



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

Divergent Labs – Annual Report 2018

Submitted to board of directors by Crystal Knoebel Western Ford on April 6, 2019.

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 now 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: In Quarter 1, we arranged a staffer, Rachel London, from Rhode Island, who started in mid April and stayed until mid-June. As a reflection of her whole time at Ocate Cliffs, it appears the experience was too big of a jump from normal life and she struggled with living there. (See Rachel's evaluation for more details.)

In Quarter 2, Ocate Cliffs held a combined autistic and international work retreat June 17 to July 1. Four people from three other countries (UK, Russia, South Korea) joined eight Americans (from NM, TX, CO, IL). The main positive result from the retreat in Star's mind was how well the international-autistic mix worked. The non-autistic people did not take over and the balance was maintained very well.

During this retreat, four people had significant hardships. These ranged from being extremely homesick, being uncomfortable and unfamiliar with living in the wilderness, inability to communicate feelings and intense emotions, and even one volunteer who expressed a lot of anger to Star and Crystal and had a long list of requested changes. The board investigated and found that some of these changes had already been planned, and some were unnecessary or unfeasible. While these hardships did make for some tense and extremely emotional times during the 2 weeks, some of our volunteers were able to work through it and make adjustments that they needed for themselves.

In April, a local rancher brought his horses up to graze our pasture and they stayed until about September. This is a win win for the rancher, the horses and Star and Crystal's land.

In Quarter 3, two volunteers, Ashton and James, a couple, lived at Ocate Cliffs for a few weeks and accomplished a surprising amount of work with almost no supervision, doing things they had little prior experience in. For example, they laid the wood floor in two rooms, laid stair treads, and worked on drywall finishing and paint.

The forestry work has been completed. Road upgrades have been completed, so the road is now accessible to all cars.

In Quarter 4, there were some minor finishing types of work to be done on the Rusty Nail as well as safety features (railings and steps) that were completed. The next step is to get the final inspection and occupancy permit which is intended to be done in Spring 2019. We did identify a second leak in our water system. Repair for this will have to wait until Spring 2019. The first leak was hard to identify, required a lot of hand digging and patience and was expensive to repair.

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 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: Central to Rhizome effort in 2018 was a movement for alternative childhood Education and Self-Determination in adulthood. To this regard, Rhizome Program and Divergent Labs have made important choices and connections by joining the Alliance for Self-Directed Education (ASDE) and the Alliance for Citizen-Directed Supports.

This work coincided with an anti-ABA campaign represented by our "Awareness to ABA Practice" project, and our continued efforts to unify Autistic community and organizations by maintaining and publicizing Autistic Zone platform.

The GAIA project was limited in scope this year due to under staffing; GAIA opened in early spring for planting but did not officially open in summer.

Looking forward to 2019, we'll be looking to continue these projects. Much of proposed work is currently being summarized under Project 2019 initiative, which also seeks to add an "activism" dimension to our work. As a part of it is essential that we extend our alliances specifically approaching ASAN and TASH for collaboration in our efforts.

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: For all of 2018, we have put this program on hold due to Star, the program manager, having a full-time job thereby leaving no time and energy to continue this program at this time.

Finances

The technical services program had \$0.00 in consulting revenue. Ocate Cliffs received income from grants and contributions in the amount of \$613.00. 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: One work retreat was held at Ocate Cliffs in the summer of 2018. Attendance was good at this retreat with a total of about 11 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 added one new board member to our board, Rachel Pretlow. This increased our board membership to 9 board members. This is a success for us!

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!