**SIGN OF THE TIMES**

From grassroots social media to mainstream TV hits like Steve Harvey’s “Little Big Shots,” society is embracing and celebrating the unique talents of amazing kids.

At age 11, Geneseo’s Zachary Mogavero turned heads worldwide when photos of the elementary schooler drawing a geographically correct world map from memory for a class of college students went viral on social media. A year and a half later, Zachary puts his steady hand and precise memory to use in a different way, creating calligraphic signs used to promote a local thrift store where the profits benefit individuals with disabilities.

The gig is practically a family affair for Zachary. The store, Finders Keepers at 47 Main Street in Mount Morris, is owned and operated by The Arc of Livingston-Wyoming. Zachary, who is on the autism spectrum, attended The Arc’s KidStart program from the time that he was 9 months old until age 12.

The foundations of sign creation, such as working with letters and fonts, aren’t new for Zachary, according to Ruth Herring, his one-to-one aide during his earliest years at KidStart.

“I remember that he had a laptop. He would change the font on it, and then write with chalk on the playground in that exact font,” she says. “He signed Walt Disney’s signature just the way that Walt did.”

Chalk art has played a pivotal role in Zachary’s development, so it’s only appropriate that his Finders Keepers signs are styled as miniature chalkboards inside of frames.

“Pretty much before he could speak, he was writing,” explains Jani Lewis, Zachary’s mom. “At age 2 ½, he wrote the word ‘tree’ in chalk on the driveway. Mark (Zachary’s dad) and I couldn’t believe it. Zachary didn’t really speak until he was 4.”

Flash forward to 2016. Zachary’s style had evolved, but his canvas of choice remained the same. As part of the ritual of walking their dog Gerty along Woodbine Park in Geneseo, he would leave elaborately

**CELEBRATION!**

A fun time was had by all at the 5th annual Arc of Livingston-Wyoming Residential Program Picnic, held September 14 in Mount Morris. The event was part of Direct Support Professional Recognition Week, during which The Arc celebrated the dedication and caring of DSPs throughout the agency.

The Arc Residential team thanks you for your support.
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I have come home from the NYSARC state meeting and The Arc national meeting with a reinforced dedication to make sure all our “Arc family” members including the people we serve, families, friends, and community members speak out loud and often to the governor, local, state and federal legislators and the community at large to demand financial funding that supports a living wage for our employees. We need to let them know that we have superior Vocational and Residential programs that need support to grow and adapt as the population we serve changes.

I have talked with people across the state and nation, and we all share the concern of financial support for our Direct Care living wages as well as Residential development. We have to speak longer and louder for our employment choice needs as well as KidStart funding as these programs are not as universal as others, but just as important.

When we all speak the same message, our voice becomes loud and clear as one united message of support for our folks with disabilities. Make our representatives accountable! They have spoken at meetings and visits that they support our cause; now is the time for actions to speak louder than words!

If you can write just one letter, write to Governor Cuomo and tell him to put the $45 million to fund our top quality programs in his budget. He needs to hear from every single one of you. Join our chorus. If you like writing letters, they are an important way to communicate with our legislators. Write to all of them, and talk to them when you see them.

Please, do not leave this just to those of us that sit on the board or work for The Arc; we need everyone to participate to help us continue to provide the top notch programs at The Arc of Livingston-Wyoming.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

With over 700 employees focused on empowering more than 1,100 individuals, The Arc of Livingston-Wyoming is the largest private, not-for-profit human services agency in this area. But even as a very large agency that provides services from birth to end-of-life, our local efforts are part of a larger picture.

I was reminded of our significance both statewide and nationally throughout the month of October during a whirlwind of travel that included stops at the NYSARC Board of Governors meeting in Albany and The Arc of the United States’ National Convention & International Forum in Orlando.

NYSARC is our state organization, and it is the largest agency for people with disabilities in the state. Similarly, The Arc is the largest national organization in our field. But there are significant differences between the two organizations, and with the way our local agency integrates into each.

The NYSARC conference discussed Governance, Financial Sustainability, Mergers and Branding – all topics driven by the squeezing of Medicaid funding and the need for NYSARC and its chapters to adapt by being more nimble, efficient and visible.

That was a very different focus and perspective from the national Arc convention that was held the following week, where my days were mostly spent attending sessions about different Position Statements of the national Arc for 2017. This year, all of these Positions were approved by NYSARC – but that has not always been the case.

Many Arcs around the country do not provide Direct Care as we do in New York State, and instead only provide Advocacy to the field. Sometimes their views can be idealistic and not realistic, which can lead to headaches for those agencies that do provide Direct Care. Work center employment is one example.

It is critical that the Arc chapters in New York participate in the dialog with the national Arc to help create Position Statements that represent all the interests and abilities of the individuals we serve, as we did with your support during this busy, productive October.

Looking Good!

Have you seen The Arc’s gorgeous Center Street, Geneseo house lately? Check out these before-and-after pics and marvel at the work of an awesome maintenance department. The Arc is proud to be part of this area’s beautiful local communities!
time home on the SUNY Geneseo campus to a planned stadium project, and campaign, the first in The Arc's 50-year history. KidStart had lost its long-

School. Chief among his responsibilities: managing an $800,000 capital two months after retiring from his position as Principal at Dansville Primary

Center was far from Chris' mind in 2007, when he was part of a volunteer Award, for a career spent enriching children's lives, including five years as

CEC with its 2016 Excellence in Leadership

Reserve your spot by contacting Arc of Livingston-Wyoming Public

Santa is coming to town.

ho! ho! ho!

Breakfast with Santa is December 10

Santa Claus is coming to town.

Who's that party animal!? The one-and-only Bill Gee, of the Avon Fire Department provided entertainment Halloween night as trick or treaters feasted on cider and donuts.

Congratualtions to Arc Board of Directors Member Eric Parker on his retirement from M&T Bank. The Board celebrated with cake at its November meeting. Wishing you all the best, Eric!

The Saunders brothers (Dan, Mark, and Steve) were among the extended Arc family who visited the agency booth at the Wyoming County (Pike) Fair this August.

Arc Board member Scott Kamakaris provided his world famous chil to attendees of the Harvest Fest food tasting event, held September 21 is Warsaw. KidStart kid Rivers Thomas was clearly a fan.

Departments throughout The Arc, including Finance and Human Resources, showed their Halloween spirit this October 31st.
Rick Young: Outstanding Performer

Rick Young learned his work ethic from his parents, who run a general store and restaurant while caring for a family of 14 adopted children, several of whom have special needs.

“Something my dad always says is, ‘If the sun is up, there’s always something to do,’” says Rick, whose days are split between family responsibilities and earning his keep as mechanic for The Arc of Livingston-Wyoming’s lawn and maintenance crews.

Rick was recently honored as an Outstanding Performer by New York State Industries for the Disabled (NYSID) in their annual William B. Joslin Outstanding Performance Awards. He has worked in Arc maintenance for about four years, after transferring out of the Hilltop work center, which focuses primarily on assembly and packaging.

“Starting with almost no experience, Rick has learned painting skills, carpentry skills, mechanical skills, electrical skills, and more,” says Bob Haslett, Rick’s job coach. “The maintenance staff has been great at giving Rick almost endless opportunities to learn and they have been rewarded by Rick becoming proficient and reliable enough to be left alone for some tasks at some work locations unsupervised knowing the job will be done and done right when they return.”

“I’m used to working outdoors,” Rick explains, with a smile. “It’s my natural habitat.”

Rick resides in a sparsely populated area about 12 miles outside of Dansville, NY. An unpaved road leads to the Young family’s property, where Rick lives independently in a trailer near his childhood home. Rick, who is the second oldest of the Young clan, had shared the trailer with his older brother until recently, when Rick’s sibling moved away to an apartment of his own.

Much of Rick’s spare time is spent helping his dad with outdoor projects such as splitting wood, and much of his paycheck benefits his younger brothers and sisters through rent paid to his family. Without the benefit of a roommate to share in expenses, every dollar counts.

“My paycheck is important. Most of it goes toward rent, bills, and food. I’m living on corn dogs,” Rick says. “I save the little bit that I have left. I put it in the bank.”

Rick’s positive attitude and can-do spirit resonates with those who work most closely with him.

“He’s pretty self-sufficient,” says Maintenance Manager Marc Strain, who supervises Rick on a day-to-day basis. “He tries to figure out how to do new things. If he doesn’t get it at first, he asks questions, and doesn’t just give up on it.”

Keeping true to his dad’s advice, Rick Young is up with the sun each day (without an automobile or driver’s license, his commute via Arc buses can be up to an hour). And he doesn’t stop until the job is done. To Rick, it’s just “in my nature.”

“I get to wake up with a smile, knowing that I’m going to accomplish something good,” he says. “And I get to better myself every day.”

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Arc Achievements

Congratulations to Arc Board President Cheryl Englert. On September 8, Sherry received the Epke-Meagher Volunteer Award at the Central Western Zone, New York State Retired Teachers’ Association Luncheon. This award is given to a newly retired teacher “who has shown exemplary service and leadership in their school and community”. Thank you, Sherry, for your years of volunteering at the Arc of Livingston-Wyoming and for making a difference in the lives of the individuals we serve.

The Arc of Livingston-Wyoming was a finalist in the Livingston County Chamber of Commerce’s Business Excellence Awards, which were presented at the Chamber’s block party September 28 in Geneseo.

Initial nominations were sought in August and finalists were determined by popular vote on Facebook and other social media. More than 2,100 votes were cast to determine the finalists. In the Large Business of the Year category, which recognized businesses with more than 25 employees, the finalists were The Arc, Once Again Nut Butter of Nunda, and Partyman Catering of Avon.

A Chamber committee selected Partyman Catering as the winner.
“Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt.” This is the motto of the Special Olympics, which has inspired athletes worldwide to face challenges head-on and succeed outside of their everyday comfort zone.

Kim Deiter, Hannah Brown, and Miranda Snyder brought the Special Olympic spirit to Geneseo October 22, by tackling a 3.1 mile course at the Ramon Rocha 5K Run/Walk to benefit The Arc. As Special Olympic athletes who also receive services from The Arc, they saw it as a way to support a good cause, while setting a good example.

“It’s about believing in yourself,” Hannah says. “Don’t tell yourself that you can’t do something, because maybe you can, and maybe it will make you happy.”

“The first time I did it, it was incredible just to finish,” adds Miranda, who has taken part in the race annually since 2007. “I thought that I was going to pass out at the finish line, but I got through it and I had fun. Now I just do it; I don’t care if anyone else is ahead of me or behind me.”

Miranda is a proud walker, with no aspiration to run – she typically finishes the route in about an hour – and her steady, measured approach has benefitted her greatly. Participation in the Run/Walk inspired her to branch out to other forms of exercise, eat better, and as a result she has lost about 10 pounds over the past year.

Kim also chose to walk this year, although she has run the race in the past. Her personal best time came in 2010, when she ended the race in 43 minutes flat, and cracked the top 100 finishers at number 98.

“It felt very long, and I felt very tired, but it was well worth it,” Kim says. “It was really good to have people at the finish line, cheering for me. I will run it again.”

“We’re not really worried about how long it takes us to finish,” says walking partner Hannah. “We just listen to music, talk, and have a good time. Walking, for me, helps to clear your mind from things that you might have stress over.”

So what would these Special Olympians recommend to a first-time 5K participant?

“I would be willing to push them or guide them,” Kim says. “I would also remind them that there’s pizza and prizes at the finish line – and lots of people cheering. There will be something waiting for you.”

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**Ramon Rocha 5K Run/Walk - October 22**

Paul Relstab was the overall fastest finisher, with a time of 17:51.48.

Catherine Staley was the female with the fastest feet, at 20:47.56. By the way, she’s 9 years old!

For the first time, the Ramon Rocha 5K Run/Walk featured a Halloween theme. Casey VanZandt and Miranda Snyder sported two of the most creative costumes.

Hot dog! Heather Bump was a wiener and a winner at the Ramon Rocha 5K Run/Walk.

Race Director Jeff Thomas was the Frankenstein Monster, and Lisa Irwin was somewhere inside that bear costume.

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LEARN MORE AT WWW.LWARC.ORG
Ho! Ho! Ho! 
**BREAKFAST WITH SANTA IS DECEMBER 10**

Mark your calendar for Breakfast with Santa, 9:00am Saturday, December 10 at KidStart, 5871 Groveland Station Road in Mt. Morris.

The festive family event will include food and drink, crafts, games, music, and individual visits with Santa Claus.

Breakfast with Santa is free and open to the public. Children must be accompanied by a parent or other adult guardian. Families are encouraged to donate a non-perishable food item to benefit local families in need through The Arc’s holiday food drive.

Reserve your spot by contacting Arc of Livingston-Wyoming Public Relations Specialist Suzanne Johnsen at (585) 658-2828 or sjohnsen@lwarc.org by Monday, November 28.

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**CHRIS LYNCH**

On November 5, Chris Lynch was honored by the New York State Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) with its 2016 Excellence in Leadership Award, for a career spent enriching children’s lives, including five years as Director of The Arc’s KidStart program.

The prospect of directing an inclusive not-for-profit Early Childhood Center was far from Chris’ mind in 2007, when he was part of a volunteer crew serving meals to thousands of Hurricane ravaged residents in Biloxi, MS. But it was on that fateful trip that Chris decided to devote his retirement years to service, which laid the foundation for his future with KidStart.

Chris joined the KidStart team as a Consultant in September 2010, just two months after retiring from his position as Principal at Dansville Primary School. Chief among his responsibilities: managing an $800,000 capital campaign, the first in The Arc’s 50-year history. KidStart had lost its long-time home on the SUNY Geneseo campus to a planned stadium project, and a new school would need to be built to ensure seamless continuation services for area children.

That successful campaign would set the tone for Chris’ subsequent years at KidStart. He came aboard full-time in 2011 as Director, in a second career that has been characterized by inclusion, compassion, and professionalism.

The Lehman Building in Groveland is a school that Chris literally helped to build, and it embodies all that is important to him – a place where children feel safe, accepted, loved, and respected; a place where the windows are low and let in the sunshine; where the toys, materials, and furniture are just the right size; a place with a predictable routine that includes fun, exciting learning activities; a place where caring adults are excited to listen, play, and help little ones solve any problems. The same holds true of KidStart’s Dansville location, where Chris recently spearheaded a significant expansion.

Most every day, “Mr. Lynch” (as the kids call him) can be found unloading buses, and generally comforting children with the calm, positive approach of a Counselor, a job that he held in the Geneseo School District during the 1980s and 90s. Chris knows practically every KidStart child by name, in a population of more than 200 young children.

Outside of the classroom, Chris is an outstanding ambassador, both professionally and in his personal life. He sees KidStart as a community resource, and facilitates cooperative relationships with groups such as Genesee Valley Educational Partnership, Genesee Community College, and other area colleges. His professional affiliations include the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and School Administrators Association of New York State.

Children and families routinely benefit from Chris’ 15 years of leadership experience as a Primary School Principal, at Dansville Primary School and Livonia Primary School. He has also held positions as Teacher, Counselor and Director of Pupil Personnel Services in his career in education that spans 35 years. Staff often joke with him about “six degrees of separation” – everyone knows Chris Lynch!

On the topic of staff, Chris is committed to being a good employer by supporting mentoring programs and other staff development activities. All-staff conference days are held every year, on topics such as Yoga, Sensory Issues, and Nurturing Hearts. Children are the ultimate beneficiaries of the knowledge gained by staff at these important skill-building events.

Most significantly, Chris is an advocate for children. He works diligently with Coordinators to create an environment that is inclusive to all children through programs as diverse as Day Care, Early Intervention, Evaluation Services, Special Services, and Head Start. Through constant development and improvement of programs for children with diverse needs, Chris and his staff create and maintain what can only be described as a true Early Childhood Center.

Congratulations, Chris! And thank you for your service.
**Representative Collins Visits Hilltop**

US Congressman Chris Collins met with Arc parents, board members, self advocates and staff November 1, followed by a tour of the Hilltop work center in Mount Morris. The topic of the day was employment choice for individuals with disabilities. “We were very encouraged by the Congressman’s commitment to Hilltop and people with disabilities,” Hilltop Director Kellie Kennedy said, after the visit.

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designed inspirational chalk art messages on the driveway of family friends Kellie and Larry Kennedy, and their three daughters.

The unconventional text messages piqued Kellie’s interest, not just personally but professionally. Kellie oversees Finders Keepers as part of her role as Director of Day Services at The Arc.

She began leaving out chalk for Zachary, his designs became more elaborate, and the two moms would periodically discuss their kids’ lives and future plans.

“The ‘a-ha!’ moment was when Jani said that her dream was for Zach to work doing signs for Wegmans,” Kellie says. “At the same time, we were having meetings to discuss signage at Finders Keepers. I thought about my driveway and how perfect it would be for Zach to do our signs.”

“I think I said that I would drag Zachary up to Wegmans the minute he turns 16 and say, ‘Put him to work,’” Jani elaborates, with a laugh.

It’s easy to envision Zachary’s eye catching designs promoting prepared food or produce specials for the supermarket giant. But his meticulous, playful lettering style also fits Finders Keepers’ upscale thrift ambiance, which is largely the vision of local artist and Arc employee Ellen Friedler. Ellen and others have expressed excitement at bringing Zachary’s international sensibilities into the store. His intense appreciation for maps and flags informs much of his artwork.

Zachary developed a passion for geography through books like Laurie Keller’s “Scrambled States of America” and computer games such as “Stack the States.” Today, an entire room in Jani and Mark’s home is dedicated to international flags, of which Zachary has a collection of 160. He can name without hesitation the capitals of all 50 US states, and most countries.

And then there’s that viral post, in which Zachary’s map drawing skills leave the jaws of an entire SUNY Geneseo geography class collectively dropped. It has been viewed millions of times, on virtually every social media platform – just Google “autistic boy draws world map from memory” to see.

“I continue to hear stories about that,” Jani says, adding that they originate everywhere from a coffee shop in Indiana to multiple points in Europe.

When asked by television executives for Zachary to reenact his feat, the family has politely declined. But he will repeat it at SUNY Geneseo. Jani is Associate Professor of Biology there, and it gives her the opportunity to speak with students on the topic of autism in a setting that is comfortable for Zachary.

She doesn’t feel that Zachary has a photographic mind, as many have suggested to her. Instead, Jani credits Zachary’s ability for “isolated concentration.” Whether he is studying a map, series of fonts, or another of his passions, Zachary has the ability to shut out all outside distractions.

“Zach does what I think students ideally should do when he studies,” she says. “He enjoys it. He fixates on detail, and it’s like sheer joy to him.”

Zachary entered an integrated 7th grade classroom at Geneseo Central School this fall, assisted by a one-to-one aide. Between his positive experiences at school and outside ventures such as Finders Keepers, his parents are optimistic about his future, and hopeful that society will continue to give amazing kids the opportunity to shine.

“With a kid on the spectrum, you’re always thinking (things like) ‘Will he be able to drive?’ and ‘Can he maintain work?’” Jani says. “But Zachary continues to surprise us with what he can do.”
Stand Up for Direct Support!

The care that The Arc’s Direct Support Professionals provide to individuals with developmental disabilities, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is critical. DSPs deserve fair compensation for their hard, life-changing work. Unfortunately, over the last eight years, State funding for developmental disability organization staff wages has only increased once.

As part of the #bFair2DirectCare Coalition, The Arc of Livingston-Wyoming is calling on Albany to address this issue before the next state budget is adopted on April 1, 2017.

Many of our members have asked how you can help. One very meaningful way is to call Governor Andrew Cuomo at (518) 474-1041 and press 3 to speak to an assistant.

Say: “Governor Cuomo, it’s time to recognize the skills and knowledge of the staff that support people with disabilities with better wages! There is a staffing crisis as non-profit agencies struggle to staff programs. New York has promised to make these programs available. Be fair to direct care and put stabilization funding in your budget so programs for people with disabilities aren’t in jeopardy!”