

## **The Arc of the Triangle Communication Audit**

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## **Executive Summary**

As a part of the Public Relations Writing course at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, we were given the opportunity to work with the nonprofit organization The Arc of the Triangle. Our APPLES team of four is made up of Susanna Lauten, Sam Pittman, Reina He, and Mahika Kawale. As stated in its mission statement, The Arc of the Triangle, Inc supports children and adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities [I/DD] in the achievement of their personal goals and dreams in our community through partnership and advocacy. The organization has a broad range of members who would like the most efficient form of information as possible. That is why we have a goal to focus in on the aspects of their social media and information distribution that are successful and push further use of those areas.

To start, we visited The Arc of the Triangle offices in Chapel Hill to establish who the organization is. We met with Michelle Foy, the community programs director, and Jennifer Pfaltzgraff, the executive director. Both of them specified that they want an emphasis on photos of their events for social media. The Arc's events, such as the Spooktacular and the holiday gift drive, are a major drawing factor for their members and allow them to raise awareness for the organization. These events help adults with disabilities become more independent as well as entertain the young children. The Arc also uses Facebook almost every day by posting photos, graphics, and feel-good stories. Instagram is also a popular social media outlet for the organization. Twitter is not used very much. The website is used mostly for information as a database for all things about the organization.

With these ideas in mind from the interview with Jennifer and Michelle, the next step was to reach out to the members of The Arc of the Triangle. From the six question survey we sent out, 38 participants responded. The overall responses from the participants were centered around receiving as much information and communication from The Arc on as frequent a basis as possible. The members are also interested in seeing more photographs and hearing more stories from the families involved in The Arc. The events that the members are also very popular among those who took the survey, as the members want more events as well as more information about the events. This all coincides with The Arc responding more frequently and efficiently to their members and their requests. The final request from the participants is the idea of donors being able to automatically donate monthly instead of having to remember to do so on their own.

Our recommendations for The Arc moving forward include adding more photo and video content to their homepage as a means to make the website more appealing as well as to provide an illustration to their mission. According to about 66 percent of the survey respondents, using more photos in The Arc's communication technique was of importance to them. The Arc's social media, particularly Twitter, could be utilized more for more effective communication with their audience. This could also be improved through the inclusion of more photo and video content. Another recommendation is the The Arc can regularly add featured articles into their newsletter as a way to make the content more in-depth. In addition, The Arc could create a social media campaign

around their slogan, "see the person," as a way to highlight stories of individuals with disabilities who have been positively impacted by The Arc.

## **Introduction**

The Arc of the Triangle is a non-profit organization that has offices located in both Raleigh and Chapel Hill from which they operate from on a day-to-day basis. The Arc provides support to children and adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. Through their advocacy, The Arc strives to provide services to individuals with disabilities in the Triangle in order to best aid them in living their fullest lives.

Sixty years ago, in a time where children with disabilities were primarily institutionalized, The Arc was formed by parents who were advocating to keep their children at home. These parents also wanted to educate the public about what it means to have a disability. Community education and awareness is still one of the primary focuses of The Arc to this day.

Jennifer Pfaltzgraff is the Executive Director of the organization, and has been passionate about serving the disabled community after her son was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at 7 months. She has been an extremely valuable member of the organization, and was a key figure in the transition of The Arc of Wake County becoming The Arc of the Triangle.

Some of the services offered by The Arc of the Triangle include Medicaid services, community outreach, supported employment where adults with disabilities are assisted in finding employment within the community, and community group programs. These programs include groups involving supported retirement, self-advocacy, specialized recreation, nutrition and choir. The Arc also plans events to support and strengthen the community such as an annual holiday party and an event called Wings

for Autism, where children and adults with disabilities were given the opportunity to fully experience the process of air travel beginning at the airport and ending in an aircraft.

Some of the other organizations in the Triangle region that also strive to help those in the disability community include the Alliance for Disability Advocates, the Autism Society of North Carolina and The Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities.

In this communication audit, the various tools that The Arc of the Triangle utilizes to relay information to its audience will be assessed for effectiveness and potential improvement. Some of these methods of communication include emails, website design and social media sites. The goal of the audit will be to identify strengths of current communication tactics, as well as find ways to better reach The Arc's mission and support those with disabilities in the Triangle community.

## **Methodology**

The methodology used for this audit was an interview and a Qualtrics survey. The interview was used to establish a relationship with The Arc of the Triangle and understand their overall goals and mission. On two separate occasions, September 18th and 25th. On the 18th, the meeting took place at The Arc of the Triangle office in Chapel Hill with Michelle Foy and Jennifer Pfaltzgraff. On the 25th, the meeting took place at the Starbucks on Franklin Street with Jennifer Pfaltzgraff. The interviews were used to establish what the organization would like to work on moving forward. They expressed a desire to work on producing more photographs and videos for their consumers. They also wanted feedback overall about how people felt about the nonprofit and what they were doing from those who are involved. Based on this information, our group produced a survey to send to those who use the services of The Arc of the Triangle. This survey included six questions regarding how members felt about the nonprofit and their methods of consumers to their audience. This included questions about their newsletters, social media, and general media production. Our APPLES team is planning on using this information to help generate ideas to help The Arc of the Triangle achieve its goals of satisfying its members and those who use its services.

## **Audit Diary**

We had our first meeting with Jennifer Pfaltzgraff, executive director of The Arc of the Triangle on Wednesday, September 18. Mahika Kawale met with Jennifer to learn more about The Arc firsthand and inquire about the organization's current communication initiatives. Mahika learned about The Arc's most used and most effective communication tactics, including a regular newsletter and consistent Facebook posts. The lack of video and photo coverage of the organization's various events was raised as a major point of potential improvement.

One week later on Wednesday, September 25, Sam Pittman and Raina He were able to hold a second meeting with Jennifer Pfaltzgraff. At this meeting, we went more in depth about The Arc's strengths and weaknesses in communication. We were told what The Arc's target audience was (persons over the age of 30). One major concern Jennifer brought up at this meeting was The Arc's work with helping to ensure Medicaid for those that they serve. Ms. Pfaltzgraff mentioned that it was difficult to promote Medicaid via The Arc's platforms because it was seen as an inherently political issue.

On Tuesday, October 1, we finalized a stakeholder survey to send out via The Arc's email list. Items on the survey included rating satisfaction of different forms of communication received from The Arc, open suggestions for improved communication and ranking the forms of communication that stakeholders relied on most. We closed our survey nine days later on Thursday, October 10 after receiving 38 responses.

## Results of the Audit Process

For this communication audit, we used two primary methods of data collection: two in-person interviews with Jennifer Pfaltzgraff and Michelle Foy, in which we discussed the goals of the organization and what aspects they felt they needed our help improving on, and an online survey sent out to The Arc of the Triangle members asking them to evaluate the organization's communications efforts so far and what they thought needed improvement.

A total of 38 people responded to the survey. Out of the respondents 28.9% said they were somewhat satisfied with the communication they've had with The Arc of the Triangle, and 55.3% said they were very satisfied, for a total of 84.2% of positive responses. 5.2% of respondents were very dissatisfied, and 7.9% of respondents were somewhat dissatisfied, for a total of 13.2% of negative responses. (Graph 1) Only 2.63% of respondents said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Specifically regarding the organization's newsletters and online posts, respondents had around the same level of satisfaction on average for both, but greater variance for the newsletter, meaning that there were more people on both ends of the spectrum (very satisfied and very dissatisfied). (Graph 3)

Responses were pretty evenly divided on what was The Arc's most useful communication tool. 23.7% said Facebook/social media, 28.9% said the newsletter,

21.1% said the website, and 15.7% said email (using the fill-in-the-blank “other” option). The newsletter won by a slight margin. (Graph 2)

We also asked respondents how important it was to them that more event photos were included in The Arc’s communications. 38.6% said it was very important and 34.2% said it was somewhat important, for a total of 65.8% of people who thought that more photos were important to some degree. 29% of respondents said it was neither important nor unimportant, while only 5.2% of respondents total said it was unimportant (2.6% each for somewhat unimportant and very unimportant). (Graph 4)

For the final two questions, which were free-response questions about how The Arc could improve its communications and general comments, respectively, there were several themes that were shared by multiple responses or stood out in other ways. They were:

- People wanted frequent, clear, and direct communication from The Arc
- People were interested in seeing more pictures and stories from The Arc members and client families
- People wanted more community outreach events, as well as more updates about existing community outreach events
- It’s important to make sure that everyone who receives services from The Arc gets regular communication, such as in the form of newsletter or emails

- Many people thought it was important to have a easy-to-navigate website with current, regularly-updated information that's delivered in an accessible, easy-to-read manner
- A few people wanted The Arc to respond better or more efficiently to clients when they contact The Arc with a problem
- One person suggested looking into ways for donors to give automatically on a monthly basis

Through the interviews with Jennifer and Michelle, we learned that the primary communication strategies The Arc uses are in-person events, the newsletter, select social media sites, and the website. The in-person events are generally either events that directly serve The Arc's clients—such as the Halloween event at Marbles Kids Museum—or community outreach events that raise awareness about The Arc, its mission, and disability advocacy, such as the Respect the Space initiatives in local schools. The website is primarily informational, with more emphasis on function and content than design. The Arc uses Facebook regularly and Instagram sporadically, but prefers to avoid Twitter. They also use Constant Contact to communicate directly with their clients via email. They have a high click-through-rate for emails.

Some things they would like our APPLES team to help with are: creating content for newsletters, helping with in-person events, and taking photos and videos at events

to create a robust multimedia archive that The Arc can use for publicity or fundraising purposes.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Arc of the Triangle currently has a very simple format for its communications-related activities. That being said, considering the target audience, the organization's communication tactics have been sound. Out of 38 stakeholders that took our survey, only five expressed a negative opinion regarding the quality of the information they receive from The Arc. Similarly, The Arc's newsletters and online posts were rated very favorably, with only two negative opinions for each. The Arc's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are straightforward and point to direct changes in strategy that can be implemented with little to no issue.

The Arc's major strengths include the consistency with which it puts out a newsletter and how it keeps stakeholders informed of upcoming events and key issues online. As we learned in our initial meetings with Jennifer Pfaltzgraff, the newsletters were effective with their audience. In addition, we were informed that they rely much more heavily on Facebook than Twitter as a means of divulging information to stakeholders. This may work for The Arc because their target is most often older than 30 years old and Facebook tends to be the social media outlet of choice for older millennials and generations prior.

Another of The Arc's strengths is the variety of programming it offers as far as educating different young people about people with disabilities and accessible recreation for those with disabilities. For example, The Arc hosts an event called

“Respect the Space” at elementary and middle schools in which organization officials teach children about disabilities and the importance of respecting reserved parking spaces for those with disabilities. In addition, the students are allowed to go outside and decorate the disability parking spaces with sidewalk chalk. Another such event is the annual “Spooktacular” that is hosted in downtown Raleigh designed to give children with physical or cognitive disabilities the opportunity to have a safe and accessible trick-or-treating experience.

Some weaknesses of The Arc of the Triangle include the organization’s lack of utilization of all potential social media platforms, namely Twitter, the dated quality of the organization’s website and the noticeable lack of photos and videos offered online. Photos and videos can be very complementary to a newsletter or other content posted online as they ground a story and make it more real. In the survey we sent to organizational stakeholders, 25 out of 38 respondents (roughly 66 percent) stated that it was either “extremely important” or “somewhat important” to them that more photos and videos were incorporated into organizational communication.

Regarding the dated website, Jennifer Pfaltzgraff stated that that was low on their list to be improved due to the cost and the fact that the current website is getting the job they need from it done well. In light of the survey results, we feel inclined to only make minor changes to the website to meet stakeholder demands rather than look into a complete overhaul. The addition of new photos and videos from various organization

events would do a lot for livening up the website and even new permanent videos and photos about the organization itself would make a great home page addition.

As come with all simpler communications plans, the opportunities for The Arc moving forward are plentiful. We think trying to get more media coverage for various events held by The Arc would be a great opportunity through our internship. Local news outlets constantly do community outreach stories about groups doing good in the area and The Arc could be one of those groups that is covered. The Arc relies in part on donations and media coverage would be another great way to get exposure for the organization that could gain the interest of local philanthropists. Additionally, one of The Arc's goals is educating younger kids about disabilities and being featured in the local news could greatly expand potential for the "Respect the Space" program.

The "Respect the Space" program opens the door for another bigger opportunity. The Arc could also try to partner with school systems as a whole to not only help the students within them that have disabilities but also to educate all students about how they can be an ally for their disabled peers. A partnership such as this would increase visibility of The Arc in the area and help to reach a key demographic in younger parents.

Another opportunity for an improvement in The Arc's communication tactics is the apparent stakeholder desire for more content from The Arc about its events and activities. In our survey, stakeholders showed a demand for the inclusion of photos and

videos on the website and in social media output. Jennifer Pfaltzgraff proposed the possibility of including feature articles in the newsletter rather than just announcements. The opportunity to take the newsletter from being more of an announcement forum to a welcoming information center is very real for The Arc. Most of The Arc's current strategies could be improved simply by way of expansion seeing as the bones for great communication are very much already present.

Threats to The Arc of the Triangle include the political nature of the topic of Medicaid. Because Medicaid is such a big part of what The Arc helps with for the people it serves, it is inherently a big part of what they should be able to advocate for in their communication tactics. That being said, Jennifer said they get some backlash whenever The Arc posts or publishes anything discussing the importance of Medicaid. The backlash includes people claiming they are being too political and that they should stay out of politics and focus on helping those with disabilities. This can be a difficult line to walk to keep from alienating any of your target audience. One thing that we could do to help is potentially starting a miniature campaign of sorts to highlight how The Arc works with Medicaid and why it is important for those with disabilities. Putting the emphasis on how this constantly-politicized issue relates to The Arc's work is key to keeping the organization from looking like it is a politically-charged one.

Our key recommendations for The Arc's communication are to go more in-depth on the newsletter by including such things as feature articles and photos and recaps of

key events, implement video into the organization's website and social media output and start some small social media campaigns highlighting The Arc's work and goals as well as the issues that are close to the organization.

Simply put, the website and social media content need to be spruced up. This can be done very easily through an increase in the number of photos and videos from The Arc's community events online. Keeping your stakeholders updated as fast and in-depth as possible on your activities is key to ensuring the transparency of your organization as well as a sense of security in your stakeholders. This sense of security comes from a feeling of being informed and a feeling that you can trust an organization because they do the best they can to keep you in the loop.

A campaign incorporating The Arc's slogan "See the person" could be an effective way to spread the ideas of what the organization does. Highlighting different people that The Arc serves in social media posts and even writing feature articles on them and their lives are content-driven ways to keeping stakeholders informed about the organization's continued work in the community. Similarly, a campaign about Medicaid and why it is important in allowing The Arc to continue to help in its community without advocating any specific political action or candidates could be an effective way to garner support from the community in regards to funding and volunteering.

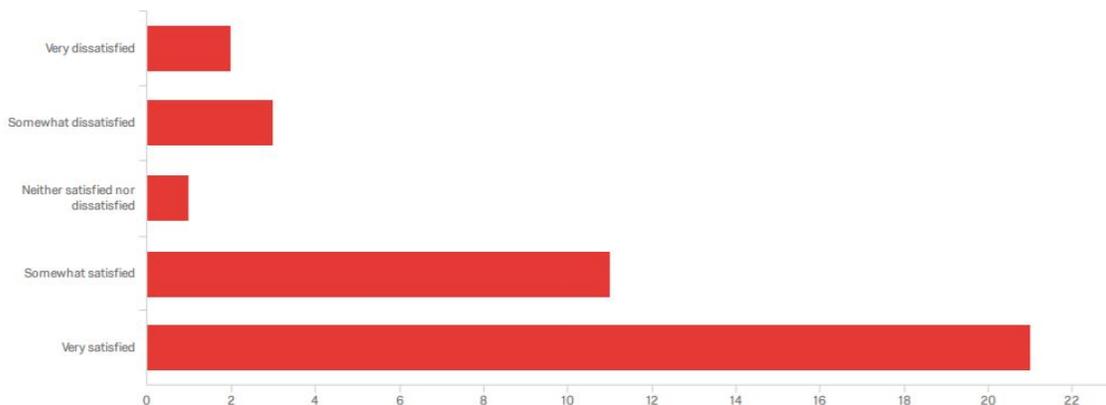
Having a group of interns that can focus solely on the communications aspects of the organization will likely allow the already effective current methods of public

relations to be improved upon and given depth to. We think that more content on The Arc's website and social media platforms as well as in newsletters and mass emails are the key to satisfying stakeholders desire for information and updates as to what the organization is doing and planning. Informed stakeholders are happy stakeholders and the more open and forthcoming you can be with as much information as you can, the happier and more supportive your stakeholders will be in turn.

## Appendix

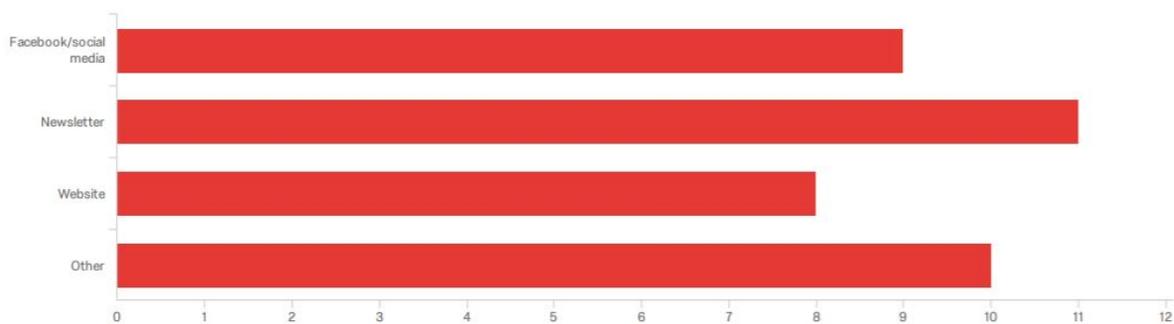
Q1 - How would you rate your satisfaction with the communication you have had with

The Arc of the Triangle?



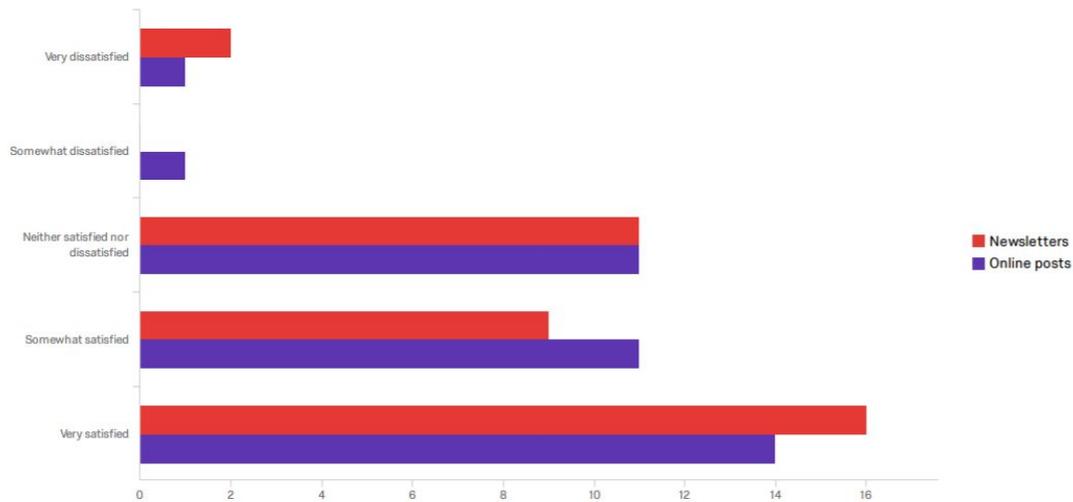
(Graph 1)

Q2 - In your opinion, what is The Arc's most useful communication tool?



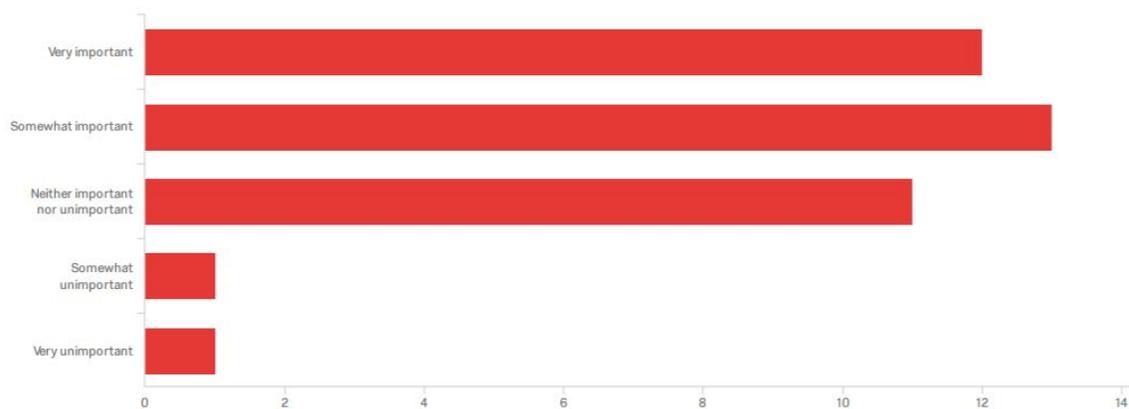
(Graph 2)

Q3 - How informative/helpful would you say you feel The Arc's newsletters/online posts are?



(Graph 3)

Q4 - How important is it to you that more event photos are included in The Arc's communication?



(Graph 4)