

For Immediate Release  
September 6, 2016

Contact: Sara McMillan  
904.355-0155 – office 904.504-7471 – cell

### **Jaguars Quarterback Blake Bortles Serves as Face of The Arc Jacksonville’s New Campaign**

*Bortles asks the community to raise awareness and support for individuals with unique abilities –*

**Jacksonville, FL** –Jacksonville Jaguars quarterback Blake Bortles is assisting The Arc Jacksonville with an invitation for community support to help citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities take the next step in their lives and achieve their greatest potential.

Bortles headlines The Arc’s “What’s Next?” multi-faceted communications effort to increase public understanding that adults with special needs can achieve much when guided in taking the next step in education, employment, home selection and other milestone decisions.

“I’ve always known that my next step would include football. But for people like my friend CJ, their future isn’t always so clear,” Bortles explained. Bortles saw CJ, who has autism, increase practical skills while living away from his family at Arc’s Summer LIFE program. He signed on to spread the word about how Arc can help others as part of his ongoing commitment to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in pursuit of full, independent lives. This is a focus of [The Blake Bortles Foundation](#) as well.

“Summer LIFE is just one of Arc’s programs to assist people to optimize their capabilities,” said Jim Whittaker, Arc President and CEO. “We are very grateful for Blake’s willingness to help us deliver the message that Arc is here to guide and support adults making life choices that enable them to achieve at their highest level. We are also most grateful for Blake’s message of inclusion and acceptance that can sometimes be a challenge to overcome.”

Another example of how Arc assists people through life junctures is The Arc Jacksonville Village. The Village was created at the request of young adults, and their families, for a safe environment where those who need some lifestyle support could independently establish a home. The Village is an apartment-style, affordable neighborhood for 121 adults age 18+. It has become a national model for custom design to promote socializing and sharing among residents plus engagement throughout the surrounding community. Village residents enjoy the camaraderie of living among peers and choose the educational, employment and recreational opportunities they wish to pursue in greater Jacksonville. The Village opened in May 2016 and was fully leased by August 2016.

The Arc Jacksonville advocates for and serves community members with diagnoses including Down syndrome, autism, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, cerebral palsy and other conditions of developmental delay. Arc promotes and actively supports the full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes of all persons without regard to diagnosis of a disability.

The Arc Jacksonville not-for-profit corporation seeks support from the Northeast Florida community to operate a full complement of residential, educational, training, pre-employment and employment initiatives.

**Mission:** To serve people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to achieve their full potential to participate in community life.

**Vision:** A community where disability is a distinction without a difference, where individuals will have choices on how they live, learn, work, worship, and play.

**Programs and Services:** The Arc has an annual operating budget of \$8.3 million, serves approximately 500 individuals daily and provides employment for approximately 145 staff members as well as service opportunities for 33 AmeriCorps and 6 VISTA members. Traditional day programs are offered from a facility in downtown Jacksonville and one in the Westside. Residential services are available in five group homes nestled within the neighborhoods of Arlington, St. Nicholas, Ortega Farms and Mandarin. Additionally, The Arc Jacksonville Village, is a community designed to promote independence and support residents as they transition to an adult lifestyle of self-determination and community inclusion. The Village is nationally recognized for creating a new residential option for persons with disabilities.

For those seeking post-secondary educational opportunities, Arc has developed two innovative transition programs. Xplore provides community-based experiential learning from a home base at Chets Creek Church, 4420 Hodges Boulevard, and On Campus Transition offers a four-year college experience, including peer residential living, on the campus of the University of North Florida (UNF). During summer, the LIFE Experience program is operated in student housing near UNF to prepare young adults, and their families, for transition to living on their own. The Arc Jacksonville serves as a source of information and support for the entire Northeast Florida area through its advocacy program, called A.S.K. (Advocacy, Support and Knowledge).

Editors Note: The Arc Jacksonville is not an acronym and Arc should never be in all capital letters. When referring to the organization, please use The Arc Jacksonville, not The ARC, The ARC Jacksonville and never ARC. The Arc Jacksonville should be considered as a title or phrase.

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