

## Ardmore marks 50 years of aiding those with special needs

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Decades ago, there weren't many opportunities for Mary O'Donnell, her family said.

The O'Donnell family struggled to find a place that could care for and nurture Mary, 58, who was born with cerebral palsy and has communication challenges. Mentally, she will never advance beyond a toddler.

With few options, the O'Donnell family and other community families decided to create new options by opening Ardmore Enterprises, a nonprofit organization. This year, Ardmore marks its 50th anniversary of providing support to the developmentally challenged.

"If she lived with one of us, she would be part of our family, but she wouldn't have something of her own. With us, she would just be doing the things we want and like to do," said O'Donnell's sister, Joan Ishimoto of Bethesda. "She comes to our parties, but she likes going to her house because she knows that's her home and she wants to be there with her friends."

The Bowie organization is planning an anniversary commemoration in October to kick off a months-long campaign aimed at reintroducing the organization to the public.

"I think most people pass by and don't know" what Ardmore does, said Colette Gingles, director of the 50th anniversary campaign to raise awareness and funding for Ardmore. "They think it's a school."

Ardmore Enterprises began as a day program at Hyattsville area churches for those who couldn't attend traditional public schools.

The organization has made its home in Bowie, where it owns 13 homes to help those with special needs live independently and to help provide them with employment opportunities, usually involving basic tasks.

The organization has a budget of about \$7 million, employs about 170 staffers and has about 200 people enrolled, said Ore Roberts, an executive associate with Ardmore. The organization is supported by grants and clients, who pay about \$600 per month to be in the program, Roberts said.

"The services they provide are critical in terms of supporting people's independence in the community," said Patrick Dooley, acting director of the state's Development Disabilities Administration. "There continues to be a need not only for basic services like housing and day services. . . . There continues to be a need for employment opportunities for those with development disabilities."

The administration is responsible for overseeing and funding services for the developmentally disabled in Maryland.

"Just because they're slower or disabled doesn't mean they don't know what's going on," said Eileen Baker, who serves on the Ardmore board and is another sister of O'Donnell. "Those who can bring in a paycheck, no matter how small or big, they have such pride about it."

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