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The Boston Globe

New name, same mission for North Shore Arc organization

By Wendy Killeen

Globe Correspondent / November 5, 2009

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When the Association for Retarded Children was formed in 1955 by a group of parents seeking services for their children with developmental disabilities, it served 19 communities north of Boston.

Today, North Shore Arc, as it later became known, has expanded its programs and geographic reach to 187 communities throughout Massachusetts.

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To reflect that expansion, the Danvers-based nonprofit agency has changed its name to Northeast Arc and created a new logo.

“We have grown a lot in the last five or six years,” said Jerry McCarthy, the organization’s executive director for 30 years. “Our territory where we have services has expanded greatly. And our mission has broadened.”

McCarthy said Northeast Arc’s previous service area was Lynnfield to Cape Ann. Now, he said, it stretches west to Rutland and Gardner in Central Massachusetts and south to Taunton.

“It happened because we have unique services that a lot of agencies don’t provide,” he said, with the list including residential, day, family support, personal assistance, early intervention, and autism programs.

“We used to work only with people with mental retardation,” McCarthy said. “Now, we have programs and services for a wide variety of disabilities including physical disabilities, people who are deaf, people with autism, and a lot of medical conditions.”

Northeast Arc serves more than 12,000 families a year. McCarthy said services begin at birth with the early intervention program, and there is a 91-year-old resident in one of the homes. “It’s from cradle to grave,” he said.

Much of the organization’s growth has been in the area of autism. In addition to its programs for people along the autism spectrum, including pervasive developmental disorder and Asperger’s disorder, its Autism Support Center provides information and resources for parents and professionals.

Topsfield resident George Carey, whose 18-year-old son has Asperger’s, said Northeast Arc “is a blessing.”

When his son was about 3 or 4, Carey said, he and his wife noticed something wasn’t right.

“As is common with kids with Asperger’s, they have intelligence, but it’s personal and interactive skills they have to work on,” he said. “They just don’t make connections.”

But they weren’t sure what to do next, Carey said: “Like most parents back then, we were going by trial and error.”

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The Careys were referred to North Shore Arc, as it was known then, and their son entered its Spotlight program.

“It made my son happy and he’s developed lifelong friends,” Carey said. “It helped him with the social [issues] and opened a lot of doors for him.”

His son is now in a Teens in Transition program at Arc.

“The number of children being diagnosed is growing rapidly and services have a hard time keeping up,” Carey said. “Arc is an organization that just gets it done.”

For more information, call 978-762-4878 or go online to www.n sarc.org. ■

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