

## A Shared Mission: Adult Agencies and Colleges Working Together to Support Lifelong Learning

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**Without a formal program or structure, the State University of New York (SUNY) Delhi and The Arc of Delaware County, NY (The Arc), a human service agency that serves individuals with developmental disabilities, forged a collaboration. Their partnership creates opportunities that support individuals to reach their goals, share their dreams, and be part of a strong relationship between The Arc participants/staff and SUNY students and faculty members.**

For adults with intellectual disabilities, opportunities to continue learning after high school are all too rare. Many of these individuals leave high school without ever having the chance to pursue any kind of postsecondary education. However, some community agencies serving adults with intellectual disabilities have partnered with local colleges to address the need for lifelong learning opportunities. By working together, and using the resources of both the agency and the college, doors are opened and opportunities grow.

This brief describes such a partnership between the State University of New York (SUNY) Delhi and The Arc of Delaware County (The Arc), a local human service agency. These partners work together to create lifelong learning opportunities, as well as employment opportunities, for adults with disabilities. We hope that sharing the story of this productive relationship will help others forge similar paths of inclusion.

This partnership is mutually beneficial as it assists both the college and the agency in meeting their missions to support learning and community engagement. The Arc supports people with disabilities by offering them opportunities to continue their education and to pursue career paths and personal interests. Students and faculty of the college learn and work in a more diverse environment, and are made aware of the gifts that each person can bring to the campus. The campus has employment opportunities, and the agency supports people who can fill those positions.

When SUNY Delhi president Dr. Candace Vancko and other college staff served on The Arc Board of Directors, they

recognized that the college shared a mission with The Arc: to teach all learners in the community. SUNY staff saw an opportunity for their college and The Arc to learn from each other. The college began teaching inclusive classes, fostering community relationships, and building bridges between their respective students and faculty members.

In recent years, the focus and shared growth has been in the area of hands-on teaching and learning across different departments at the college. In courses taught by the author, including Introduction to Psychology, Child Growth and Development, and Adolescent Psychology, the goal was for all students, including over a dozen students who were being served by The Arc, to learn about themselves.

Another objective was for SUNY students to develop their leadership skills by helping model and create inclusive environments and interactions. SUNY students are paired with students served by The Arc as Study Buddies to work and learn together, sharing each other's strengths and supporting each other's goals.



### Jennifer: How Study Buddies Support Success

Jennifer Gugliotti shares her experiences in college and describes how Study Buddies help.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDbA\\_ZN6hs4&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDbA_ZN6hs4&feature=youtu.be)

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**Brandy Goes To College:** Brandy Parker shares what she has learned about herself and others by taking a college psychology class.

[http://youtu.be/lala\\_7TLUvs](http://youtu.be/lala_7TLUvs)

At SUNY Delhi there is a wide range of not only liberal arts courses, but also technical courses that provide career directions for students and opportunities to explore topics that interest them. These experiences potentially lead to career paths as students seek independence and an inclusive role in their community.

SUNY Delhi has a national reputation in culinary arts and hospitality management education. The Arc students have participated in the SUNY Basic Food Preparation Lab program to prepare them for entry-level positions in hotels, resorts, and restaurants. Faculty member Betsy Weidenbach said, speaking about two students who were being supported by The Arc, said “Thomas and Brenda were inspirational in their work ethic, and positive feedback from other SUNY students proved to me that the benefits of this partnership are beyond measure.”



Brenda from The Arc enjoying the SUNY culinary program

Dave DeForest, an assistant professor in SUNY's Applied Sciences Department, has hosted a wide range of environmental outdoor programs. Together, students who are supported by The Arc and other SUNY students have helped to maintain SUNY's Outdoor Education Center; learned outdoor survival skills, practiced kayaking, tapped maple trees for sap, and learned the importance of stream bank protection.

From Dave's perspective, “Students have said that the inclusive classes were their favorite experience of the course, and that the program changes student attitudes about people with disabilities. . . .there is the realization that people are people and that student motivation increases as they work together with students supported by The Arc.” The Arc's Sam Conklin said, “I love the outdoors, and learning. . . I enjoy the wide range of programs offered, and both the SUNY students and Dave have been cool to learn from and be with.”



**Video: SUNY Outdoor Education Program** The college hosts a survival course for The Arc. <http://youtu.be/2BYc8jP6vpl>

Over 60 years old, Lewis Pepper is an accomplished sketch artist who receives services from The Arc. Pepper (his preferred nickname) has taken two SUNY Delhi free-hand drawing courses to learn more and broaden his skills.

Lisa Tessier and Rhonda Harrow, SUNY Delhi faculty members, have had Pepper in their classes. Rhonda stated, “Pepper is an enthusiastic learner, has a great work ethic, and is still actively and eagerly learning at his age!” Lisa added, “A memorable moment for me was when one of the other students noticed Pepper was absent and said to me ‘Where's Pepper today?’ That showed me he was a real part of our learning community!”



Pepper and Rhonda in drawing class

In addition to providing access to college courses to those who are supported by The Arc, SUNY Delhi also offers employment opportunities. “A clear indication of the range and depth of the relationship between our two organizations is where very capable people who receive services from The Arc can be paid members of the team that helps SUNY Delhi function as a college and helps it shine,” noted Bonnie Martin, the college’s vice president of operations.

“They have worked as part-time employees teamed with SUNY students,” Ms. Martin continued, “painting residence halls and our automotive center. A local resident, Robert Eckert, has taken charge of the college’s recycling program at our campus recycling facility.”



Robert Eckert, recycling facility manager, displays his first paycheck.

Ms. Martin gave an additional illustration of how the collaboration has benefited both SUNY and The Arc. “Another outstanding example of our shared mission has been the joining of The Arc’s pre-K children’s program, Carousel Children’s Services, with the college’s Delhi College Child Care Center (DC4), in our new state-of-the-art facility that enriches a shared educational experience... both organizations benefit greatly, and most importantly the two groups of children learn together and gain respect for each other at an important early age.”

It has taken leadership and enthusiasm for learning by both The Arc and SUNY Delhi to make this program successful. Whether it’s Rachel Closs’s involvement in the college’s nationally accredited veterinary sciences curriculum, students performing projects as part of the college’s O’Connor Center for Community Service, or service learning programs where SUNY students visit Arc campuses to work closely with students on individual goals and interests, both organizations continue to support each other on their shared missions.

SUNY Delhi is fortunate to be part of this partnership and we were honored when in 2010, SUNY Delhi was recognized as The Arc’s community “Partner of the Year” at their annual Awards and Membership meeting.

George Suess, The Arc’s CEO, pointed out that “At The Arc of Delaware County, we seek opportunities for people that inspire learning, increase independence, and cultivate meaningful connections with their community. Our partnership with SUNY Delhi continues to thrive because we share a deep commitment to helping people achieve their fullest potential and recognize that engaging individuals in their community is vital to this success.”

The words of people directly involved in these programs express it best: The Arc’s Life Coach, Becky Townsend,

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emphasized that “There is a learning environment on campus that encourages all students to learn from each other. ....all students are encouraged to share their dreams, talents and unique personalities.” Brandy Parker, a student from The Arc who has participated in many classes, sums it up simply and eloquently: “My SUNY professor makes learning fun and exciting. ...she has impacted my life, makes it easier for me to learn...I’ve learned to freely share my thoughts and ideas...I’ve met so many new people, had new experiences, built relationships in my community and learned to share with others what I have learned.”

**To view more photos of The SUNY Delhi and Arc Partnership:**

**SUNY Delhi and The Arc Partnership Photos**

[www.flickr.com/photos/delarc/collections/72157643715248703/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/delarc/collections/72157643715248703/)

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