

Sunrise group helps those with special needs

More than 650 Adults, children benefit from ARC of Broward.

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Modest means led to the creation of Achievement & Rehabilitation Centers Inc. Broward, which now provides support to more than 650 children and adults with disabilities and employs more than 400 healthcare, educational and other personnel.

A group of concerned parents seeking services for their children at a time

when options were limited, got together and opened two classrooms for children with special needs on Las Olas Boulevard. Incorporated in 1957, the private, nonprofit organization based in Sunrise supports children and adults with mental retardation, Down's syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy and other developmental disabilities. They operate 10 separate sites across the country with 40 vehicles and provide more than 25 different services. There is no minimum or maximum age to obtain services.

Services provided are under five divisions: Children's Services, Adult Habilitation, Workforce

Development Services, Outpatient Health Care Services and Behavioral Health Care Services. Admittance to obtain the center's services depends on each service. Some are free, others are based on a sliding scale and some are paid for privately. Traditional insurance also provides coverage. The organization provides services to consumer's homes; parents can drop off their kids; others are

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A CHANCE TO PLAY: Alex Boeter, 3, plays with his car at the Achievement and Rehabilitation Center.

Staff photo/Yasmine Salem



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transported with ARC's own vehicles and staff.

The program's President and CEO, Dennis Haas, said the staff integrates a therapeutic approach. This is especially apparent in the Children's Services.

"Even on the playground, when we designed the equipment, we determined the height of the steps to walk up to the slide to help kids with mobility. Their games and activities have therapy. They learn through playing how to brush their teeth. There'll be a therapy component on how to grasp a toothbrush," he said.

The philosophy is to try to minimize pulling the

child away from a group. Haas said the idea is to make sure the therapy does not seem like a chore or staged circumstances. Group therapy is integrated with therapeutic instruction to routine school and play activities. With kids, most of the kids with developmental disabilities, or at risk of, some early intervention services are geared to help them get to mainstream. This encompasses very different populations of kids and adults. They may or may not have physical issues, for example, needing breathing or feeding tubes; behavioral issues are all taken into consideration.

Lauderhill residents Kathy and Cory West enrolled their four-and-a-half year-old son Blake

almost two years ago. He receives occupational and physical therapies for cerebral palsy and cortical visual impairment.

"I've seen such a big difference in him since we've been going there. Before, he used to be so nervous around people. He would really freak out and scream all the time," she said.

The Wests now go out to restaurants without concern.

"Being at school, he's been so used to being with people," Kathy said. "The teachers are excellent the therapist are wonderful."

Shawn Preston, director of Children's Services, oversees the entire children's division, including the developmental preschool. She said there are about 80-85 children

enrolled, primarily children with developmental disabilities.

"We provide family and group meetings as well as case management," Preston said. "We offer mental health and behavioral analysis. We have behavioral analysts that go into the homes and teach parents how to implement the programs [in the home]."

Haas said the organization differs from others in that it is a one-stop shop. This helps minimize the need to find and be involved with several agencies, which can be extremely stressful, he said. ARC's mission is to help its consumers go from restrictive and intensive services to being as independent as possible.

"We try to be innovative and stay cutting edge," Haas said. "We are aggressive in our commitment to not being afraid to try new things."

The Rehabilitation Commission and the National Association accredit ARC Broward for the Education of Young Children. The agency is funded by grants, individual and corporate contributions and revenue generated through a broad range of contracts.

For more information about adult and children's services or volunteering, call 954-746-9400.

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