Excellence Awards will be held at 6 p.m. on Thursday, November 16, 2023 at Bello Giorno Estate in Belvidere, New Jersey. Awardees were nominated by staff, residents, and members of The Arc of Warren County for advancing the mission of The Agency and for their work with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities across a variety of supports and services.

The Community Excellence Awards will include three new categories including The Circle of Joy Award, The Embracing Family Award, and The Trailblazer Award. We are pleased to honor and recognize the following

individuals for their outstanding dedication and support.

Julianna Altonjy of Unity Music Therapy, LLC. will receive The Circle of Joy Award, in recognition of her musical and therapeutic contributions to The Arc of Warren County. Altonjy has worked with The Arc of Warren County for four years and conducts weekly music therapy sessions for our Day Programs and at Camp Warren during the summer.

Michele and Roy Levisay will be the recipients of The Embracing Family Award, a new category this year. For over two decades, Roy and his family have welcomed resident Joe Kaplan into their family with open arms, sharing meals, providing family support, and spending holidays together. The Levisay family has not only met, but exceeded, the definition of “family by choice.”

Rachel Senger of Harmony School District has been selected for The Educator of the Year Award in recognition for her work as a special education teacher for sixth through

eighth grades. Senger holds various leadership positions within the school district and community, including President of the Harmony Township Education Association.

Jim Travis of Otterstedt Insurance Agency has been nominated for The Community Partner Award. Travis has demonstrated a tireless commitment to The Arc of Warren County for over 30 years. Travis has served as co-chair for the annual The Arc of Warren County Radiothon with WRNJ for five years and has been a valuable member of The Arc of Warren County Board of Directors and Compliance Committee.

Bill Whitney of William A. Whitney Plumbing and Heating has been nominated for The Distinguished Service Provider Award in recognition of his service to The Arc of Warren County. Whitney has been essential in providing quality maintenance for our facilities, while ensuring the health and welfare of our consumers.

Carolyn “Kerry” Wolf has been nominated for The Trailblazer Award, a

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## Cont. Community Excellence Awards

new category this year. This award was created to recognize Wolf's lifetime of outstanding support, dedication, advocacy, and impact to improving the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our community.

"We are so pleased to honor these individuals in this manner," says

Annamaria Lalevee, Chief Development and Communications Officer for The Arc of Warren County. "They have all made a significant impact to The Arc of Warren County and our community, in general, so we feel it is important to recognize them for their commitment."

Members of the community are invited

to attend this event and sponsorship opportunities are available. Cost is \$50 per person. Those who are interested in attending can email [alalevee@arcwarren.org](mailto:alalevee@arcwarren.org) or call (908) 223-0884 or register online at [arcwarren.org](http://arcwarren.org)

## Autism Advocate Dr. Kerry Magro on Anti-Bullying

Autism advocate and internationally renowned speaker Dr. Kerry Magro presented "I Used to Be Bullied for Having Autism: Here's When It Stopped," at Warren Hills Regional High School in May. Dr. Magro's talk offered a first-hand account of a young man who was bullied as he was growing up on the autism spectrum. He shared the difficulties of having autism and not being able to express and defend himself. Dr. Magro discussed the causes and effects of bullying on our community and in our schools, including a powerful story of a young woman with autism and the struggles she faced while reconciling with her self-worth in the aftermath of bullying. He also touched on behaviors that are considered bullying, including cyberbullying, and the damaging effects it can have on students. Dr. Magro detailed a seven-step plan to take a stand against bullying that self-advocates, families, and professionals can adopt.

Dr. Kerry Magro Ed.D. is an award-winning autistic professional

speaker, bestselling author, and autism consultant to the HBO series "Mrs. Fletcher" that aired in Fall 2019 and the latest season of Netflix's Emmy Award-winning series "Love on the Spectrum." He started professionally speaking in 2011 via the National Speakers Association after he fell in love with theater as a child to help with his social and communication skills. Today, he has spoken at over 1,200 events, including two TEDxTalks and a "Talks at Google" presentation.

We are fortunate to have the opportunity to bring thought leaders like Dr. Magro to our community. Dr. Kerry Magro's presentation was made possible through a collaboration with event sponsors Greenwich Autism Alliance Foundation, The Arc of Warren County, Abilities of Northwest Jersey, Inc., and Warren Hills Regional High School. Greenwich Autism Alliance Foundation funded this project.



Renowned speaker Dr. Kerry Magro

## *Embracing Diversity: The Story of Disability Pride Month*

Disability Pride Month is celebrated each year in July and is an opportunity to recognize the achievements, struggles, and contributions of people with disabilities. Historically, society has marginalized and stigmatized people with disabilities leading to unequal treatment, limited accessibility, and systemic discrimination. Over the last seven decades, The Arc has played a significant role in supporting movement aimed to challenge these norms and advocate for equal rights and opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

As a grassroots organization, The Arc of Warren County has played a vital role in advocating for disability rights on a local, state, and federal level. The passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on July 26, 1990, was a pivotal moment in the disability

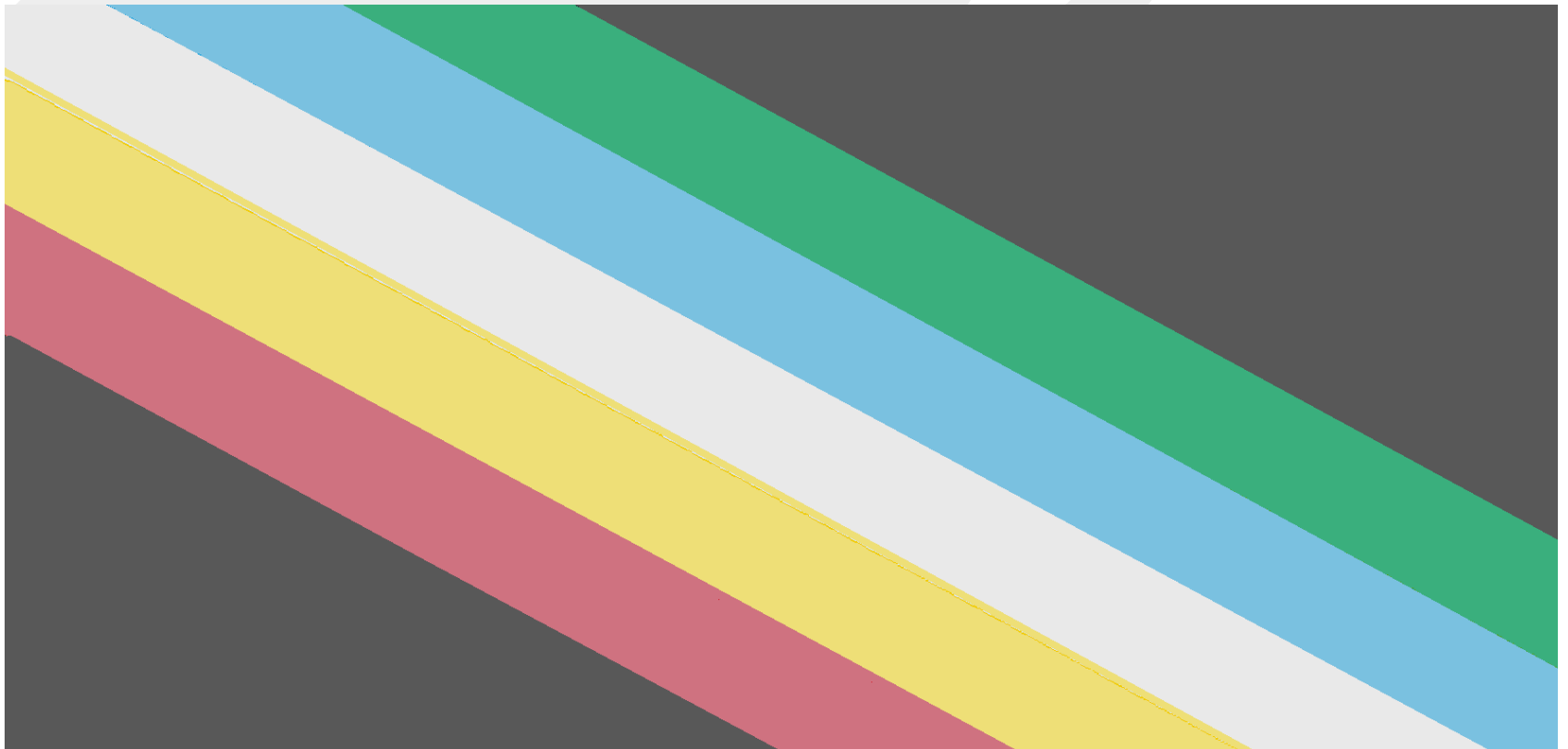
rights movement. The ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in various aspects of life, including employment, transportation, and public services. Since then, the disability rights movement has grown to include international awareness and events throughout the year, including Disability Pride Month in July.

In 2023, Disability Pride Month was officially recognized by New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy as a state-recognized month of awareness. During the month of July, the Agency recognizes the remarkable accomplishments of individuals who have triumphed over obstacles and shattered stereotypes. By celebrating these achievements, Disability Pride Month encourages a shift in societal perceptions, emphasizing ability over limitation.

This July, we celebrated Disability Pride Month and used the power of social media to increase awareness about the importance of accessibility and inclusivity. From advocating for accessible infrastructure to fostering respectful language and attitudes, we hope to continue to break down the barriers that hinder the full participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of life.

As part of our celebration, we asked people about what Disability Pride means to them. In an interview with long-time resident and advocate with The Arc of Warren County, Jill Young, she shared what she is proud of and what disability pride means to her. Jill believes disability pride comes from “people helping others, like having good health care, good staffing in the group homes, family inclusion, and support.”

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## *Cont. Embracing Diversity: The Story of Disability Pride Month*

As a fun, outgoing, crafty, and tech-savvy person, time spent with her friends and family means everything to Jill. She is very proud to have maintained several meaningful, life-long friendships. When Jill isn't trying a new craft, watching TV classics, or Facetiming long-distance family, she can be found hanging with friends or busting a move on the dance floor at a Social Club dance!

If Jill had a superpower, it would be her resilience. "I'm a trooper," Jill says. "I've been through a lot, but I like who I am."

Disability Pride Month celebrates the strength, resiliency, and achievements of people with disabilities. It commemorates their journey of

advocating for equal rights and inclusivity, while inspiring individuals to change perceptions and create a more inclusive world. At The Arc of Warren County, embracing diversity enriches our communities and paves the way for a brighter, more equitable future.

This future would not be possible without the support of our community. By acknowledging the barriers to a fully inclusive society, we are able to continue making impactful strides in improving the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Warren County and beyond. To learn more about how you can advocate for disability rights and support our mission, visit [www.arcwarren.org](http://www.arcwarren.org)



Long-time resident Jill Young

## *Julie Pruznick Completes 41 Years of Service at The Arc of Warren County*

Julie Pruznick, The Arc of Warren County's former Chief Compliance Officer, was celebrated for her 41 years of service at Bello Giorno Estate recently. Julie had been an employee of The Arc since 1982 and served in many different capacities starting at the first group home in Asbury. She also served as Co-Director of Community Living Arrangements and Director of Human Resources.

"Julie has been an integral part of The Arc of Warren County community and will be greatly missed," says John Whitehead. "We are so thankful for her many years of service to the organization. She has been an asset

and we wish her well in her retirement."

Speakers that evening included John Whitehead; Dr. Nancy Wilson-Soga, Board of Directors President; Greg Beben, Chief Operating Officer; Ruth Cobb, Board of Directors member; Kerry Wolf, past Board of Directors member; and Bonnie Hill, Administrator/PF&E.

We all wish Julie well in her retirement!



John Whitehead and Julie Pruznick (Former Chief Compliance Officer)

## *The Arc of Warren County Member Highlight: Meet Virgienne Spann*

Virgienne “Jean” Spann has been an active member of The Arc of Warren County for many years. Her involvement with The Arc started when her daughter Elizabeth was three or four years old. She lived in Hunterdon County at the time, and someone told her about The Hunterdon Arc in Flemington. It was there where Elizabeth learned to become potty trained, which was huge because being potty trained was the criteria for being admitted to public school.

“Having the important support system of an Arc Chapter is so beneficial,” says Jean.

When the Spanns moved to Somerset County, they became involved with The Arc of Somerset County. When they moved to Warren County, they received services from our Agency. Her daughter Elizabeth has been a resident at The Arc of Warren County for many years, living at the Agency’s home in Belvidere. Recently Elizabeth became a resident of The Arc of Warren County home in Alpha.

“Her new residence in Alpha is a delightful setting,” says Jean. “She loves it.”

Elizabeth also participates in Camp Warren’s summer camp. One of the activities that she particularly enjoys is spending time using the pool as she is an avid swimmer.

As for Jean, her experience with being an Arc of Warren County member has been very fulfilling for her throughout the years. Some of her involvement

has included spearheading fundraisers and attending informational events.

“In the past, it was a way to connect with other parents and was a great social outlet,” says Jean. “We would even meet monthly. I believe the more that people get involved, the more that they will get out of it.”

Current members received a survey to assess the types of events and activities that they are interested in participating in. Some upcoming events include an ice cream social and informational meeting. If you are a member and would like to receive another copy of the survey, please reach out to [rowlin@arcwarren.org](mailto:rowlin@arcwarren.org). If you are interested in becoming a member, please visit [arcwarren.org](http://arcwarren.org) or call 908) 223-0884.



Active member of The Arc Warren County  
Virgienne “Jean” Spann

### ***Become a Member of The Arc of Warren County!***

Please consider becoming  
a member of The Arc of  
Warren County.

**Benefits include invitations  
to informational and  
social events, a discount  
to Serendipity, The Arc of  
Warren County Gift Shop  
and more!**

  
**The Arc.**  
*of Warren County*



## *The Arc of Warren County Community Loses A Valued Member from Our Day Program*

The Arc of Warren County community is saddened to lose a member of our Day Programs – Cori Gruter-Curham. Cori had been a member of our Washington Day Program for eight years. She came to The Arc of Warren County after a long hospitalization, her family wanting a smaller, more individualized day program than other agencies could offer. She immediately fit right in with other participants. She thrived in her new program and seemed to enjoy the vast array of activities offered to her. Her favorites were making greeting cards to send to family and friends, and participating in music therapy on Tuesdays.

In the words of Jennifer Beetar-Speth, Director of Day and Community Based Services, “Cori was a true joy to have in program. She had a smile that could light up a room, a truly infectious laugh, and a wicked sense of humor. She had a limited vocabulary, but you knew when you were the punchline of one of her jokes. I can safely speak for everyone here by saying she will be very missed. Washington Day Program is short one amazing ray of yellow sunshine.”

Thank you to the Gruter-Curham family for asking family and friends to consider donating to The Arc Foundation.





## Camp Warren

Camp Warren celebrated this summer with five fun-filled weeks of art, music, swimming, and more! Nestled in the rural foothills of Knowlton Township, adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities enjoyed three weeks of camp. The second half of Camp Warren was for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We got an inside look at Camp Warren during the children's camp.

Campers and camp counselors wasted no time enjoying all that summer camp has to offer. Enjoy some photos from Camp Warren 2023!

