

The History of The Arc of San Diego



Cherrie Sevick, The Arc of San Diego's
First Executive Director

"There are times in history when people who carry a common and crushing burden become so desperate that they seek each other out, band themselves together, enlist the aid of concerned friends, and begin to demand that attention be paid."

On October 23, 1951, the Ocean Beach Junior Women's Club asked people who were interested in helping people with developmental disabilities to come to a meeting at the San Diego Gas & Light Company in San Diego. That same month, the "Society for Exceptional Children" was voted into existence, and The Arc of San Diego as we know it today was started.

In the early years, The Arc of San Diego was a pioneer in establishing programs until the programs were assumed by the community. The 1950's were a time of struggling to organize and set policies in place. The rallying cry was mandatory public education for all children.

During the 1960's, we worked to change public attitudes, influence legislation, and recruit professionals into the field. In 1963, eight years after the battle for mandatory education began, Assemblyman Clair Burgener of San Diego secured passage of his very first bill without one dissenting vote: mandatory public-supported, appropriate

education in California for those with developmental disabilities.

The 1970's were inspired by legislative successes, including the creation of a statewide delivery of services system of Regional Centers, The Lanterman Act, a Master Plan for Special Education for children ages 3-21, Supplemental Security Income, and expansion of the Rehabilitation Act.

In the 1980's we experienced an era of mergers, program growth, expansion, and improvements. We worked against a proposed shortfall in funding when the Department of Developmental Services issued directives requiring Regional Centers to cut back services without regard to the Individual Program Plan. We won a unanimous decision from the Supreme Court upholding the right to services under The Lanterman Act.

The 1990's showed an agency in transition. A shift in thinking to empowerment of individuals with developmental disabilities and changes in the nature of the delivery systems made it necessary to reexamine our mission and articulate a new direction.

During the next decade we fully committed to Person-Centered Planning and Self-Determination as philosophies. We changed our mission statement to expand services for other disabilities and initiated a new, major federal food service contract at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot. We also launched a Seniors Program in response to the increasing longevity of people with disabilities.

Today The Arc of San Diego is the largest, most comprehensive provider of services to children and adults with disabilities in San Diego County. Through classes, workshops, community living, and individualized counseling, the dedicated staff of The Arc patiently guides individuals with disabilities toward the most self-sufficient life possible.

The ultimate goal of all programs and services at The Arc of San Diego is to help each individual reach their fullest level of independence.