

Dear Arc of Westchester Member and Friend,

A big brother is supposed to watch out for his little brother, but I know I could not possibly fulfill my role without your help, and I want to tell you how grateful I am to you as a supporting member of Arc of Westchester.

My mother passed away 18 years ago, and I'm now Lee's guardian. I visit Lee whenever I can, and I've seen his life at Croton House up close. It's hard for me to imagine a better place for Lee to live.

When Lee and I were growing up, his behavior put an extra burden on my parents, but otherwise we had a pretty normal childhood with the usual chaos of three kids and a house full of dogs, cats, fish, snakes and other critters.

Lee was 16 — the year I left for college — when it was no longer possible for my parents to care for him at home. He's lived in supportive residences ever since.

At Croton House, Lee found a true home. He didn't lose his family — my sister and me — he gained an even bigger family. Steven, the manager at Croton House, formed a special bond with Lee and that relationship has opened up my brother's life in so many ways.

This became especially clear recently when Lee began to complain about leg pain and didn't want to walk.

Lee is outgoing and loves to be active, and to go on trips and outings with his Arc family. So it was heartbreaking to see pain hindering his ability to walk and take part in the activities and trips of Croton House.

Steven took Lee swimming a couple of times a week to see if that kind of low-impact exercise would help. When it didn't help, he took Lee to a doctor.

But Lee struggles to communicate sometimes, so it was hard for him to describe the pain he was having. The doctor thought it was Lee's knee, but scans didn't show any problems. Steven kept pressing the doctor, and even got Lee a different doctor when the first one wasn't making any progress.

Eventually, they figured out that what Lee has is a very bad hip.

So Steven and the Arc team arranged for Lee to have hip replacement surgery.



Lee and Steven



What's remarkable about this is that because the Croton House staff values Lee as an individual and they care about his health and his happiness, they wouldn't give up - just the way you and I wouldn't give up if a loved one were in pain.

When Lee was feeling anxious about the upcoming surgery, Steven sensed it and offered to take him on a mini vacation just a few days before the surgery.

Instead of worrying about the surgery, Lee began looking forward to the trip.

I understand that this is very typical of the way they operate at Croton House and Arc of Westchester. The people who work there are truly amazing, selfless people. I know they don't make a lot of money. They do it out of true caring.

Steven is such a dedicated person. He's Lee's go-to pal. And I feel like Lee has gained another big brother to watch out for him.

Whenever I finish a visit with Lee, I go home knowing he's happy and safe and loved by the staff and the nine other residents of Croton House.

Steven searched for a solution to Lee's pain because the family at Croton House just couldn't bear to leave Lee out of the community's activities.

I have no idea what I'd do without Arc. I wouldn't be able to work and support my family. And I couldn't possibly duplicate the kind of home Lee has at Croton House or the support and services he gets.

There were times in the past when Lee would be destructive and out of control. But in the loving environment of Croton House and Arc of Westchester, Lee has made so much progress. Because Arc has worked hard to help Lee learn to communicate, he is so much happier now.

Like you, I am a member of Arc of Westchester. And I know that Arc really depends on each one of us. I hope you'll join me in renewing your support today.

There was a time when I was a kid, I thought of Lee as a burden. But as I've grown older, I've come to see Lee as a teacher and my life is truly better for all that he's shown me. He loves people and lives with joy. He reminds me of what's truly important.

Thank you for helping to provide Lee with the kind of home and services he needs to flourish. I'm so grateful.

With warm appreciation,



David Bilgre

“No one cares what you know until they know that you care.”

Dear Friend,

I want to write to you about the incredible power of one. Sometimes one person is all it takes to make a life-changing difference in this world — for each one of us to give what we can to the best of our ability.

Arc of Westchester staff members give all they can each and everyday in ways that defy measurement. I’m hoping that after you read my letter, you’ll give all you can to help us support people with autism and developmental disabilities through your membership in Arc of Westchester.

Steven Bell is one of our heroic employees. When he first joined our team as the manager of Croton House — one of 43 residences Arc of Westchester operates all over the county — he said something that really stuck with me.

He said, *“No one cares what you know, until they know that you care.”*

From the moment Steven started with Arc of Westchester, he has gone above and beyond the call of business to show residents that he cares who they are as a person. And while everyone in Croton House is better for it, Steven’s special brand of caring has made a very special difference in the life of one man — Lee Bilgre for whom Croton House has been home for the last 20 years.

When Lee first came to us, he was virtually nonverbal. He struggled to communicate and often exhibited frustration-driven destructive behavior. There was a time in the past when Lee’s outbursts would have doomed him to an institutionalized life.

Thankfully, caring members like you have helped create and support innovative programs and services that enable Lee and others like him to pursue their hopes and dreams ... to build lives around their own interests.

**Government funding gives people like Lee a bed and basic services.
But it’s members like you who help us give Lee a life worth living.**

That’s why our 2016 Membership Drive is so central to our mission. Your generosity makes a lasting difference in the life of someone like Lee. I hope you’ll be able to renew your last gift. And if you’re able, please consider increasing your support. This is a time when every member — and every dollar — matters.

You see, in recent years, state funding for services to help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and those on the autism spectrum have been slashed. Thankfully, you and other members have helped us weather the storm without compromising our mission to help people like Lee pursue lives of dignity and promise.

But now we're facing another severe financial challenge.

As you may know, New York state is considering a rise in the minimum wage. I strongly support paying a living wage to the dedicated men and women who care for people like Lee. But if the state increases the minimum wage without providing funds to pay our staff more, it'll be a disaster for Arc of Westchester.

Whenever reimbursements fall below what we need to provide the services that help people with autism or other developmental disability, member support helps uphold our mission. Your membership supports the "people first" approach Steven and the rest of our staff embrace in providing care and services to individuals like Lee.

This means a focus on abilities and fostering development. It means services designed to provide safety and security, while enriching the lives of children, young adults and seniors.

When you renew your Arc of Westchester membership, you help provide:

- **adaptive technology to help children develop**
- **training to improve the abilities of our staff**
- **guardianship services**
- **employment training and placement**
- **recreation and activities: trips, sporting events, cultural events**
- **transportation to jobs, volunteering opportunities, activities**
- **counseling and transition services to families**

And when you support these additions, you help us go above and beyond the basic services provided by government funding. You can see the difference in Lee's life.

In the caring environment of Croton House, Lee has flourished. With speech therapy and behavioral help, he has greatly increased his ability to communicate and his frustration and destructive behavior is under control. He's a pretty happy guy these days.

Lee's brother, David, has watched this happen and he couldn't be more grateful to members like you who have helped make this possible. I'm including the letter he wrote about his brother's life at Croton House. I hope you'll read it and then please renew your membership today.

When you do, you'll help people of all ages and you'll set an example for our legislators and leaders in Albany to remind them of their duty to care for the most vulnerable people in our community.

This truly is a time when you can apply your *power of one* to make a difference and keep dreams alive at Arc of Westchester. Thank you for your generosity.

Yours Respectfully,



Ric Sweirat
Executive Director



P.S. As you'll read in the enclosed letter from Lee's brother, we recently took Lee on a mini vacation to ease his fears about hip surgery. This is an example of how your membership support makes a difference in the lives of the people we serve. Please renew your membership for 2016 today. Thank you so much!

P.P.S. All it takes is \$15 to be a member of Arc of Westchester. Of course, I hope you'll contribute more, but please, *do something*. If every person exercises their power of one — if every mother, father, sister, neighbor, and friend sends in just \$15 — we'll raise the funds we urgently need to keep Arc of Westchester programs strong. Thank you.