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Executive Director Corner

by Patricia Chiapellone, ARCC Executive Director

It's not too late to wish everyone a very 'happy new year', is it? Just a couple of weeks into this promising 2014, there is much to celebrate and much to do.

We've been talking about it for a year or so, our Ruby Anniversary - celebrating 40 years of ARCC service to the community -and it is finally upon us. Preparations are in the final stages for our annual luncheon fundraiser. I'm working on my script. Student speakers are 'auditioning' at Ocala Middle School and event planning details are well underway.



Today, I am celebrating the generous individuals and organizations that have stepped up to sponsor our ambitious 40th anniversary event calendar. The honor roll of sponsors is growing daily and while I look forward to thanking each of our sponsors on the 30th, the following are confirmed at this time:

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The very practical benefit of sponsorships is that they ensure the event's success. The less obvious, but equally important, benefit is that our own community is investing in ARCC, investing in the work and the impact. That means everything to me, to our leadership, and to staff.

Today, I am celebrating that our extraordinary growth - from 75 employees to 97, from 22 schools to 50 - in the past 18 months, has not impeded quality. We just passed our annual DMH audit with flying colors. This is a feat that involves all levels of staff with client files checked and rechecked for accuracy and compliance. Well done!

Today, I am celebrating the magic that we brought to our client families over the holidays. (I'm even celebrating the fact that staff has tremendous fun making sure that when I am volunteering at the wrapping desk they presented me with every uniquely shaped object to bunch or swaddle or camouflage for a waiting parent and/or child!)

This year clients and a committee from all teams joined together to decorate the Christmas in the Park tree honoring the programs of ARCC. Thousands of visitors saw an utterly unique paper doll chain created by our toddler to teen clients as well as packages



creatively conceived by staff to represent our ARCC values. We distributed over 600 gifts (including those 97 bikes from Turning Wheels for Kids) to parents looking forward to being able to surprise their children on Christmas morning and to children who wanted to be there to choose what matched their wishes best.

With an incredible community volunteer - Anna Stockel - we repeated our affiliation with Christmas Angels. Two families were selected by the group - one from FIRST5 and one from PEI (Prevention & Early Intervention) - and in both cases the bounty was incredible. A decorated tree, gift cards for a full holiday feast to prepare and present at home, beautifully wrapped gifts - from a toddler bed to a tv. Two single mothers and five children had an unforgettable holiday this year. Thank you, Christmas Angels.

Today. I am celebrating ten years as Executive Director. So much has changed since 2004 when I joined ARCC. Then there were only 16 employees, no MediCal programs, no FIRST 5 programming, and no looming Health Care Reform. There have been countless challenges, but the agency has thrived. What hasn't changed is that the staff is simply incredible - caring, compassionate, passionate about the work and that the world we know needs what we offer. What hasn't changed is the need for proactive, interactive programs that address very specific needs. If asked what one single thing best describes who we are, what we do and how we do it - I'd have to say 'cultural competency.' It sets us apart. Our approach today is just what it was 40 years ago, to reflect and respect the neighborhoods and the community we serve. I am proud of so many things at ARCC, but especially that we still stand for the intention of our founders - to be a part of the solution to the challenges facing our youth and families. And that we are!

The poet Audre Lorde wrote, "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

I am celebrating that at ARCC we continue to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences every day and after 40 years, that's quite a legacy!

Patricia Chesellone

Program Spotlight - Celebrate

According to Webster's Dictionary, "Celebration is to do something special or enjoyable for an important event, occasion, or holiday." I believe that the work our ARCC teams do daily is important and should be celebrated on a regular basis. When through our Child Abuse Prevention Program we are able to support parents in learning different ways of setting boundaries and responding to their child's needs, that should be celebrated. When we are able to connect with a child and family who are starting to struggle with issues before they escalate into crisis and affect academic success and family functioning through our Prevention and Early Intervention Program, we are doing something important.

Responding to a crisis call through our Mobile Crisis Response and Counseling Program when families have nowhere else to turn has critical short term and long term impact on those who called us.

Every time we support a caregiver in better understanding their child's temperament and needs, or working with them to mitigate the effects of trauma via our FIRST 5 program, it is critical in creating life time success for the little ones served.

The work everyone did (and you know who you are) allowed us to have yet another successful Department of Mental Health audit experience with a disallowance of less than 1%, which is well below the norm.

All of our teams, including our Administrative and Billing employees, work diligently behind the scenes to hit deadlines, support contracts, and manage our internal processes so that all of the work I mentioned above can happen seamlessly.

This all needs to be celebrated whether it is with the teams, each person privately, or just quietly and introspectively. It needs to be celebrated and honored because what we do everyday matters. Not everyone we touch gets better, makes healthier choices, or resolves their issues while they are with us. But the odds are that we have made a difference. Maybe we have created a healthier bond for a caregiver and child to build on over the years, or supported an angry youth in better understanding how to articulate their needs, allowing them less abrasive interactions and thereby staying in school. Or even connecting families to resources in the community that allow them to be less stressed, meet their basic needs and therefore have more quality time as a family.

All of this is, to me, very important work and I honor and appreciate it every day with quiet (or sometimes loud) celebration.

- by Andrea Urton-Hayward, LMFT
ARCC Director of Operations

Nelson Mandela

by Stephanie Demos, ARCC Director of Development & Communications

"It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership."-- Nelson Mandela

This past year a film was made celebrating the life of Nelson Mandela - a man who refused to be defined by bitterness when, for so many of us, it would be the only option. A man who kept some kernel of hope when hopelessness made infinitely more sense, and a man who though given no choice but to serve a seemingly interminable incarceration, chose to serve his country upon release. That's the stuff of heroes, of epic movies. Ironically on the day this movie was premiered in London, Nelson Mandela died, but the way he changed his country, the way he changed the world lives on.

He is a quintessential role model - an imperfect man, aiming toward perfecting the potentiality of those who might give up because of poverty or prejudice or a seeming predestination.

On a smaller scale, the middle school kids who participate in our mentoring program reflect that concept. They are 'screened into' the program by their fifth-grade teachers and administrators who see them as the highest risk for dropping out of school. High-risk behaviors in school, in the community or at home, a family history of gang affiliation, violence, poverty and disenfranchisement, segregation by language or culture - these are all factors that influence this grim prospect. A family history of dropping out of school, in fact, is a strong indicator in the likelihood of repeating the pattern.

Yet the students in our program participate voluntarily. They give up their lunch hour once a week for lifestyle sessions. They participate in group and individual counseling. They know their attendance and grades are monitored. They are held accountable. They show up and they do the work. Of course it's

not all work - one key aspect of the program is the slate of varied social activities - from hikes to spectator sports, farmers markets to sightseeing, from community service to activities such as rock climbing, trampolining and more. There's fun built into the program, but it's not fun for fun's sake. These are vital opportunities to practice and perfect pro-social behaviors and positive interaction with peers.

The sixth-grade students participate in group mentoring. Staff and community volunteers are there primarily to role model positive choices and behaviors. They're also there to listen, to demonstrate respect for differences and difficult decisions. Mentoring is so much more about what the students hear than what the mentor says. It's about being a role model - an imperfect, but committed role model.

Seventh and eighth graders are given the opportunity to be paired one-on-one with an adult mentor. College students, retirees, professionals in varied fields are all potential mentors. This, too, is voluntary. Mentors are asked to spend at least six hours a month with their mentee. They are asked to show up and do the work, and to have fun. Spending time with a student this age, at this critical development stage, is invaluable. And, if done right, it's a lot of fun.

I speak from experience - I have been paired with the most remarkable mentee. We've been to every local mall, seen the One Direction movie (Go Niall, her favorite!), tasted Mongolian Bar-b-que and sweet potato fries (not her favorite.) Last month we spent the day at the Dickens Faire, experiencing the entirely different world of Victorian England.

We text and she lets me know what's going on in school. She opens my eyes to possibility and I can't wait to celebrate her Quincinera in a couple of years with her family. We're different - science and math are her favorite subjects (Hooray for STEM education!) and mine were English and History. Hers is a large family, mine small. But we share so much as well and it's a relationship I treasure and plan to sustain long after she graduates from middle school.



None of us are Nelson Mandela, but we can do our part. We don't have to be superstars. In fact, the quote applies to mentoring as to life, in general. Mentors lead from behind,

putting their mentees in front - especially to celebrate victories like honor roll and sports achievements. Mentors and mentees show up, do the work and have fun. We talk about the dangers, the challenges of wrong choices, and lead by example. That's true leadership. That's role modeling.

We need more mentors. If you have an interest, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator Courtney Groszhans at cgroszhans@alumrockcc.org to chat about next steps. We need more donors to support this program - to ensure that it continues to thrive. Our hope is to expand beyond Ocala Middle School to additional campuses enthusiastically requesting a program of their own. Please consider supporting the Middle School Mentoring program in any way you can - as a volunteer, as an ambassador, as a donor.

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Ways to celebrate

by Clayton Ng, ARCC Chief Financial Officer

Certain professions are more prestigious than others when it comes to receiving recognition. Educators observe Teacher Appreciation Week and National Teacher Day. Administrative Assistants observe Administrative Professionals Day. Finance and accounting professionals don't get the same opportunity to receive gifts of gratitude. It doesn't mean their work isn't appreciated or that there's nothing to celebrate. It's just that these occasions don't share the same spotlight. Truth be told, I've never even heard of these until I started researching for this article.

International Accounting Day (Nov 10th) - gives recognition to the people who do the job that few others want to do -- trudge through long complex tax forms, deal with the IRS, and being the ones who keep a company's finances and financial strategy healthy.

National Financial Literacy Month (Apr) - is an effort to highlight the importance of financial literacy and teach how to establish and maintain healthy financial habits.

Financial Planning Week (Oct) - is a celebration to help individuals discover the value of financial planning and make smart financial decisions to achieve life goals and dreams.

Ok, none of these are likely to trigger a cake ceremony or a champagne shower. And just because you're neither a finance nor an accounting professional doesn't mean you can't do something to celebrate. In fact, you should celebrate, any day, every day, just because. Here are a few financially responsible ways how you can do so:

1. Make a monetary contribution to your favorite non-profit organization. If you don't have one, consider: [ARCC](#)
2. Teach a child how to save and spend wisely.
3. Volunteer at your favorite non-profit organization. If you need help arranging, please contact Courtney Groszhans: cgroszhans@alumrockcc.org
4. Start a savings account for a gift to a child.
5. Create or revise your estate planning documents. A financial endowment will allow your legacy to continue on.
6. Plan for year-end tax strategies. Most charitable donations are tax deductible.

If you need assistance with any of these suggestions, please contact Stephanie Demos: sdemos@alumrockcc.org



ARCC Areas of Impact

- 1. Decrease at-risk and violent behaviors in youth and in the community.**
- 2. Decrease system-dependent youth.**
- 3. Sustain youth through elementary, middle and high school graduation and beyond.**
- 4. Ensure all kids are kindergarten ready.**