

HEATHER GARRIS NAMED DSP OF THE YEAR 2026

We are proud to announce that Heather Garris has been chosen as the Arc of Blackstone Valley's Direct Support Professional of the Year! Heather, Assistant Program Manager at Tim Healey Way, has been a dedicated member of The Arc of Blackstone Valley since 1997. For nearly three decades, she has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the individuals she supports through her compassion, professionalism, and dedication. Heather is a positive role model who consistently goes above and beyond to ensure the needs of the individuals she supports are met. Her commitment to excellence and person-centered care makes her truly deserving of this recognition.

The individuals Heather supports shared that she is always there to help them, treats them with respect, encourages them to experience new things, and supports them in building meaningful relationships within their community. They also describe her as genuinely kind and caring. These qualities reflect the lasting, positive impact she has on the lives of those she supports every day. Congratulations, Heather, and THANK YOU for your outstanding service, unwavering dedication, and the difference you make each and every day!



Updates from Flying Shuttles

Shri Yoga commissioned the artists of Flying Shuttles Art and Weaving Studio to create an outdoor work of art to display in front of the Pine Street building. Support from Navigant Credit Union made the project possible. The design is inspired by Valentine's Day artwork created by Flying Shuttles artists, which Alison Bologna felt perfectly represented the values of Shri. John, Brenda, and other artists worked throughout the summer to bring the design to life on the large canvas, which is now proudly displayed for the whole community to enjoy.



Direct Support Professional Recognition Week

Direct Support Professional Recognition Week 2026 is being held from September 13th through 19th. It is a weeklong celebration of Direct Support Professionals accomplishments not only across the country, but also in Rhode Island, and more specifically right here at The Arc of Blackstone Valley.

One week is not nearly enough to properly thank our Direct Support Professionals for the selfless work they do 365 days a year. These dedicated professionals work tirelessly every day of the year providing thoughtful and compassionate supports to individuals and their families that receive services from The Arc of Blackstone Valley.

We rely upon Direct Support Professionals not only to care for individuals but also to provide essential support to help keep individuals connected to their family and community while enabling them to lead successful lives that are rich and meaningful.

This year, in honor and recognition of Direct Support Professional Recognition Week, one of the ways The Arc of Blackstone Valley will celebrate our Direct Support Professional's is by having a full day of activities that includes a car wash for our direct support workers supported by management and administrative personnel, raffle prizes, yummy empanadas provided by Matilda's food catering truck, followed by Palagis Ice Cream.



July is Disability Pride Month

Disability Pride Month is observed every July. This year's theme, chosen by The Arc's National Council of Self-Advocates, was "The World Works Better With Us." The theme reminds us that everyone benefits when people with disabilities are included, respected, and supported. Accessibility features such as audiobooks, voice dictation, closed captioning, and curb cuts were introduced to support people with disabilities and have become relied on and appreciated by many. Disability Pride Month is always a great opportunity to celebrate disability identity and achievement, while also challenging misconceptions, stereotypes, and discrimination.

Citizens With Power Elect New Leadership Team

In June, Citizens with Power, The Arc of Blackstone Valley's group of self-advocates, met to elect a new leadership team. This special activity happens every two years. Elected members can hold the same position for up to two terms. During the voting, members discussed the characteristics of a good leader and what they hope to accomplish in the next year.



From left to right: Vice President Richard, President John, Treasurer Paula, Secretary Jenn, and Board of Directors Representative Julia

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) which is an annual event held every October to celebrate the contributions of America's workers with disabilities and promote inclusive employment practices. Led by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, the 2026 theme is "Celebrating Value and Talent". Although the month of October highlights Disability Employment Awareness, for our very own Employment department here at The Arc of Blackstone Valley, this is something we celebrate daily!

Our Employment department, led by Employment Services Manager Nayib Batista, currently serves approximately thirty-five participants with their employment needs. These needs range from learning how to write resumes, mock interviews, community-based work experiences, to job applications, real interviews, job coaching on site, and all the way to retention (checking in with the employer monthly). Our Employment staff work tirelessly to ensure that the folks we support not only find a job that matches them but that the job itself is inclusive, treating them with dignity and respect as they do to all employees.

Our employment department is currently hiring! If you or someone you know is interested in becoming an Employment Specialist, please feel free to contact Ashley Lawton, Director of Employment and Community Services via email at alawton@bvcriarc.org and Nayib and myself will be happy to meet with you!

What are the goals of NDEAM?

- Education: Informing workplaces and the public about disability employment needs and value.
- Inclusion: Highlighting policies that ensure equal employment opportunities.
- Accessibility: Encouraging barrier-free recruitment, hiring, and onboarding

HISTORY OF NDEAM:

- 1945: Started as a weeklong observance called "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week".
- 1962: "Physically" was dropped from the title to recognize all types of disabilities.
- 1988: Congress expanded the observance to a full month and named it NDEAM.

