



The Arc of New Mexico 2022 Awards Ceremony

Moving Forward and Self-Advocate Conference –
June 24, 2022

The Arc Annual Awards Ceremony

Agency of Distinction

Community Service

Exemplary Educator

Inclusive Employer

Work Initiative

Promising Young Leader

The Bob Thomas Achievement Award



AGENCY OF DISTINCTION (1)

- Nature Matters Academy – Nominated by Jennifer Bartz
- At the Nature Matters Academy, Dr. Jenny Lloyd Strovas has jumped into the world of providing high quality, inclusive, and accessible enrichment educational services to medically complex children with enthusiasm! She adjusts her curriculum to meet individual needs of a wide range of children, including toddlers up to adults, taking into account any challenges they face. Ms. Bartz provided videos that highlighted how Nature Matters Academy provides the efforts of Outdoor Equity Program to bring more accessible outdoor open spaces to the families they serve.



AGENCY OF DISTINCTION (2)

- Zee Empowerment Inc – Nominated by Darlene Onsaе
- Zee Empowerment, Inc. has been providing services for over 30 years in promotion of “Creating Independence Through Involvement”. The agency supports individuals in daily living, employment, education, health/safety, and community involvement that is tailored to each individual for gainful independence. The organization provides supports to a diverse population within the Zuni Reservation, and southern McKinley and Cibola Counties collaborating with other entities for additional supports and resources. The organization has a team committed to support, implement, and advocate for individuals to that their rights as human beings are honored and their dignity is respected.

AGENCY OF DISTINCTION

(3)

- Native American Disability Law Center – Nominated by Benita McKerry
- The Native American Disability Law Center provides advocacy, referral information, and educational resources to all Native Americans with a disability living anywhere in the four Corners area who feel that they have been discriminated against because of their disability, abused or neglected, or wrongly denied a service. They recently won a federal case on behalf of their clients.



COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Community Service Award, Adrien Lawyer, nominated by Wendy Corry

Adrien Lawyer is the Executive Director and Co-Founder of the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico. He has provided an invaluable service to NM, advocating for acceptance and celebration of all people. Adrien co-founded TGRCNM in 2008 to be a clearinghouse of direct services, education, and advocacy for the transgender community. Adrien has delivered Transgender Cultural Fluency trainings in over 2,500 settings, including public and private schools, police and public safety departments, every correctional institution in New Mexico, healthcare and social service facilities, federal, state, and local government agencies, and private businesses, foundations, and nonprofit organizations. He recently partnered with the New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Council and the Arc of NM to conduct two training on “Self-Advocacy and the LGBTQIA+ Community”, specifically for people with disabilities. He has also led successful advocacy efforts for model transgender student policies, gender-neutral restrooms, trans inclusion in social service facilities, statewide bullying prevention, and most recently, birth certificate gender marker change.



EXEMPLARY EDUCATOR (1)

- Theresa Aragon - Nominated by Jennifer Bartz
- Ms. Theresa, from Nature Matters Academy, skillfully integrates biological and ecological science into our Outdoor Equity Nature Education programs. Theresa is able to cultivate learning in children of all ages and ability, and ensures that all medical, intellectual, and mobility challenges are integrated in her individual approach with each child. She helps each child know that they are a valuable part of our local ecosystem (our community).



EXEMPLARY EDUCATOR (2)

- Jennifer Robbison– Nominated by Barb Estes, Dawn Berthold
- Jennifer (Jen) Robbison is a speech therapist from San Juan College. She has helped take students to prom, places where they can get a job, helps where needed even if its not a speech issue. Jen has been an amazing therapist with students with special needs, and is always there to help.

INCLUSIVE EMPLOYER

- Samuel Post/ Springhill Suites in Gallup - Nominated by David Palerschat
- Samuel has worked with community programs to advocate for and provide an inclusive work environment to over a dozen job seekers within the last couple of years (even during COVID). He helps ensure the success of all his employees.

WORK INITIATIVE

- Allen Leo Palmer – Nominated by Erica Nakai-Olani
- Allen Leo Palmer, student, is a front office aid at Kirtland Central High School. Allen is able to anticipate needs of educational staff and parents. He communicates with staff, students, and any individual to answer questions, explain information, takes orders, and will address situations as they arise. He maintains staff mail, helps other use office equipment, and makes phone calls. He is very reliable in his job.

PROMISING YOUNG LEADER

- Benjamin Allen – Nominated by Rosalie DesAutel
- Ben Allen is a young entrepreneur who invented a device for people with disabilities to cast their own fishing line. Ben is an avid fisherman from Albuquerque who goes above and beyond to share his passion for fishing with others. Each year, he spends countless hours volunteering to help kids and people with disabilities catch fish. Recently he developed an innovative fishing device he calls “Da Castenator” to help people with disabilities cast their own fishing rods. He says he could cast for them, but they have much more fun if they can cast their own rod! His invention started off by winning 1st place at his science fair. Ben’s abstract for his invention was published in the January 2022 NM Department of Game & Fish Report.



THE BOB THOMAS ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The Bob Thomas Achievement Award, Rebecca Evanko - Nominated by Linda Stover

It is my honor to nominate Rebecca Evanko for the Bob Thomas Achievement Award. Rebecca is a woman with autism who has overcome significant challenges in her life, including being abandoned by her parents when she was 15, a high-school dropout, and not being diagnosed with autism until she was in her mid-40s.

With her characteristic determination to succeed and skills she developed through necessity and hard work, Rebecca went back to school in her 20s, received her GED, then went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts (with Distinction), a Master of Arts, and a Doctor of Philosophy in cognitive linguistics. A university faculty member and academic Dean for several years, as well as an accomplished horsewoman, Rebecca left the field of education to begin a 501(c)(3) nonprofit – Wilderwood Equine Therapy – with her husband, Dr. Mark Evanko. She based the curriculum on what she knew was an inherent connection between horses and those with autism. As the Executive Director of Wilderwood, Rebecca is taking the lead in developing a home-grown program that takes as its premise the commitment to authentic involvement and inclusion from those who benefit from it, including engaging adult mentors and assistants with autism, which is a first for a program such as this. Using her skills, knowledge, education, and direct experience with autism, Wilderwood is devoted to helping children, youth, and adults with autism become the best they can possibly be, with its programs designed, led, and instructed by those with autism for those with autism.

Rebecca has succeeded when many of the odds were against her, and her accomplishments are nothing short of exceptional. She does not seek the spotlight and much of her work goes formally unrecognized.





Congratulations to Award Recipients!

Thank You All For Attending!