



# TOGETHER

— WE'RE BETTER —

# IMPACT REPORT

School Year 2023–2024

Published by The Arc Maryland



# PROGRAM HISTORY

The Arc Maryland, Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Department of Disabilities, and the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council have partnered on the statewide “Together We’re Better” (TWB) inclusive education campaign since 2004.

What started as a classroom poster contest, has grown into a multi-pronged program where students are engaged through in-person learning and extension activities in their schools and local communities.

The TWB campaign exists to raise awareness and increase acceptance of everyone, highlighting the value and importance of meaningful inclusion for students with disabilities. The primary components of the program are:

## **Diversity Celebration Toolkit**

- Contains activity ideas, sample lesson plans for teachers, videos, books, and other resources to promote inclusion and full participation for all students. Available for electronic download on The Arc Maryland's [website](#).

## **Disability Awareness & Acceptance Presentations**

- An interactive exploration of individual differences and commonalities for schools across the State of Maryland! Visit The Arc Maryland's [website](#) to learn more about scheduling an assembly at your school.

## **Elementary and Middle School Artwork Contest**

- Students create pieces of unique artwork based on the December 2023 National Inclusive Schools Week theme, "Draw Me In!"

## **High School Drawing Contest**

- Students submit original drawings that show how inclusion benefits us all. These drawings are used as pages in a coloring book for younger children to enjoy.

## **Public Displays of Artwork Throughout Maryland**

- Artwork is showcased at State Government buildings, County libraries, public venues, local Parks and Recreation centers, and on social media.

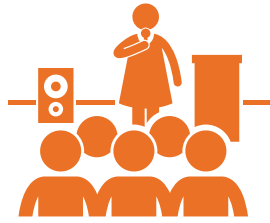
***Together, we can create a more inclusive world for everyone; where children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) are fully included in all aspects of life and have equal access to opportunities to succeed!***

In 2023, this project was supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$1,201,464 with 100% funding by ACL/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

# BY THE NUMBERS



28 schools



19 assemblies



6,000 students  
PreK-12th Grade



121 artwork and drawing  
contest submissions



100+ online toolkits  
distributed



15 public events and  
displays

## IMPACT ON LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Students and Educators completed post-assembly surveys, this is what they said:

94% Students enjoyed the assemblies.

91% Students learned something new about people with disabilities.

95% Students agree that schools are better when students with disabilities learn and play together.

93% Students agree that kids with disabilities "are just like me." They want to play, learn, and make friends.

96% Teachers agree that the language used and content presented was age-appropriate and easily understood; The Arc Maryland staff & facilitator effectively communicated with students; Agree that assemblies align with their school's goals for Social-Emotional Learning and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.

# CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES

## The TWB Diversity Celebration Toolkit

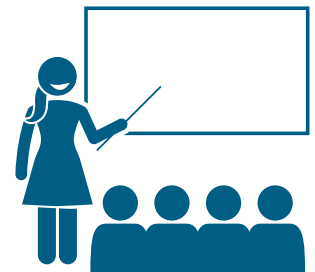
Contains activity ideas, sample lesson plans for teachers, videos, books, and other resources to promote inclusion and full participation for all students.



**Books**



**Online Resources**



**Lesson Plans**



**Videos**



**Download the toolkit here!**

*This year, Together We're Better celebrated 20 years of making schools more inclusive in Maryland! Check out our redesigned logo for this milestone!*



# MEET THE FACILITATORS

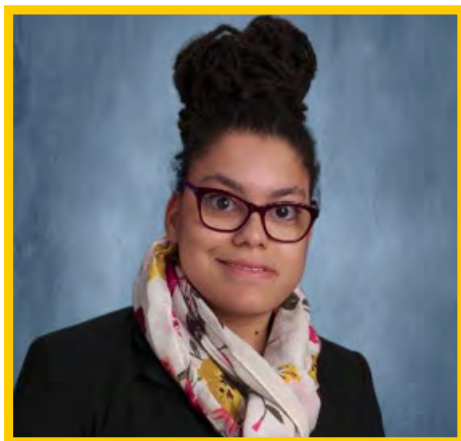
*Thank you to Dominique, Emily, Ryan, and Seti for sharing your personal and lived experiences at school assemblies to over 2,500 students in Maryland this year! Together, we have made a considerable positive impact on schools across the state.*



**Dominique Palmer**  
Howard County



**Seti Ouelega (right), with sister, Meghan**  
Montgomery County



**Emily Rowe**  
Prince George's County



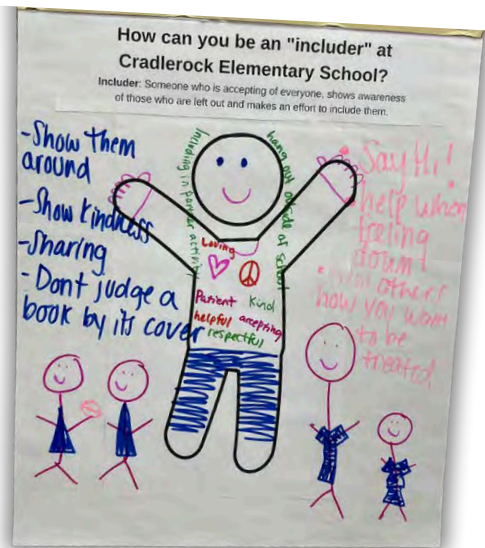
**Ryan Ward**  
Prince George's County



[RELIVING WITH CP TEAM](#) is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing support and resources for teens and young adults living with cerebral palsy transition from high school to adulthood. Ryan and Emily founded the R(yan &) E(mily) Living With CP Team to create a community of shared experience with others who have Cerebral Palsy. We appreciate our partnership to raise awareness in our schools.



# SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES



**Thank you, staff and students!**  
**Rock Creek Valley Elementary School**  
**Diamond Elementary School**  
**Battle Grove Elementary School**  
**Cradlerock Elementary School**  
**Charles Herbert Flowers High School**

*I was very impressed with the questions our students asked and that was due to how well the assembly was led.*  
*Thank you so much for coming and working with our kids!!*  
*-3rd Grade Teacher, Cradlerock ES*

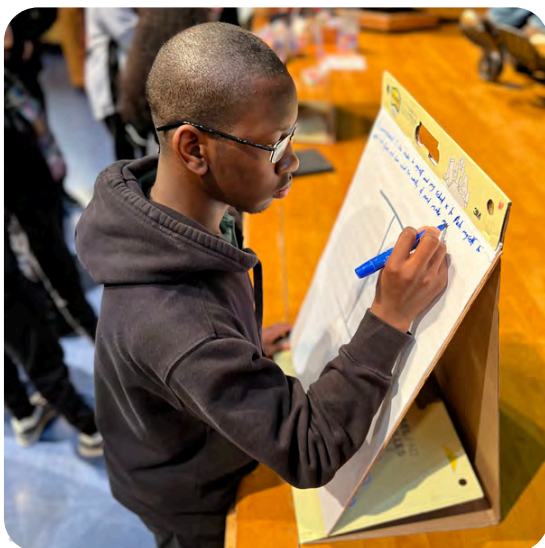
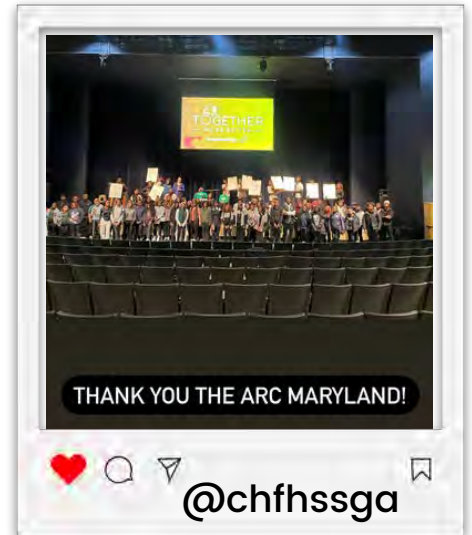




# NATIONAL INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS WEEK

## Charles H. Flowers High School Prince George's County

Thank you to the CHFHS Student Government Association (SGA) who collaborated with The Arc Maryland to plan assemblies for their school during National Inclusive Schools Week. Student leadership from the club and the organization's advisor were critical partners in enhancing participation in their school community!



— ” —

*I learned that people with disabilities can also do the same things as me, such as go to college and have similar experiences in school.*

*-CHFHS 10th Grader*

*It made me realize people are capable of anything, despite disabilities, and that you shouldn't count anyone out.*

*-CHFHS 9th Grader*

— ” —

# AUTISM ACCEPTANCE

## Diamond Elementary School Montgomery County

The Arc Maryland returned to Diamond Elementary School for a special assembly on autism acceptance during the month of April, with special guest, Seti Ouelega, who attends a local high school and co-authored a book with her younger sister. Students learned that Meghan, their older sister who has Autism, learns differently but still likes many of the same things that they do, like jumping on the trampoline, and watching TV.



Pictured: (Left to Right), Dan Walder, Principal, Sylvie Ouelega, Seti Ouelega, Natalie Dohner, and Sharon Dols. After the assembly, Seti gifted a copy of her book, “Marvelous Meghan” to the school’s library.

### [Local High Schooler and Middle Schooler Publish Children’s Book About Their Sister With Severe Autism](#)



—” —  
*We want to educate the public so people will learn what autism is and how it can affect different people, using our sister Meghan as an example. We hope that by doing this, our community will be one step closer to including and accepting people with autism. It’s not everyday that little black girls share their story, and its definitely not everyday that a black girl with autism is talked about.”*  
— Seti Ouelega



# ARTWORK AND DRAWING CONTEST JUDGING



The 2023/2024 artwork and drawing contest theme, "Draw Me In!" follows the theme of National Inclusive Schools Week which allowed students to explore how they see themselves included in their communities.

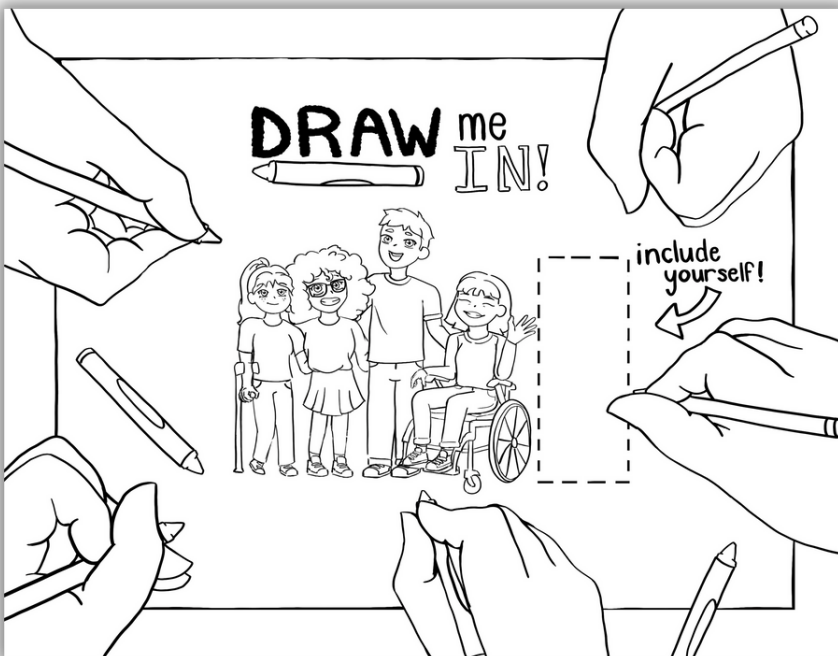
Thank you to everyone who participated in this year's contests!

The Arc Maryland received a total of 121 contest submissions:

- 71 pieces from elementary school students
- 29 pieces from middle school students
- 21 pieces from high school students

Student artwork included representation from 9 counties in Maryland:

Baltimore, Cecil, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, Queen Anne's, Washington & Wicomico



(Top): First place winner for middle school artwork contest.

(Middle): First place winner for elementary school artwork contest.

(Left): First place winner of the high school drawing contest, featured as the centerfold in this year's coloring book.

# COLORING BOOK

## Premiere at ArtScene Event in Queen Anne's County with Kent Island High School April 2024

High school students artwork from across Maryland came to life in the production of this year's coloring book. Pages included 21 original drawings for children to enjoy! Congratulations to Emily A. from Kent Island High School in Ms. Andrea Schulte's art class who was awarded third place, as well as several other students who entered the contest.

Pictured Below: Third place winner Emily A. with her art teacher, Mrs. Andrea Schulte. Emily used the prize money awarded to her school to host an inclusive after-school art party with the National Art Honors Society and their Unified Club. Students experimented with watercolor and tempera paint on canvas.

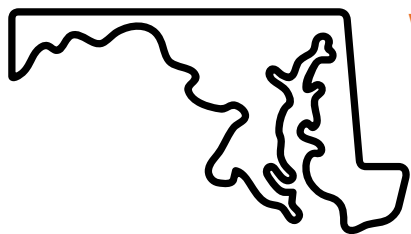


Take a look inside the coloring book!





# TRAVELING DISPLAYS & PUBLIC EVENTS



World Down Syndrome Day  
Annapolis, MD

Autism Acceptance Day  
Annapolis, MD

Developmental Disabilities Day  
at the Legislature  
Annapolis, MD

Back-to-School Block Party  
Old Mill Middle School  
Anne Arundel County, MD

Twinbrook Library  
Montgomery County, MD



Disability Pride Arts Festival  
Baltimore, MD

Take Your Child to Work Day  
The Arc Montgomery County

The Arc Maryland Statewide Convention  
Howard County, MD

Kent Island Library  
Queen Anne's County, MD

Greenbelt Library  
Prince George's County, MD

Miller Branch Library  
Howard County, MD

Maryland Recreation & Parks Association  
ADA & Inclusion Summit  
Howard County, MD

ArtScene  
Kent Island High School  
Queen Anne's County, MD

MSDE Statewide Family Support Meeting  
Talbot County, MD

"Step Forward to Cure TSC"  
Montgomery County, MD



—” —  
*Thank you so much for raising our awareness of Disability Book Week with a wonderful display of art and book recommendations.*

— Nancy Targett, Instructor and Research Specialist, Miller Branch Library

—” —



# THANK YOU TO THE TOGETHER WE'RE BETTER PARTNERS AND FUNDERS!

*The Arc Maryland*

*Project Co-leads: Sharon Dols and Natalie Dohner*

*Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council*

*Maryland State Department of Education  
Division of Early Intervention and Special Education*

*The Nora Roberts Foundation*

*Jessica C. Tuthill Memorial Foundation*

*Maryland Department of Disabilities*

**If you are interested in supporting the sustainment of the Together We're Better Program, to make meaningful inclusion a reality for students across Maryland, please contact Natalie Dohner, Director of Education Initiatives and Partnerships.**

**[NDohner@thearcmd.org](mailto:NDohner@thearcmd.org)**