



Serving children and adults with Down syndrome,  
autism and other developmental disabilities

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Executive Director Michael Smith Leads ACDS**

### **To a Decade of Growth and Financial Stability**

*Initiates strategies that expand programs and reach while  
significantly increasing funding*

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**Plainview, NY, April 28, 2014** Unlike most nonprofits that have had to scale back on services during the recent economic slowdown, ACDS, a Long Island-based agency that serves children and adults with Down syndrome, autism and other developmental disabilities, has actually expanded their programs and almost tripled their revenues over the last ten years.

Under the leadership of Executive Director Michael Smith, who joined the agency in 2004, ACDS has undergone a dramatic turnaround. "When I first came to the agency, they were bleeding money and were in danger of closing within a few months," recalls Smith. "Having previously worked on the business side of other nonprofit agencies, I knew the financial and operational issues that had to be addressed. Fortunately, we had an excellent board that understood the severity of the situation and let me do what I had to do."

One of the first things Smith did was hire a new Chief Financial Officer and pare down a top-heavy administration, which he accomplished in just a few months. Operationally, the group homes were sustainable but the school was losing money. "I knew that ACDS was created to serve those with Down syndrome," Smith continues, "but the school was always half empty. To fill those seats, we had to look beyond serving only those with Down syndrome and include the growing population of children with autism and other developmental disabilities. The local community welcomed the change and soon the seats were filled. By 2009, our school enrollment actually exceeded State Education Department mandates and we were authorized to serve an additional child in each of our classes. Additionally we have opened three new classrooms providing services to 40 additional students."

Since then, ACDS has evolved into a lifetime services agency with an expanded roster of programs that include adult day habilitation, case management for young adults with disabilities, adult Medicaid services coordination, and a weeklong overnight summer camp in Garrison, NY. They purchased a new facility in Levittown in 2010 and opened their eighth group home in Albertson in January, 2014, which serves four adults with autism.

Despite the fact that the agency has received no rate increase in government funding for the past five years, their budget has more than doubled from just over \$6 million in 2004 to over \$16 million today. "We bring in almost \$1 million a year through our fundraising programs including our annual golf tournament, dinner dance, annual appeal and our St. Patrick's Day party," says Smith. "And I'm sure part of this is because we've become more well-known in the community and have a better reputation for

providing needs-centric services to a wider range of individuals. People want to support a place that does good things and is financially solvent.ö

When asked what enabled the incredible turnaround in the agency's programs, growth, and financial stability, Smith says that nonprofits have to not only think and operate more like a business, but also see the government as a partner, not an enemy. Smith had worked on the business side of the New York City Division of Special Education and has contacts with government officials in Albany. öWe still get most of our funding from the state, so why would you want to bite the hand that feeds you,ö he laughs. öBesides, it's much more effective to partner with government officials than to knock heads. It just makes sense to work with your funding source. The government doesn't want to see our schools fail, but they do want you to show them that you're a good steward of the taxpayers' money.ö

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### **ABOUT ACDS**

ACDS, located in Plainview, NY is dedicated to providing lifetime resources of exceptional quality, innovation and inclusion for individuals with Down syndrome, autism and other developmental disabilities and their families. ACDS has been providing programs and services in and around Long Island since 1966. ACDS currently serves over 1000 children and adults, providing services that include Early Intervention and preschool special education programs, respite and recreation programs for children, teens and adults, adult Medicaid service coordination and eight supervised group homes in Nassau County. For more information, please visit [acds.org](http://acds.org) or call 516-933-4700.

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