

The Arc of Colorado Mourns a Friend

by Anastasia Lawhead, Vice-President
The Arc of Colorado Board of Directors

Ten days after terrorists attacked our country, leaving many of us with an unprecedented sense of vulnerability, the disability community in Colorado felt an electrifying aftershock with news of Charlie Allinson's death. Charlie had been the Director of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) for the State of Colorado for the better part of the past decade, and was someone who understood this "sense of vulnerability" perhaps more than most. He chose to enter a profession designed to serve one of the most vulnerable groups of people in society and dedicated three decades of his short life to making the world a better place for people with developmental disabilities. He believed in community and leading by example and through the scope of his career encompassed both through volunteering with children in a special education class (pre-IDEA), teaching, program management, administering, and being Executive Director of Community Options (a community centered board that serves Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel counties) just prior to his State DDS directorship.

Charlie spent a great deal of his time thinking about how to design and implement services, supports and policies that would improve the quality of life for people with developmental disabilities in Colorado. He was always willing to talk and to listen and he welcomed input and discussion from people with disabilities and their families and advocates. The Arc of Colorado had a positive and productive working relationship based on mutual respect and honesty.

Through a State governmental trend of top-down management, an increase in local control and inadequate state resources, Charlie continued to understand the needs and issues brought forth by people with disabilities and their families and advocates. Even though we don't yet understand what the long term consequences of the Colorado Systems Change Project will be, Charlie was at the helm in implementation of the Systems Change Project, which has institutionalized service-related choice making for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

The Arc of Colorado has lost a friend. A friend who listened and a friend who cared. Charlie's concern was sincere and he loved to hear stories about the successes and challenges faced by our sons and daughters. We will miss him, and as we deal more and more with this feeling of vulnerability, we may think of Charlie Allinson and the lessons he taught us and the example by which he led. Our heartfelt sympathy is extended to the Allinson family.

Editor's note: Anastasia Lawhead first met Charlie Allinson at a National TASH conference in Washington, DC in the early 80's and then spent the following decade working with him on supported employment projects in Montrose, CO and at DDS. She is a mom to Jess, a five year old with a cognitive disability and is the newly elected Vice President of The Arc of Colorado.