



Introducing the Over 21 Gap Fund



“I can’t even begin to think about what would have happened if the services just ended.”

Read on for Mary’s story...

Dear Friend,

While a 21st birthday is a milestone in any young person’s life, for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities this is also a time of change. Often, high school graduation is on the horizon and caregivers are working to find the perfect fit as their loved ones transition from school to adult life. Amidst all of this excitement, some families are confronted with an immediate and unanticipated obstacle. I am confident that together our Arc family can join forces to build a sustainable solution.

Currently, the education entitlement for special needs students is guaranteed through the completion of the school year a child turns 21, but, due to state mandates, other wrap-around services funded through the Department of Children and Families (DCF) ends on the child’s 21st birthday. If you have a child whose birthday falls on February 1st, they will not be eligible to continue their DCF-funded respite services and recreation programs until new funding is found. This dramatic service interruption can have a significant and immediate impact on the life of the person with special needs as well as their caregivers.

Recognizing the need for service continuity despite these current hurdles, The Arc of Essex County established the Over 21 Gap Fund in late 2016. Designed to financially maintain Arc services during the gap period between the student’s 21st birthday and graduation, this fund keeps the student’s and family’s plan of care uninterrupted while The Arc’s team helps caregivers navigate state systems and complete enrollment requirements.

The first benefactors of the Over 21 Gap Fund were Imani Allen and his mom, Mary. Imani began receiving services from The Arc of Essex County nearly 10 years ago as a camper at Camp Hope. Over the years, he and Mary began incorporating additional services including Saturday Group Respite, Behavioral Supports, and Life Management.

As Imani’s 21st birthday quickly approached in February, Mary began working with The Arc of Essex County to ensure a seamless transition. Imani, like many individuals on the Autism spectrum, craves routine. Sudden disruptions can not only be a source of anxiety, but could lead to a crisis situation beyond Mary’s ability to manage independently.

Drawing from the Over 21 Gap Fund, The Arc of Essex County was able to cover 100% of the cost of services for Imani while Mary worked with Arc staff to enroll her son on Medicaid and with the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). One month after Imani's 21st birthday, he was successfully enrolled with DDD, receiving new funding to cover his Saturday Group Respite program and a portion of his Life Management services. The Arc of Essex County will continue to cover the Life Management funding shortfall until Imani's graduation in June. Imani's services will continue – uninterrupted.

“The help I received from The Arc of Essex County kept me ahead of the game. ***I can't even begin to think about what would have happened if the services just ended,***” said Mary Allen. “Imani would not have accepted that. The continuity provided by The Arc, even though you didn't have to, was absolutely wonderful. Everything is working out better than I could have imagined.”

The Arc of Essex County is proud to support individuals and families like Imani and Mary and has already selected the next benefactor of the Over 21 Gap Fund. Our goal is to continue to provide gap funding to maintain services until a permanent solution is established.

We don't know when a long-term solution to this issue will be in place, but The Arc is committed to funding the gap for as long as there is a need. Will you make a \$50 donation today to help replenish the Over 21 Gap Fund so we can continue to meet this funding need for future recipients?

I thank you for your support of The Arc of Essex County and, together, look forward to continuing to serve individuals and families for years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda C. Lucas".

Linda C. Lucas
Chief Executive Officer