

From the Desk of Bill Baesman, Executive Director

I feel very privileged to introduce myself to you as your new Executive Director of The Arc of Colorado. I think it is only fair to you to share who I am and what my values are, because, hopefully, that is what is important to you. I am a parent of a 29 year old daughter with developmental disabilities and, as a lawyer for over 25 years, I practiced special education law.

So why is it important that I am a parent? I have been through the struggles that most of you as parents and families have gone through. I've shared your anger...your stress...your tears...your burnout...your feeling of hopelessness. And because I have been there, done that, I feel comfortable in telling the "rest of the story" and in urging your continued support and involvement in The Arc.

Even though my daughter does not read or write, has no math or money skills, has no concept of time, and has a vocabulary of about 150 words, my wife and I have always advocated for her to have as normal and inclusive a life as possible. We dreamed what everyone else thought was impossible—and our dreams have come true for Stacie. Stacie was the first student to be included in her neighborhood school (1976) and to receive ESY services. She was the only student [with a disability] to be on the swim team and track team in her high school. Stacie has been competitively employed with Guaranty National Life Insurance and Eddie Bauer for 7 years. And the highlight was when she moved into her own townhome (1996) and lives there with a roommate who does not have a disability, does not provide services, and is only a friend! Stacie has a computerized prompting system which allows her to be independent and receive minimal supports.

I share this with you because we reached our dreams for our daughter and I want all of you as parents and families to reach your dreams as well. But first, you must have dreams and then, you must advocate for those dreams to come true. An advocate is a "person who pleads a cause for others". Many of our sons and daughters are advocating for themselves in People First. But when they can't, it means that we must make it happen on behalf of them. We must believe that our children are worthy of living a quality life and deserve the respect in the community.

The Arc is a grassroots organization which means that YOU make it exist, and it exists for YOU. It will not get done unless WE DO IT OURSELVES! The stronger YOU make this organization, the more support you will get. The Arc's need, and must have, your involvement. What you give in volunteer work, you will get back in support to achieve a greater quality of life for all people with developmental disabilities.

Let me summarize in the words that I live my life by: "Some people see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say WHY NOT". George Bernard Shaw