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Divergent Labs – Annual Report 2016

Submitted to board of directors by Crystal Western Ford on February 28, 2017.

Divergent Labs exists to advance the economic status, educational status, spiritual growth, human rights, and representation in the public sphere of disabled and disenfranchised people. With a majority-autistic board of directors and a structure that allows for many parallel programs run by different managers, the organization will experiment in many ways with creating our economy and culture for ourselves, building organic links among the tribe of autistic people.

In its third full year, DL kept on track with modest stable growth in two out of its three programs and we didn't add any new programs.

Ocate Cliffs Program

Purpose: Ocate Cliffs is a retreat center under construction in northern New Mexico. It is being built and will be run by an autistic staff. As a summer-long autistic workspace, it will be a laboratory for accessibility with lots of opportunity for personal growth. The manager is Star Ford.

Accomplishments: Construction of the Rusty Nail building (aka staff house) is now at the stage where it has been shelled in and ready for interior finishing. There is still much work to be done in installing the solar electric system, plumbing, gas lines, water heater, and interior doors, and contracts have been signed in regards to some of these projects. These are expected to be completed in spring 2017.

Two work retreats were held during the summer with a total of about 15 participants.

We put out an ad to hire an on-site manager to live there during the winter months. However, due to the construction work taking longer than expected, and the Rusty Nail not being winterized in time, we retracted the ad and let the house sit vacant for the winter.

In an attempt to increase our publicity, Star signed a contract with the firm CWA (cwastrategic.com) to professionalize our logos, branding, make brochures, and get local news coverage. The anticipated cost is \$9,000.00.

More info: Check out the web site for history and pictures – www.ocatecliffs.org.

Rhizome program

Purpose: The purpose of the Rhizome program is to provide a way for people to introduce projects consistent with Divergent Labs vision and to help them to bring these projects to fruition. The program is essentially a discussion forum acting as an idea incubator.

Accomplishments: The Rhizome project has achieved a formulation stage – we have defined our agenda, have initiated critical projects, elaborated the motions in the areas of importance and created a web discussion platform – autistic.zone. Further research was done on Autistic Education project and the web pages were reworked to contain more content.

The GAIA camp was open from July until the end of August with successful operation and some problems identified; specifically with regard to parental restrictions over an autistic child.

Technical Services program

Purpose: The technical services program connects disabled technical workers to work opportunities, for people with demonstrated professional-level skills but not being able to work office jobs. The manager is Star Ford.

Accomplishments: Star, program manager, struggled throughout the year to find and retain enough clients to keep this program viable, therefore she began applying for a full time job. In late fall 2016, Star was offered a full time, remote job as a senior software engineer. While this is an excellent opportunity for her, it does mean that the technical services program is on hold indefinitely. Since her job allows her to work remotely, Star plans to open an office in the Rusty Nail in order to work from there for a portion of the year.

Finances

The technical services program represented the largest amount of money coming in and out, with \$41,615 in consulting revenue. This is a significant decrease from the prior year's revenue. Ocate Cliffs received more income from grants (\$15,000). See 990 form for details.

Lessons learned and challenges

Networking: Well, once again, another year has gone by with very little progress in this area. We continue with our ongoing struggles to be able to market ourselves and reach out and talk to people about all of our projects. We hope that the marketing firm that Star has contracted with will get us out of this hole, and at least get our name out in the world to a degree that allows us to move forward towards our goals.

Work retreats: Two work retreats were held at Ocate Cliffs in the summer of 2017. Attendance was good at both camps with a total of about 15 people. As in the previous years' work retreats, it was definitely a learning and growth experience for all who came and it seems that most everyone leaves with a happy attitude and positive impression of OC. However, we did experience some frustration from campers regarding the organization of each day, and the level of physical ability of each person definitely played a role into how

much of the preplanned work was actually completed. This is an important aspect of OC as it lends itself to allow each person to find work that suits their abilities.

DL board: The board of directors underwent some changes towards the end of the year being that three new board members were added to the existing board and our board chair, Kjensmo Walker, resigned. This increased the board size to eight board members and five of the original board members decided to stay on in their current roles. With the loss of our board chair in November 2016, Crystal Western Ford was made interim chair with the intention of electing a permanent chair in early 2017. While our board is currently functioning well, it could function at a more engaged and active level if we could find that elusive someone or something to kick it up a notch. It would probably be beneficial to find more board members with contacts and the ability to publicize our ongoing projects in order to get the organization, as a whole, out of its publicity black hole.

To end on a positive note, a big thank you to all of our board members, volunteers and supporters who have helped us to accomplish so much and we look forward to another year of progress and moving forward!