

## **Spirit of The Arc Award – Jennifer Velez, Esq.**

The Spirit of The Arc Award honors an individual who readily and passionately embraces the values and vision of our organization and who works tirelessly to make a difference in the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We believe that description very clearly encapsulates the Honorable Jennifer Velez. Commissioner Velez is the rare cabinet member whose tenure spanned across multiple administrations; a testament to her hard work and proof that her expertise and dedication superseded politics. She was appointed by Governor Corzine in 2007 and reappointed by Governor Christie in 2010, but she first joined state government during Governor Whitman's term as a member of the Chief Counsel's Office.

As Commissioner at the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Commissioner Velez managed the largest State agency with budget, personnel and operational responsibilities for nearly \$11 billion, approximately 16,000 employees, eight operational divisions, including Medicaid, developmental centers and psychiatric hospitals. She was a consistent voice and a strong advocate for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. During her time as Commissioner she spoke out publicly in support of community living, and although it was a challenging road, she succeeded in closing two developmental centers. She was a champion for our advocacy campaign to eliminate use of the "R-word" and an ardent backer of New Jersey's Employment First initiative.

While her list of accomplishments at the Department of Human Services is long, Commissioner Velez captures the essence of the Spirit of The Arc Award for things you can't find in her career biography. Commissioner Velez was a strong leader and she made herself accessible to stakeholders and most importantly, to Self-Advocates. She made it a priority to visit the Developmental Disability Awareness Month celebration at the State House each year and despite the demands on her schedule, she always took time to speak with Self-Advocates and learn more about their lives and the issues impacting them. She consistently kicked off the annual New Jersey Self-Advocacy Conference each fall and she encouraged Self-Advocates in her remarks to work hard for the changes they wanted to see in the world. Commissioner Velez is deserving of this award because she is passionate and caring and because those traits are always paramount in her actions.

## **Spirit of The Arc Award – Stephanie Pratico**

Growing up in one of The Arc's founding families, Stephanie Pratico was raised in the spirit of The Arc. Having an aunt with autism, for whom she is the caregiver, and two children with Down syndrome, led her down a personal and professional path of advocacy for people with developmental disabilities.

Stephanie has dedicated much of the past 20 years to advocating for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, particularly in the areas of healthcare and education. She works at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia as the manager of their Trisomy 21 Program. In this position, she provides specialized support and care coordination for pediatric and adult patients with Trisomy 21—also known as Down syndrome—as well as counseling services for new and existing parents and families of children with Trisomy 21. In her role at the Children's Hospital, Stephanie has also taught throughout the healthcare system to medical students, physicians, nurses, support staff, and other professionals regarding effective strategies in communication, collaboration, and partnership with family members and individuals with disabilities in planning and implementing patient and family-centered care.

Other professional experience includes managing the Healthy Athletes program at Special Olympics New Jersey, where, among other things, she cultivated many relationships with professionals throughout the adult and pediatric medical community to provide screenings and education to support health and wellness for athletes with developmental disabilities in New Jersey. Stephanie is a recipient of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's LEND fellowship, where she received advanced training in the areas of family-centered care, participatory outreach, and community outreach and partnerships. She is also a 2008 graduate of the NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities Partners in Policymaking.

Throughout her extensive experience as a parent advocate, Stephanie has served within a number of organizations dedicated to improving the lives of people with disabilities. She was the founding member of Valuable Partners, an organization dedicated to healthcare and education issues for individuals with developmental disabilities and complex healthcare needs, as well as the Hamilton Township Mayor's Commission for Special Needs. She has served as an ambassador in New Jersey and Pennsylvania for the National Down Syndrome Society, and as a family ambassador for The Arc of New Jersey. She is also a member of the New Jersey Statewide Parent-to-Parent Support Organization and the YMCA Special Kids Organized Recreation Committee. Stephanie is a member of the Advisory Board of the Mainstreaming Medical Care Program of The Arc of NJ, and in the Summer of 2015 was appointed as Chair of the NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities.

### **Health Care Professional of the Year Award – Evan Spivack, D.D.S.**

Evan Spivack, D.D.S. is the Director of the Special Care Treatment Center (SCTC) at the New Jersey Dental School in Newark. The SCTC is the only program of its kind in the region that provides quality dental care for individuals with complex intellectual and developmental disabilities who must have dental work while under general anesthesia because they would not be able to sit still in a dental chair, with an open mouth, for the dental work to be completed.

Dr. Spivack graduated from the University of Maryland Dental School. He had a dental residency at St. Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx followed by a fellowship in special care dentistry at Helen Hayes Hospital in New York.

Believing that it is important to train dental students and postdoctoral residents on the importance of proper dental treatment for vulnerable populations, including individuals with I/DD, Dr. Spivack (with his colleague Mark Robinson, DMD) initiated a one trimester elective in special care dentistry. Dr. Spivack also lectures across the country on special care dentistry to medical and dental professionals and also to families and agency staff. He is a fellow of the Academy of General Dentistry and is the editor and vice president of the New Jersey chapter of this organization.

Dr. Spivack has been a valued member of the Mainstreaming Medical Care Program Advisory Board for more than 25 years. He has been the “go to” person for many questions and concerns about dental care of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), and he provides timely and helpful responses to questions from family members, agency staff, and other health care professionals.

Over the years, he has given presentations at several of The Arc of NJ’s Mainstreaming Medical Care annual conferences. His presentations are always very informative and explained at a level that non-dentists can easily comprehend.

Dr. Spivack truly cares about his patients. As an example, Dr. Spivack had a patient with I/DD who was 44-years-old, and she came to the SCTC accompanied by her elderly, frail mother. Dr. Spivack immediately recognized that the mother had too many of her own unmet needs to take proper care of her daughter’s oral health care. Dr. Spivack contacted the hospital’s social worker and asked her to help in arranging for the mother to receive some urgently needed supportive services.

Throughout Dr. Spivack’s career -- in addition to his superior skills as a dentist -- he is praised for his consistently treating everyone with kindness and the highest level of professionalism.