

Northern Chesapeake Arc raising awareness of those with disabilities

March 1 marks the beginning of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region will be joining with people and chapters across the country to raise awareness about issues facing those with disabilities.

To observe this month, The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region will be promoting the news and sharing stories at various activities in the community with the goal to promote and protect the rights of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, stories like Jason Coffman, of Harford County, and his recycler position that opened the door to a micro-enterprise opportunity.

Jason teamed up with the Rapid Refill branch in Bel Air, where he works as an ink cartridge recycler and is responsible for collecting recycled ink cartridges from more than 20 different clients including schools, churches and small businesses. Jason's parents have supported this venture from day one by purchasing a cart to assist him on his route and his dad has accompanied Jason on routes and is helping to grow his business contacts. Likewise, the Employment Services staff at The Arc has helped Jason grow business prospects in the Harford County business community, assist with transportation and one on one job coaching.

Through the leadership at Rapid Refill, support from The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region and his parents, Jason has the opportunity to achieve his goals, be successful as an employee, and establish and grow his own business at a pace that suits his needs as well as his employer.

Over the last 60 years, The Arc of the United States and its network of more than 700 chapters across the country have made tremendous progress in promoting and protecting the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It is due greatly to the advocacy efforts of The Arc that President Ronald Reagan officially declared March to be Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in 1987.

In 2008, only 46 percent of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who were eligible to vote actually did so. Together chapters of The Arc nationwide are working to educate candidates about the issues that matter most to the intellectual and developmental disabilities community. The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region is working to engage voters and candidates throughout Harford, Cecil, and Kent counties during the crucial months leading up to Election Day. Individuals with disabilities have the right to vote, and the goal of the campaign is to encourage them not only to vote but to speak out about the topics that are important to them.

By supporting The Arc's "We've Got The Power!" campaign, The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region is working to engage voters and candidates throughout Harford, Cecil, and Kent counties during the crucial months leading up to Election Day.

Shawn Kros, executive director, adds, "Many individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities live and work in Harford, Cecil, and Kent county communities and are valued members of these communities. In this pivotal election year, The Arc is joining national efforts to raise awareness about disability related policy on the campaign trail."



Jason Coffman

