



Supporting Law Enforcement with Effective IDD Interventions





ArcServices.Org.SpArc

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SpArc is a robust advocate for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in the criminal justice system. Navigators, experts in human services, possess comprehensive knowledge of available support services and resources. Their primary objective is to establish stable support systems, fostering a happy life while minimizing interactions with the law.

SpArc Navigators in Action:

Inform and Empower: Guiding individuals with IDD on interactions with law enforcement, empowering informed decisions on disclosing disabilities for respectful and supportive interactions.

Explore Alternatives: Uniquely addressing specific needs, SpArc explores alternatives to incarceration for individuals with IDD in Michigan, promoting fairness and understanding.

Connect to Resources: Beyond the legal realm, facilitating access to housing, employment, medical, and psychiatric care, avoiding unnecessary contacts with law enforcement.

Educate First Responders: Proactively educating law enforcement and first responders on recognizing signs of IDD and providing guidance for improved interactions.

Community Participation: Actively engaging in initiatives like Safe and Healthy Macomb, contributing to the broader goal of ensuring every resident, including those with IDD, lives a healthy and fulfilling life. Through collaboration, SpArc fosters a more inclusive and supportive community.

For more information, contact:

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• **1 in 20**
• **Prisoners in**
• **the U.S. has a**
• **developmental**
• **disability**

• **33-50%**
• **of all use-of-**
• **force incidents**
• **with police**
• **involve a citizen**
• **with a disability**

• **People with**
• **disabilities are**
• **Twice**
• **as likely to be**
• **the victim**
• **of a crime** than
• **people without**
• **disabilities**



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Partnering with Police for Disability Safety

Disability Safety Starts with Partnership

SpArc works closely with law enforcement agencies across Macomb County to improve outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

From training officers to helping families register loved ones for disability safety programs, SpArc is committed to building bridges between the IDD community and public safety.

Here's How We Help

LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

SpArc provides education to police and first responders on:

- Recognizing signs of IDD
- De-escalation strategies tailored to disability needs
- Navigating communication challenges
- Understanding legal capacity and disability rights

DISABILITY SAFETY REGISTRIES

SpArc supports the creation and expansion of special needs and vulnerable individual registries across Metro Detroit. These registries:

- Help police respond safely to individuals with disabilities
- Include optional medical, behavioral, and contact info
- Can be used in missing person cases or traffic stopsPermanent supportive housing referrals

What Makes SpArc Different?

We go beyond general training. SpArc Navigators work case-by-case with individuals who have had contact with police, helping them:

- Stay out of jail
- Access housing, benefits, and medical care
- Build trust with local officers
- Avoid future legal trouble through support and advocacy
- We are a wraparound service designed to support both the person and the systems around them.

Let's Build a Safer Macomb Together

Whether you're a police officer, dispatcher, community advocate, or family member—you have a role in making sure people with disabilities are treated with respect and understanding.



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Crisis Intervention with Compassion

How SpArc Supports and Strengthens CIT Response

SpArc, a program of The Arc of Macomb County, partners with law enforcement and behavioral health agencies to support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) during crises. Our Navigators enhance CIT efforts by offering disability-specific insight, education, and follow-up care.

Why IDD Expertise Matters in Crisis Response

People with IDD may not respond to commands or questions the way neurotypical individuals do. They may become overwhelmed, shut down, or behave in ways that are misunderstood as noncompliance or aggression.

SpArc bridges that gap by helping first responders:

- Recognize signs of IDD in the field
- De-escalate situations with empathy and context
- Understand communication barriers and sensory triggers
- Reduce the risk of unnecessary force or incarceration

What SpArc Brings to CIT Partnerships:

- **Trainings for Officers & Dispatch:** SpArc offers in-person and virtual education on IDD awareness, scenario-based learning, and de-escalation techniques tailored to disability-related behaviors.
- **Field Support & Case Coordination:** When appropriate, SpArc Navigators collaborate with officers and clinicians to follow up with individuals post-crisis.
- **Resource Access:** We connect individuals to wraparound supports including housing, behavioral health, guardianship help, and public benefits.
- **Registry Promotion:** We advocate for special needs registries and support their implementation across departments.

Working Together for Better Outcomes

SpArc doesn't replace CIT—we strengthen it. By layering IDD-specific expertise into your existing response model, we reduce repeat calls, avoid unnecessary jail time, and build safer interactions for all.

Let's Talk

Interested in bringing SpArc training to your department? Want to co-host a community safety workshop or explore deeper collaboration? Contact us. Together, we can create safer, smarter responses—because disability shouldn't be a barrier to safety.

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SpArc: Smart Alternatives to Incarceration

Supporting People with IDD Before, During, and After Justice Involvement

SpArc is Macomb County's innovative jail diversion program for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). We step in early—often before charges are filed—and work to stabilize lives, not shatter them.

How We Divert Individuals from Incarceration

SpArc Navigators are trained in disability-informed crisis response, system navigation, and community-based problem-solving. Here's how we intervene:

1. PRE-ARREST INTERVENTION

- Partner with police to identify disability-related behavior early
- Promote use of Special Needs Registries to inform safe response
- Work with families and officers to de-escalate situations without arrest

2. JAIL ALTERNATIVES AT ARRAIGNMENT OR BOND HEARINGS

- Provide the court with documentation of disability
- Advocate for community-based alternatives to incarceration
- Help secure safe housing, transportation, and mental health care for release

3. COORDINATED CASE SUPPORT POST-RELEASE

- Connect clients to long-term supports: CMH, guardianship, benefits, vocational help
- Monitor follow-through on court conditions
- Help reduce recidivism through stabilization

When to Refer to SpArc

- You may be seeing someone who could benefit from SpArc if they:
- Struggle with understanding court proceedings
- Seem confused or disoriented when interacting with police or jail staff
- Have a known or suspected intellectual or developmental disability
- Repeatedly cycle through jail for nonviolent or compliance-related offenses

Our Approach Works

Instead of expensive jail time, SpArc focuses on housing, healthcare, and community-based services. The result?

- Lower recidivism
- Stronger public safety
- Better outcomes for individuals with IDD

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Best Practices for Interacting with Individuals with IDD

Respect. Patience. Clarity. Safety.

Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) may interact with the world differently—but with the right approach, you can communicate more effectively, avoid escalation, and build trust.

Here are field-tested strategies from SpArc Navigators, grounded in dignity and trauma-informed care.

1. LOOK FOR SIGNS OF IDD

- Common indicators may include:
- Difficulty understanding instructions or questions
- Slower response time or processing delays
- Overreaction to noise, touch, or sudden movement
- Repeating words or pacing
- Limited eye contact or nontraditional social behavior

Don't assume noncompliance. It may be a sign of confusion, anxiety, or sensory overload.

2. USE CLEAR, CALM LANGUAGE

- Speak slowly and clearly—avoid shouting or complex phrases
- Break directions into one step at a time
- Repeat information calmly if needed
- Avoid sarcasm, metaphors, or rhetorical questions

Example: Instead of “Do you know why I pulled you over?”

Try: “I stopped you because your taillight is out.”

Reminder: Not all disabilities are visible.

Treat everyone with patience and respect—your calm presence can change the outcome.

3. REDUCE ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSORS

- Minimize lights, sirens, and loud radio chatter
- Avoid sudden movements
- Give space but stay visible and calm
- Ask before touching the person—many have touch sensitivities

4. OFFER SUPPORT, NOT CONFRONTATION

- Ask: “Is there someone I can call to help you right now?”
- Ask if they have a disability ID card or are registered in a local Special Needs Registry
- Allow extra time for responses or compliance
- Document behaviors without judgment—avoid terms like “hostile” or “nonresponsive” without context

5. KNOW WHEN TO REFER OR REQUEST HELP

If you suspect a person may have IDD and needs additional support:

- De-escalate and divert when safe and appropriate
- Contact SpArc for assistance navigating follow-up care
- Document the potential need for a disability-informed response in reports

Disability & Due Process

Understanding How IDD Affects Legal Decision-Making

SpArc, a program of The Arc of Macomb County, works directly with individuals who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and are involved in the justice system. Many of these individuals face unique challenges in making informed legal decisions—challenges that courts and counsel must consider to ensure fair, ethical proceedings.

What is IDD?

IDD refers to a group of conditions—including autism, Down syndrome, and cognitive impairments—that affect intellectual functioning, learning, and adaptive behavior. These disabilities may impact:

- Memory and comprehension
- Language and communication
- Judgment and reasoning
- Executive function and impulse control
- Processing speed

How IDD Affects Legal Participation

1. UNDERSTANDING OF RIGHTS

- Individuals may agree to waivers (like Miranda or plea deals) they don't fully understand
- They may nod or say "yes" to avoid embarrassment or appear cooperative
- Concepts like "plea bargain," "probation," or "time served" may be misinterpreted

2. PARTICIPATION IN DEFENSE

- Clients with IDD may struggle to recall facts, timelines, or names
- They may be unable to evaluate legal advice or consequences
- They may avoid asking questions—even when confused

3. COMPETENCY CONCERNS

- IDD is often mistaken for mental illness, though both may co-occur
- Individuals may not meet the legal threshold for incompetence but still lack the capacity to engage in their defense meaningfully

Red Flags for Legal Professionals

You may be working with someone with IDD if they:

- Have a limited education history or were in special education
- Appear agreeable but can't explain their case or decisions
- Exhibit childlike behavior, poor impulse control, or flat affect
- Have difficulty with dates, timelines, or multiple-step instructions
- Have repeated low-level offenses or probation violations

How SpArc Can Help

- SpArc Navigators assist courts and counsel by:
- Providing context around an individual's disability and functional level
- Offering referrals for psychological evaluations
- Coordinating supports to meet conditions of release or probation
- Connecting individuals to case management, benefits, and stabilization services

Every person deserves to understand their case and participate in their own defense.

SpArc ensures that disability is recognized—not criminalized.

Navigating the Legal System with IDD

What Legal Professionals Need to Know

SpArc is a jail diversion and wraparound support program for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who become involved in the criminal justice system. Our goal is to help legal professionals ensure access, equity, and dignity for this highly vulnerable population.

Why It Matters

Individuals with IDD often face systemic disadvantages that impact every stage of their legal journey—from arrest to sentencing. Without the right accommodations and understanding, they may:

- Waive rights without understanding the consequences
- Appear noncompliant or indifferent due to communication differences
- Fail to meet release or probation requirements due to disability-related challenges
- Be deemed competent when they cannot truly participate in their own defense

Legal System Pressure Points for Individuals with IDD

1. ARREST & BOOKING

- May be unable to explain behavior or follow instructions
- Might try to “please” officers by saying what they think is expected

2. ARRAIGNMENT & BOND

- May not understand charges or conditions of release
- Risk of being held longer due to inability to secure housing or supervision

3. LEGAL CONSULTATION & DEFENSE

- May have trouble remembering details or providing coherent narratives
- Often hesitant to admit confusion or ask questions

4. COURT APPEARANCES

- Difficulty following proceedings, behaving appropriately, or engaging with the process
- Easily overwhelmed by formal settings or sensory triggers

5. SENTENCING, PROBATION, & COMPLIANCE

- High risk of technical violations due to cognitive limitations or lack of supports
- Needs structured, disability-informed plans—not punitive measures

Best Practices for Legal Professionals

- **Simplify Language:** Use clear, plain terms—avoid jargon or abstract concepts
- **Check for Understanding:** Ask open-ended questions like “Can you tell me what that means in your own words?”
- **Document Disability Clues:** Look for IEPs, benefit enrollment, or CMH history
- **Advocate for Evaluation:** If IDD is suspected, request a competency or psychological assessment
- **Involve Supports:** Family members, guardians, or caseworkers can provide critical context

How SpArc Can Help

SpArc Navigators work alongside legal professionals to:

- Identify disability-related needs
- Coordinate evaluations or service documentation
- Support stability plans for pre-trial release
- Assist with compliance plans that work for the individual

Mental Health and IDD

Key Challenges & Insights for Legal and Clinical Professionals

Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) often experience co-occurring mental health conditions—but their needs are frequently misunderstood, misdiagnosed, or overlooked. SpArc bridges that gap through coordinated support, education, and advocacy.

Dual Diagnosis: What It Means

“Dual diagnosis” refers to individuals who have both:

- An intellectual or developmental disability (such as autism, Down syndrome, or cognitive impairment)
- A mental health condition (such as anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia)

This combination requires thoughtful, trauma-informed interventions—not one-size-fits-all care.

Why These Individuals Fall Through the Cracks

- **Misdiagnosis or Missed Diagnosis:** Symptoms of IDD may be mistaken for mental illness—and vice versa
- **Inappropriate Placement:** People with IDD are often placed in environments designed for behavioral health clients without staff trained in developmental disabilities
- **Medication Complications:** Individuals may be overmedicated or prescribed treatments not suited to their cognitive profile
- **Limited Access to Services:** Many community mental health (CMH) programs have strict eligibility rules that exclude people based on IQ scores or disability labels
- **Justice System Risks:** Dual-diagnosed individuals face a higher risk of arrest, incarceration, and institutionalization due to behavioral symptoms that are misunderstood as defiance or danger

Key Considerations for Providers & Legal Professionals

- Always screen for co-occurring conditions, especially if standard treatment isn't working
- Treat IDD as a health condition—not a barrier to receiving mental health care
- Collaborate across systems—CMH, disability services, probation, housing, and crisis teams
- Ensure that safety plans, discharge instructions, and probation terms are developmentally appropriate
- Understand that behavioral outbursts may stem from unmet communication, sensory, or environmental needs

How SpArc Helps

SpArc Navigators specialize in supporting dual-diagnosed clients by:

- Coordinating between mental health, disability, and justice systems
- Advocating for eligibility or reassessment when CMH doors are closed
- Educating staff, officers, and families on trauma, communication, and behavioral supports
- Helping secure consistent psychiatric care, case management, and stabilization services



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Inclusion, Not Incarceration

How SpArc Reduces Recidivism and Builds Belonging

SpArc, a program of The Arc of Macomb County, provides wraparound jail diversion services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Our approach is rooted in stability, connection, and community inclusion—because no one thrives in isolation.

The Problem

People with IDD are:

- More likely to be arrested for behaviors related to misunderstanding or unmet needs
- Often held longer in jail due to communication challenges or lack of stable housing
- More likely to return to jail without targeted support
- Less likely to be connected to long-term services and employment

This isn't just a justice issue—it's a systems failure.

SpArc's Solution: Stabilize, Support, Include

Our Navigators use a disability-informed, trauma-sensitive model to help individuals:

- Navigate CMH, SSI, Medicaid, and guardianship
- Build job readiness and pursue inclusive employment
- Access safe, supported housing
- Reconnect with families and support networks
- Fulfill court obligations with dignity and structure
- Engage in community—not cycles of jail time

Why It Works

- SpArc reduces recidivism by replacing instability with opportunity.
- Disability is addressed, not punished
- Support is proactive, not reactive
- Clients are linked to long-term resources—not left alone
- Inclusion lowers crisis risk and raises quality of life

When people with IDD have what they need, they stop showing up in courtrooms—and start showing up in their communities.

Inclusion Is Prevention

SpArc believes that belonging is the most powerful tool in public safety.

- We train officers, legal professionals, and providers to recognize IDD
- We design reentry plans rooted in person-centered goals
- We connect people to lives worth living—not just services that check a box

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Accessing SpArc's Referral Page

The First Steps to Joining our Program



Open your web browser and type the following URL into the address bar:
[arcservices.org/sparc-referral/](https://ArcServices.Org/sparc-referral/)

Press Enter to navigate to the SpArc online referral form page.

Once the page loads, you should see the online referral form displayed on the screen.

Fill out the required fields on the form with accurate information. This includes details about the individual you're referring, including applicable Neuropsych and court information.

Double-check the information you've entered to ensure it's accurate and complete.

After completing the form, click on the "Download" button located at the bottom of the page.

Finally **send the referral** one of two ways to our SpArc Navigators. The first option is to print and **fax the document to 586-569-4327**. The second is to email the document to **sue.lind@arcservices.org**.

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