



For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities

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The Arc of the Capital Area Begins Exciting New Chapter

Austin, TX — As one of Austin’s oldest nonprofits (founded in 1949), The Arc of the Capital Area empowers Central Texans with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) and their families through compassionate case management and innovative programs. Examples of the more than 100 different diagnoses which fall under I/DD’s umbrella include Autism, Spina Bifida, Cerebral Palsy, Down syndrome, learning disabilities, and seizure disorder. The Arc of the Capital Area connects individuals and families to education, work, recreation, and lifelong services so they may achieve lives of joy, dignity, and independence. Currently The Arc of the Capital Area serves more than 1,000 children and adults with I/DD and their families in 17 counties throughout Central Texas.

Today, The Arc of the Capital Area is pleased to announce the beginning of an exciting new chapter in its 73-year history. After the initial impact of COVID, the organization conducted a community needs assessment. The results showed that there is a clear and documented need, not only in the city of Austin, but also a growing need in the surrounding areas for individuals with I/DD who have left or are leaving high school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that supports special education and related service programming for children and youth with disabilities. This federal legislation is designed to ensure that children with disabilities be granted a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

Following the last day of high school, the legal mandate for help suddenly ends. There is no federal requirement for providing supportive services in adulthood. This is called falling off the cliff. These young adults with special needs no longer have any supports or services. This is where The Arc is stepping in.

For more than a year The Arc collected data from the Texas Education Administration, the Texas Health and Human Services agency, and The Arc’s community needs assessment. The results showed that by expanding Art & Education Programs and Employment Services, The Arc will meet one of the most significant and growing needs for this community. As of July 1st, The Arc of the Capital Area will officially be starting this expansion project. In addition to the new program location in the city at St. Martin’s Lutheran Church & Preschool, 606 West 15th Street, Austin, Texas, the organization is finalizing plans to open multiple locations in the city’s suburbs - including Hutto and Elgin - throughout 2022. This expansion project is possible based on the organization’s solid reserve funds.

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Chief Executive Officer Dr. Mary VanHaneghan has led The Arc of the Capital Area expansion project for the past seven years, significantly growing the organization's reach and reserves. Under her leadership, The Arc's programs have expanded from case management and art-related day time programming to include multiple continuing education opportunities, transition services and a variety of competitive employment programs. Over the years she has secured multiple meaningful grants, donations and contract awards, and developed partnerships to support the mission that includes St. David's Foundation, Moody Foundation, Texas Workforce Commission, State Office of the Governor, and Texas Council on Developmental Disabilities.

As The Arc begins this exciting new chapter, it is with a mix of sadness and gratitude that the Board of Directors announces Dr. Mary VanHaneghan's departure as its Chief Executive Officer effective June 10, 2022. Since 2016, Dr. VanHaneghan has played a critical role in the development and success of the organization and, while the organization will miss her and her inspiring leadership, we wish her the best of luck in her new endeavor as the new Executive Director for the national William Syndrome Association. The Board of Directors thanks her for the dedication, passion, enthusiasm, and motivation she has given to The Arc of the Capital Area over the years. The Board has appointed the Chief Operating Officer, Amber Nelson, to lead the organization during the Board's national search for the new CEO to lead The Arc of the Capital Area into its next chapter.

From Dr. Mary VanHaneghan: "After a wonderful experience here at The Arc of the Capital Area, I recently submitted my resignation to the Board in order to pursue this new opportunity. While I have a mix of emotions as I move into this next chapter of my career, the decision for my transition did not come easily as I am extremely proud of all that we have accomplished during my tenure, and I will continue to cherish the relationships I've built during my time in service. I want to give my deepest appreciation to our clients and their families, our donors, as well as everyone on our team and Board of Directors. Without you, The Arc of the Capital Area would not be as strong and impactful as it is today. I am so deeply thankful to have been able to walk alongside each of you and serve this community over the past six years."

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Editor's Note: The Arc is not an acronym; always refer to us as The Arc, not The ARC and never ARC. The Arc should be considered as a title or a phrase.

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