



Star Ford, Program Manager  
Divergent Labs, Inc.  
starluciaford@gmail.com  
505.908.9426

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## **Divergent Labs – Annual Report 2017**

*Submitted to board of directors by Crystal Western Ford on March 25, 2018.*

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.

### **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 complete with the exception of interior finishing work. The solar electric system, plumbing, gas lines, water heater, insulation, interior doors and living room tile floor have been installed. Drywall, plaster, and bedroom flooring are now being worked on and hopefully to be finished by summer 2018.

One 2-week international work camp was held in July. This was a huge success with a total of 5 international volunteers from Russia, South Korea and the United States. Many projects were worked on and completed such as the barn, the outdoor patio wall and lots of plastering, and they all enjoyed being able to improve their English and we had lots of fun.

We hired our first paid employee in May 2017 and he stayed on for about 6 weeks. He was creative and really enjoyed doing outdoor work. We had two longer term volunteers who each stayed for several weeks during the summer.

*More info:* Check out the web site for history and pictures – [www.ocatecliffs.org](http://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 acts as an idea incubator; and is supported by a unique technology platform developed internally (Autistic Zone), and a discussion forum for staff and volunteers (Rhizome Core).

**Accomplishments:** The Autistic Zone project has seen the highest participation of Rhizome Core; work on the project was completed by the end of 2016 and it went into production in 2017. The first stage focused on creation of resources and attracting participants. The participation however fell below expectations but AZ project is still persevering, and hopefully will fulfill its purpose in the future.

The Gaia retreat was active in the summer and early fall, hosting 2 groups of people; seniors and families with children. As in the past year we had a couple of repeat autistic participants. Camp was maintained orderly and few improvements were made. The capacity of the camp remains at 20 (yurt + tenting). Gaia will be continuing as a Transformative Retreat next year inviting former guests to come and help with plantings and gardening in the spring of 2018.

Autistic Governance and Self-Direction has been the latest autistic movement in danger of being undermined by the autism industry. Our AGSD project has initiated a motion for Divergent Labs to join as a member of the Alliance for Citizen Directed Supports.

The Autistic Education Project has expanded its scope and recognition by making connections with like-minded groups: connections were made to the Transforming Autism Initiative in UK, and the International Alliance of Self-Directed Education which Divergent Labs has joined as a sponsor and a member.

### **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:* The technical services program qualified two disabled technical workers and paid them a total of \$18,356. For the latter part of the year, we have put this program on hold due to Star, the program manager, taking on a full-time job thereby leaving no time and energy to continue this program at this time.

### **Finances**

The technical services program had \$12,959 in consulting revenue. Ocate Cliffs received income from grants and contributions in the amount of \$16,715. 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 continue to distribute our brochures locally and have a consistent following on Facebook and to our newsletter.

*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.

*DL board:* The board of directors underwent some changes towards the end of the year being that one new board member was added to the existing board and newly elected board member, Dan Rask, replaced Crystal Western Ford as chair. The board size remains at eight board members. 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!