

The ARC: My Internship Experience

Agency Overview

The ARC, a non-profit organization, was started in 1953 by a group of parents who recognized the need for services for developmental disabled children. The ARC offers multiple programs to improve the lives of those children. It focuses on service, advocacy, inclusion, family and community. Some of the organization's beliefs are: that there is strength in diversity, each individual and family is unique and has value, individuals with disabilities deserve quality education, vocational, social and living opportunities, and that each individual and family has a right to make their own decisions. One of the goals of the ARC is to help the consumers become as independent as possible, and it is all about client chose.

The ARC is part of a national organization, but what is unique about the one in east central Iowa is that they provide services. They are an independent provider who serves eight counties in Iowa, and, usually, the consumers are referred by DHS, the MH/DD department. There are approximately 580 consumers and their families, and the company gains about another 50 consumers during the summer program. Over 75% of the consumers are from Lynn County, which is one of the best counties in the country for assistance to disabled children. The organization gets around 80% of its funding from the state, and the rest of the money comes from fund raising events. The three main HCBS waivers that cover the ARC services are the Mental Retardation, Brain Injury, and Ill and Handicapped.

The company has 409 employees, 13 % of those are males. It is natural to see a low percentage of men working in the social services field. Out of 409, only 20 are full-

time employees. There are three basic ways the ARC seeks out employment: put out ads, referrals made by current employees, and families referrals. During the interview, the potential employee is asked about availability and comfort scale when working with developmental disabled children. Much of the work is done during evenings and weekends. An employee must complete nine hours of training, have a one-on-one meeting with the supervisor, and go on a meet and greet with the family before one provides any service to the consumer.

There are direct service programs (in-home services) and center-based programs.

Direct service programs include:

- Respite programs- temporary child care while a parent is out
- Group respite- group gatherings usually on Fridays and Saturdays, i.e. Cooking Club and Friday Night Flix
- Getaway respite- theme-based daylong or overnight group activities
- Supported Community Living- skill-training program, i.e. setting the table, ordering pizza, and grocery shopping.

Center-based services are BASICS (Before/After School Inclusive Childcare Services), OASIS (Opportunities, Activities, Support, and Inclusive Services), and Summer Day program.

One strength of the ARC is that the staff values their work and really cares about their consumers and the families. The managerial staff even takes caseloads, which helps them relate to the other staff members. The ARC has good ties to the community and the board of directors, which is another good strength. One limitation is that the organization has a small full-time staff, hence limits growth for the company. Another limitation is

that the ARC is reliant on Medicaid. They are indirectly affected by budget cuts. Budget cuts mean that the consumers receive less hours of service because the funding has decreased.

What I Learned

I have learned quite a bit at the ARC during my internship. One thing I found out is that there is a lot of politics involved with the ARC and non-profit agencies. The organization relies heavily on the state and local budget. If the budget gets cut, it indirectly affects consumers at the ARC. It is the executive director/president's job to inform one's employees on the current news about what is going on in the political segment. I feel that, even though this is the case, one should personally watch the news for any updates.

Along with the politics involved, I learned how Title XIX and Medicaid work. I had no previous knowledge of these terms, and I feel now that I have worked at the ARC, I have a better feel of what their functions are and how they serve the people. Additionally, I know a lot more about what waivers are available and what services are included in each waiver. There are some similarities and some differences between them. Some of them are based on monthly allowances, and some are based on yearly amounts. Each waiver has certain services that it will cover for the family and child.

Furthermore, I have learned quite a bit about the funding. My experience has helped me understand how money comes in and goes out in a non-profit agency. Because I helped in the Communications department and the Accounting department, I saw how the ARC supports its services. I got an overview on some of the events that take place to help raise money for the business to operate. Also, I got to help with payroll

and billing, so that job helped me comprehend how the ARC charges each consumer for each service that is provided. Since the organization gave me the chance to see how each department works, I got a better feel for what they do. There is good communication between each segment, and I think that is a good quality to have. It is essential to the agency that each employee works and relies on each other, and, to have that, the company needs good communication ties amongst one another. For example, the in-home services will have questions about the center-based programs. The Communications people work closely with the Accounting employees.

Another thing I really learned about is how children with developmental disabilities are as people. I have never really worked with them extensively, so this gave me a lot more knowledge about them. I have read some of the diagnoses in textbooks, but it was neat to see it first hand. I did not know how mentally frustrating it would be to work with them. I got to see children of many different ages. Each center (after-school programs) has a very different atmosphere. They are each structured very uniquely. It makes sense that the older children need less structure and are given more freedom to decide what to do; the younger kids need more structure and guidance. Likewise, I did not realize how physically draining it could be. I would come home from my internship and be exhausted from working, especially with the little ones. It was somewhat emotionally tiring, in that you know with some of them this is pretty much the best that you can do for them. There is no real long-term goal of higher functioning for them, and that concept was hard for me to grasp at first.

Career Direction

This internship has given me an excellent outlook on what is like to work with children with developmental disabilities. I got the chance to work with them personally. Moreover, I got the chance to see what it is like to work in a non-profit organization. I got to know some of their operations and functions. From interacting with the children, I know that I do not have what it takes to work with them daily. That kind of job is not something I would like to pursue as my career. However, there are positions at the ARC that interested me. I found that Family Service Coordinators are a nice balance of consumer interaction and office work. I would not mind working with these children, but I could not do it day in and day out for a lengthy period of time. These positions have some interaction with the consumers, but it isn't extensive. They also have office work to do, which is something I find appealing. When talking to one of the Accounting department employees, not only does she do the paperwork and billing, but she also takes on some caseloads. This type of work can be very rewarding, but it takes a lot of time getting used to the environment and people involved.

My time at the ARC has been very insightful. I have learned a lot from this experience, and I will take the information with me as I start the next chapter of my life.