Fiscal Year 2021–22 was a very busy year for the Arc of Litchfield County. The agency hired a new residential director as well as a new coordinator for the Autism Resource Center; formed a committee which began working on new residential living arrangements in the new Torrington Riverfront apartments; graduated four interns in the Project SEARCH program; and spent much of the year recruiting, hiring and training staff to support the individuals who were returning to the programs, including Day Support and Vocational. Please take some time to read about the exciting and impactful work undertaken over the past year by our dedicated staff. Thank you.

**Development & Marketing, Mary Ellen Kunz, Director**

Fiscal year 2021–22 saw a modicum of normalcy return to development and marketing initiatives. Revenue brought in through the efforts of the Development Department totaled $236,180, which is $15,000 above last year for non-capital campaign revenue.

Some highlights: grants of $100,000 from the Robert Rosenheim Foundation in support of the Autism Resource Center; $11,132 from the Connecticut Community Foundation for the purchase of iPads for job coaches; $7,250 from the Eva M. Coty Fund for a new generator in one of the agency’s group homes, and $5,100 from the Edwin & Edith Stone Fund for a new lift in another group home (both funds of the Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation), and unrestricted donations of $39,000. Two events were held in Fiscal year 2021–22. One was a live fundraising event and the other a virtual fundraising event. With safety at the forefront of planning, the live event, Nature is Nurture, was held partially indoors and out. Only 100 tickets were made available which included sponsor tickets. Over $27,000 was raised with a net of $25,000.
The virtual friendraiser was held for the second year in a row and was again a successful community-building initiative. This virtually no-overhead event brings new friends to our website where they learn about LARC. Fifteen tablescapes were donated, valued at over $2000, and 1220 raffle tickets were sold with $4200 raised.

A new partnership was formed between the Arc of Litchfield County and Five Points Visual Arts Center in the fall of 2021. A workshop, funded by a grant from Thomaston Savings Bank Foundation, was held for 12 weeks at the new center on University Drive in Torrington. Twelve individuals in LARC’s Day Support program attended the workshop. Through demonstrations, individualized attention, sensory explorations, and mixed media materials, participants explored art making at their own pace, using materials tailored to their needs. At the end of the workshop, the artwork created was exhibited in a two-week show at the Five Points Annex on Water Street in downtown Torrington.

In mid-2021, the agency undertook steps to re-brand with a new logo in order to more closely align the Arc of Litchfield County with the Arc National brand. The change was approved by the Arc Connecticut and the Arc National as well as the agency’s board of directors. The re-branding rolled out in Spring 2022. A new sign was installed in May and LARC’s letterhead, website, and all printed materials will feature the new logo by July 1, 2022.

There are a number of strong reasons for pursuing this direction. The agency has been a member of The Arc for years. The Arc is the largest national community-based organization advocating for and serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. As a national organization, The Arc has an immense presence in Washington, DC and helped achieve many important milestones over the years.
Human Resources, Scott Whittaker, Director

2021 saw a lot of change in the Human Resources department. Both the Director of Human Resources and the Staffing Coordinator resigned within 2 months of each other. A new Human Resource Director was hired in June, just in time for benefits open enrollment. Hitting the ground running, the primary order of business was to hire, then to redevelop the training structure so we could get the new employees properly trained. Between July 1st, 2021, and December 31st, 2021, 31 new employees were hired, including a Residential Director, an Assistant Director of Nursing, a Human Resources Assistant, a DSO Manager and 4 Residential Managers. Nearly 70% of these new hires remain employed with the agency. 2021 also saw a significant increase in pay for Direct Support Professionals, from $14.75 to $16.50 per hour. We look forward to continued positive momentum in 2022.

Clinical Services, Julie Stachowiak, Director of Services

Julie oversees Jill Sahlin, Clinical Team Director; Jennifer Hull, Vocational and Day Supports Director; Traci Damon, Residential Director; Karen Dundas, R.N., Nursing Director

There have been many things that have happened over the course of this past year and many exciting projects on tap for the coming year. In our Vocational and Day Support Option (DSO) Programs, individuals continue to return to their day programs. Individuals are thrilled to be back, happy to be working, or doing arts and crafts and spending time with old and new friends. Day program staff in both Vocational and DSO programs have been working hard to support individuals helping them get back to a normal routine.

Nursing continues to find its footing and continues to evolve. It provides an incredible amount of support, knowledge, and experience to the individuals we support and to the staff providing the support as well.
In her role as Clinical Director, Jill is responsible for completing investigations for the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), providing employee trainings, and coordinating monthly psych clinics. She has been involved with preparations for Torrington Riverfront, managing the referral process, chairing committee meetings, maintaining communications with DDS and families, and assisting with the housing application process. She is in the process of coordinating the next phase which will be inviting individuals, families, and case managers in for team meetings and then creating a schedule for families to meet with DeMarco Management in order to complete subsidy applications. Overall, she is working together with the team to assist in all aspects of this exciting transition for individuals and families.

Lisa Francis has been spreading the word about the agency’s new medication administration certification process, which will be fully implemented in July, with a Phase 1 and Phase 2 component. Phase 1 is uniform across the Department of Public Health, Department of Children and Family Services, and Department of Developmental Services and includes the option to complete independently online. LARC is requiring the online option to be completed at LARC, with a quiet space and a device being provided to those who choose this option. Phase 2 is specific to each department, and both the exam and Phase 2 are in person, proctored by DDS at one of their locations. Lisa also oversees Therap, an electronic data collection, management, and reporting system, including training of staff.

Mary Fisher works with the agency’s job coaches and individuals in the Vocational Program. She prepares reports, attends semi-annual and annual meetings, helps at group homes, and maintains files. Mary also serves on the agency’s Safety Committee.

Nerissa Casanova, center coordinator, has been very productive since coming on board. The playgroup she created for children ages 2–5 has had great success. The group met weekly and worked on individual goals as well as shared goals. The participants included families as well as their support staff, which provided additional opportunities to work on various skills in a different setting promoting generalization. The first group was such a huge success that we are now in our 2nd round of the 6-week session, and it is off to a great start. The next phase of creating additional groups is underway.
During spring break the center welcomed individuals ages 11–26 as well as from LARC’s DSO program to participate in a cupcake decorating class taught by Mimi’s Cake Decorating School. Each participant received 6 cupcakes and created beautiful edible art. Some individuals due to illness or having physical limitations were unable to attend the event in person however arrangements were made so they received their cupcake kit and were able to participate at home.

Monthly webinars continue to be a success and provide additional support and resources to families not only in Litchfield County but surrounding areas. Public response to these webinars has been positive. The webinars are also recorded and posted on the Autism Resource Homepage allowing individuals to access them at their convenience. In addition, the center has a Facebook page which is being used to provide additional supports to families as well as information on upcoming events.

Work in the sensory garden is progressing, with help from volunteers who were able to complete a school project through the volunteer opportunity. In addition, more flowers and seeds have been planted as we progress in making the garden filled with beautiful flowers. The patio furniture provides a comfortable space for all to enjoy. On Earth Day the playgroup planted seeds that were recently transplanted to larger pots as an activity. In addition, participants in the DSO program were given gardening kits to complete. The seeds have grown into very healthy plants, and we will be planting them in raised beds.

Work on the pre-teen/teen center has begun. Already in place is a television and gaming center. Summer events are being planned and flyers will be created soon to announce these events and registration to the community.

Camp MOE

After months of extensive review and consideration of the programs and services provided by LARC and an intense analysis of the financial impact of owning a 165-acre property, the agency made the difficult decision to proceed with the necessary steps to sell the property where Camp MOE is held each summer. Since 2017, LARC has struggled to optimize and maintain Camp MOE and the property, which was purchased in 2016 to house the camp. Every year, the agency staff and resources are stretched to the limits, hiring and training summer staff, and trying to accomplish all of the work required annually to keep the property safe for the 2 ½ months during which camp is held. Since the COVID-19 Pandemic forced the agency to temporarily close its doors in 2020, LARC’s Board of Directors and Leadership Team, necessarily, had to refocus on the agency’s financial stability, its core programs, and the steps needed to strengthen the organization for a resilient future.
As a result of that collaboration, Alyssa Marchetti and Owen Reidy have been hired part-time as assembly workers in the company’s kitting department. Alyssa started her new job with Commercial Sewing on March 14 and Owen’s first day on the job was April 4.

David Mazzarelli, company co-owner with Stephen Mazzarelli, said he is pleased to welcome Owen and Alyssa as part of the Commercial Sewing team, and noted that the recent collaboration between his family-owned business and LARC has been a win-win situation for everyone involved.

Shardae Farmer, who is Alyssa and Owen’s supervisor in the Kitting Department, said their contributions have been extremely valuable to the company.

“Owen and Alyssa are awesome. They have helped out a lot, especially when we’ve been short-staffed. They are valued employees and team players and are great assets to our team. I see a promising future for them.”

Since 1967, Commercial Sewing has been manufacturing in Torrington, where its 89,000-square-foot facility continues to be the headquarters for all design and manufacturing. Commercial Sewing employs approximately 185 people at this location.

Over the past 50 years, the company has grown its manufacturing footprint where new facilities and partners were brought on to accommodate growth, new production capabilities, and sourcing. It currently has operations in the U.S., Mexico and China.

Torrington-based Federal Direct recently increased the square footage of workspace set aside for participants in LARC’s Group Supported Employment (GSE) Program working out of its Ella Grasso Avenue facility. The extra space allowed individuals in the GSE program to be shifted around and to free up additional slots for workers looking to return to the work program.

In the summer of 2019, Federal Direct forged a new partnership with LARC’s Vocational Department when it generously offered the use of approximately 1,250 square feet of space as a community work site for about 10 individuals. Since that time, several members of the work group have been assisting in the company’s direct mail bindery where they insert mail pieces into envelopes. When not performing bindery work, the group works on an assembly job supplied by LARC. Federal Direct is a marketing resource with 90 years of expertise in print, direct mail and fulfillment.
Responding to increased manufacturing demand, BD welcomed a second group of LARC workers in early May and an additional job coach to its Rework Department in May. The addition of five individuals brings the total number of individuals from LARC’s vocational program working at BD’s Canaan facility to 10. In January of 2016 LARC partnered with BD when the company welcomed a group of five clients to assist in the quality control area performing rework operations. Their primary function since that time has been to inspect and prepare syringes, already produced, for machine operators to repackage. Due to the nature of BD’s product, it is a critical and highly important process, according to company officials, who said they have been impressed with the workers’ dedication and attention to detail. To date, the crew has reworked several million parts.

The Vocational Department’s Group Supported Employment (GSE) program is slowly returning to near normal as the COVID-19 pandemic enters its third year. The transition is the result of diligent planning, said Marianne Sedgwick, LARC’s Community Support Coordinator. “Almost all of the people who were previously served by this department prior to Covid have returned,” she said. Those clients who no longer chose to participate in LARC’s GSE program have returned to the Day Program.
Project SEARCH resumed in person at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital in September 2021. (Project SEARCH provides classes in employability skills, independent living skills, and internship experience to individuals with disabilities who are between the ages of 18 and 35. The goal is to gain competitive employment upon completion.) Kathy Riberdy, Special Educator and Project SEARCH Coordinator, was joined by four exceptional young adults who showed up ready to learn and work on job skills. Marianne Sedgwick, LARC Vocational Coordinator, and Ellen Kirsch, Skills Trainer, were welcomed additions to the Project SEARCH team. Interns worked on creating resumes, filling out applications, interview skills, looking professional, resolving conflict and internet safety among other topics. Charlotte Hungerford Hospital has been a welcoming and supportive host. Project SEARCH interns have learned valuable, transferrable skills by supporting eight departments including Nutritional Services, Podiatry, Cardiology, and the Storeroom. One intern has been hired as a part-time office assistant in Podiatry at CHH. Another intern secured part-time employment working in the kitchen and housekeeping at Keystone Place in Torrington. Project SEARCH is looking forward to resuming the program at the hospital this fall.

Recreation and Special Olympics, Robin Pedone Coordinator

LARC participated at the Special Olympic Bocce competition at Scalzi Park in Stamford.
Our athletes won several medals including three golds, one silver, three bronze, and two 4th place ribbons. Some competitions were so close that two of our teams had to play two other teams for a run off. The team with the most points in the combined rounds won the gold. One division resulted in a tie for gold (LARC and another team ) because the runoff also resulted in a tie!!

LARC had two athletes compete in the snowshoe competition and four in cross country skiing. Three athletes competed in alpine skiing.