



Press Release
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**Arc and Stony Brook University Partner to Launch FREE 24-Hour Support Line for
the Developmental Disabilities Community**
Addressing the critical shortage of mental health services in America

Sacramento, CA —Prior to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, people with developmental disabilities have historically been disproportionately impacted by mental health issues compared to those without disabilities. According to the [Center for Disease Control](#), 17.4 million adults with disabilities experience frequent mental health distress, such as anxiety and depression, about 4.6 times as often as adults without disabilities. Today, that number is rapidly increasing for this population because of pandemic-related impacts, such as isolation and lack of community engagement and social interaction, while availability for in-person mental health services has not kept up with demand.

In response, The Arc of California partnered with Stony Brook University School of Social Welfare to launch Project Connect, a FREE 24-hour support line for people with disabilities, their caregivers, family members and support team.

“Going into the pandemic, we were aware that people with disabilities would be experiencing greater levels of stress, fear and depression; and coupled with a well-documented provider shortage for mental health services, we felt the need to develop an open line of communication for our community as a safety net during this challenging time,” said Jordan Lindsey, Executive Director, [The Arc of California](#). “As the holidays rapidly approach and the Country is still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope that Project Connect will make mental health support more accessible for anyone who needs assistance.”

The Project Connect telehealth support line is staffed by graduate students in the Stony Brook School of Social Welfare and supervised by licensed social workers. The graduate students offer a wide range of support services including counseling, wellness checks, depression screening, and referrals to community services.

“We saw this collaborative opportunity with The Arc as serving a dual purpose. It is allowing us an opportunity to support the needs of people with disabilities and their families during a tough time, while also providing our graduate students with real world professional counseling experience,” said Warren K. Graham, Assistant Dean of Field Education and Clinical Assistant Professor, [Stony Brook University School of Social Welfare](#). “Our team of social workers are well-prepared to offer support, guidance and referrals to anyone who calls.”

Since the start of the pandemic, Stony Brook University and The Arc have been working together on developing solutions to some of the most urgent concerns facing this population, starting with how to prepare caregivers of individuals with unique needs for a hospital stay should they get diagnosed with COVID-19.

“We hope this free teletherapy line will remind people that they are not alone, and to give those who are feeling overwhelmed or are struggling a glimmer of hope that together we can get through this and thrive,” Lindsey said.

To get support for you or person with a disability, please call the toll-free line for Project Connect at 1-888-847-3209 or learn more at TheArcCA.org/SupportLine.

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ABOUT THE ARC OF CALIFORNIA

The Arc promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes. The Arc acts to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their parents, siblings, family members and other concerned members of the public have meaningful opportunities to inform and guide the direction of the organization's advocacy, including determining policy and positions on important issues.

ABOUT STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

The School of Social Welfare prepares students for professional practice in the field of social welfare, from baccalaureate to doctoral levels. We offer an upper-division undergraduate program leading to the Bachelor of Science degree with a major in social work (B.S.W.) which prepares students for entry level professional social work practice. Our graduate program leading to the Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) degree prepares students for advanced social work practice and may be designed to include an area of specialization or a dual degree in social work and law (M.S.W./J.D.). The Council on Social Work Education accredits both the BSW and MSW programs of the school, and the New York State Education Department recognizes the MSW program as fulfilling the academic requirements for students to register for the LMSW and LCSW license examinations. The School's doctoral (Ph.D.) program focuses on policy research, allowing students to pursue this focus in their area of interest within social welfare.