

Bradford Arc transitioning to new vision – Nonprofit celebrating 50 years

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The Arc of Bradford County’s executive director said his group is undergoing a radical change in outlook, transforming from a nonprofit with a specific mission into a group that takes on challenges from a wide array of community needs.

John Williams said the organization’s 50th anniversary is the perfect time to expand the group’s focus.

“I tell people all the time,” said Williams, “we’ve got this one little table that we’ve been sitting at for the last 50 years, and unless people come to our table, they don’t really know what’s going on. But we’re a part of the community, so we should be sitting at every table. We should be involved with everything that’s going on because not only does it promote access for the people we’re serving, but it also gives the community the opportunity to see the people that we’re serving for who they are and what they can be a part of.”

One project the Arc is participating in this holiday season is a Christmas Shop at Keystone Heights High School. In partnership with Community Partnerships with Schools, the Starke-based nonprofit organizes and catalogs Christmas gifts so families may purchase them at up to a 70% discount.

Williams said the event is an example of the Arc contributing to the community instead of only seeking contributions from the community.



The Arc’s woodshop is expanding its inventory to include raised planters, picnic tables, and Christmas yard decorations, which John Williams displays here. This will allow the shop to offer more products to the general public.

Expanded business operations

The group is also re-evaluating one of its primary revenue sources.

For years, the facility’s woodshop has supported the Arc’s clients. The shop primarily produces survey stakes and pallets.

“We’re generally doing between \$40,000 and \$50,000 a month Williams said, “So it’s a big production that we have here.”

He added that when the housing market is strong, revenues are healthy.

“It really is beneficial for us, and it’s a great way for our consumers to have a job,” he added. “They all make minimum wage. They live on their own, so it’s a way for them to support themselves, along with any third-party benefits that they get.”

Williams said that many of the woodshop workers would likely not be successful without the support they receive from Arc staff while working there.

Now, the woodshop is expanding its inventory to include raised planters, picnic tables, and Christmas yard decorations to offer more products to the general public.

50th Anniversary

Williams said that with the organization’s 50th anniversary, the group’s leadership wants to raise the public profile of the Arc.

“I’ve had several meetings with people recently who said they had no idea who we are,” Williams recalled. “They’ve said, ‘I’ve driven by your building a hundred times. Never knew you existed, never knew what you did.’ And so, we’re trying to connect with the community and become a resource hub.”

“I believe our consumers and clients have so much to offer to the community, but the community doesn’t realize they’re here,” he continued. “So, we’re working on ways to engage the community.”

Williams has several events planned to commemorate next year’s 50th anniversary, including a membership drive in January and a car show the following month. In March, the nonprofit will emphasize a Month of Giving to coincide with its annual meeting. In April, the group plans a progressive dinner and participation in the Clay County Fair. A gala is penciled in for July, and a fall festival is scheduled for September, which features the Cow Patty Bingo.

A joint venture with the Woman’s Club is on the drawing board for October. The Arc plans to replicate the Lake Butler Rotary Club’s veteran’s cross project in November, in which the names of local veterans are written on white crosses and placed along a busy highway, along with American flags.

The Arc plans to repeat its David Dodge Cake Auction in December 2025. The event is named after the late David Dodge, a long-time board member who advocated for the organization on the state and local levels.

“We wanted to kind of commemorate his legacy and so we renamed this fundraiser and his honor,” Williams said. “It’s a great, great night. Our consumers perform Christmas carols and skits, and then we’ve got the cake auction.”

50 cents a month

The January fundraising drive has a unique feature: donors may pledge as little as 50 cents a month.

“Everybody can do 50 cents,” Williams said.

The Arc’s website also offers monthly commitments of \$19.95, \$50 and \$100.

“But if everyone gets on board with it,” added the executive director, “if I’ve got a thousand people who give 50 cents a month, that’s 500 bucks a month, that’s six grand a year.”

Williams said he wants as many people as possible to support the Arc’s efforts to assist individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and its other community efforts.

From coaching to group homes

The Arc provides its consumers with a variety of day services.

One is a life skill development program that teaches a variety of daily living activities. A second is mental health services. Williams said that around 25% of the general population has mental health diagnoses or concerns. That percentage rises to 60% for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. The Arc offers psychological rehabilitation to those who need help.

For consumers who live in their own homes, the Arc provides coaches who visit them and help them pay bills, go to doctor’s appointments, shop, and complete other tasks.

Other individuals need more help, and the Arc provides someone to stay with them while the other household members leave for work.

The Arc also runs group homes that offer housing to some consumers.

50 years of change

Like other nonprofits and governments, the Arc received additional funding during the COVID years, which masked increasing costs. However, that funding decreased over the last few years, and the Arc recorded a \$450,000 deficit last year. The sale of a piece of property and a tax credit got the organization through the crisis. Williams added that the Arc has operated at deficits in four of his six years in Starke.

He said the financial challenges are another reason to expand the organization’s outlook, adding that many similar agencies across Florida are losing money.

Williams said that since the Arc of Bradford County was established in 1975, providing services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities has changed.

Staffing has changed, the funding models have changed, and the needs of the consumers have changed. Williams said the transformation in focus he oversees now is simply another iteration of the changes that will constantly challenge his organization.

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