

# Service Provider Promising Practice

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TOPIC:  
Customer Focus and  
Engagement

## Arc of Westchester: Annual Employer Appreciation Breakfast

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### Background

The Arc of Westchester was established in New York State in 1949 as a day school for children with developmental disabilities. It has since grown to over 800 hundred employees serving over 2000 individuals throughout Westchester county supporting children, teens, and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The organization's vision is a world where the population that they serve enjoy fulfilled lives and an inspired future while the mission focuses on strengthening families and encouraging personal choices, abilities and interests. The programs focus on the individual, helping them discover their interests, develop their talents and prepare for meaningful careers. The Arc of Westchester holds an annual employer appreciation breakfast, whereby the Arc recognizes the role and contribution of employers in the creation of meaningful integrated employment experiences. Employers are acknowledged through awards, which are given out during a breakfast celebration and accompanied by personal success stories.

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### Implementation

The first step in organizing the event involves the selection of speakers, which are typically a combination of employees and/or other stakeholder representatives such as employers, other members of the business community, government officials, community leaders etc. Special employer categories are established such as newest employer, oldest employer, and each is recognized for their contribution to both the individuals' and program's success. Both individuals and the employers share success stories to demonstrate what is possible to other attendees. Breakfast is served free to all who attend.

The Arc invites between 250 to 400 people and often takes place in a hotel to accommodate the crowd give it a grander feel. The Arc sends out a press release about the event, and local newspapers are often courted to cover the story. The Arc encourages each participant and honoree to invite a guest to the breakfast, especially one that is unfamiliar with the work of the Arc and involved in a local business. This strategy serves to expand the Arc's membership as well as create employment and networking opportunities for the people it serves.

During the annual employer breakfast event, awards are given out, alongside celebrations and films, which tell success stories of how hiring an individual from the Arc has increased business efficiency, positively impacting their bottom line. The employers testify and tell the stories themselves at the event.



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## Impact

The event provides an opportunity for employers to share their success stories with other employers in order to further encourage the hiring of individuals with disabilities in the local community. It also provides an opportunity to publicize the work of the Arc of Westchester, while recognizing and rewarding accomplishments of the business partners. Individual strengths, capabilities and accomplishments are highlighted as part of the storytelling, which create momentum and engagement. The stories show practical examples of the meaningful impact of persons with disabilities in the work place, and increase awareness of the positive impact that people with ID can have. Finally, the breakfast recognizes the important and ongoing role of employers in moving individuals out of the workshop during an organizational transformation process.

**AOW website: <https://www.arcwestchester.org/>**

**For more information on this practice contact [thinkwork@umb.edu](mailto:thinkwork@umb.edu)**



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