Mosaic believes in a life of possibilities for people with intellectual disabilities.

Congratulations to these five state winners who represent the thousands of Mosaic employees doing great things for people every day.

Latasha Love
Mosaic in Waco

Sharon Teets
Mosaic in Central Nebraska (Grand Island)

Liz Pagel
Mosaic in Macomb

Evans Omanga
Mosaic in Delaware

Kim Pettela
Mosaic in Connecticut

Mosaic serves more than 3,900 people in 10 states.
Join The Campaign!

By Barbara Merrill, Esq.
ANCOR CEO

Excellence. Passion. Commitment. These words only begin to capture the extraordinary people profiled in these pages – ANCOR’s 2015 Direct Support Professional Recognition Award Recipients. On behalf of the entire ANCOR community, thank you! ANCOR’s National Advocacy Campaign is all about you – recognizing that each and every day you support people to realize the promise of the Americans with Disabilities Act. As we prepare to celebrate the ADA’s 25th Anniversary this July, your stories – and the stories of your colleagues across the nation – show us why your work matters. You are truly our heroes.

The judging process is always incredibly difficult – this year’s National Recipient and State Recipients were chosen from a large, deeply impressive group of nominations. I want to thank everyone who submitted a nomination, and the people who stepped up to serve on the judging panel: Stephanie Boyle, Debra Langseth, whose dedication to the DSP workforce and organizational skill ensured a smooth judging process for all.

Recognition of excellence is important – deeply important. But we cannot and will not stop there! It is the mission of ANCOR’s National Advocacy Campaign to obtain the resources necessary to attract and retain professionals like this year’s award recipients. All too often we hear about previous awardees – DSPs that personified the best of the best – that with great reluctance left for a better paying job, not a profession. Turnover rates across the country are unacceptably high.

As we celebrate the accomplishments of these dedicated professionals, join our campaign. Help us spread the word, help us to educate your state and federal elected officials that quality supports for people with disabilities require a stable, professional workforce!

Barbara Merrill, Esq., is CEO of ANCOR. She can be reached at bmerrill@ancor.org
Honoring Our Best Direct Support Professionals

By Chris Sparks
ANCOR President

This work is difficult, the hours are inconvenient, and it doesn’t pay very well, other than that it’s a great job.” This is often my intentionally provocative introduction to talking with others about the critical work of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs).

Thirty years ago, I got my start in the field of disability services working in Missouri as a DSP (actually called a “houseparent” then) in a residential program that served six people. At some point my houseparent partner (my wife) and I became aware that many of the people with whom we worked had never been on a vacation. Somehow the idea was hatched that we would go camping, tent camping because that was the equipment we had access to.

It probably should have occurred to us that tent camping with six inexperienced campers, two of whom depended upon wheelchairs for mobility, with bathrooms a ways down the trail (and not accessible), might present some challenges. The experience was challenging in many ways, and physically exhausting, but people had a great time and it remains one of my enduringly positive memories. That’s what DSPs do: facilitate interesting, enriching, and novel experiences for the people they support.

The work of DSPs has changed much since I was in that role. It grows ever more complex as people with disabilities strive to create lives of their choosing and participate more fully in their communities.

Today, DSPs are called upon to be accomplished teachers, to be a social guide, and a skilled recorder to make sure that required documentation meets increasingly stringent Medicaid standards. Not to mention ancillary job requirements of being unfailingly upbeat, social chairman and activities organizer, confidante, provider of encouragement and hope, and conduit of information for family members and others. Whew!

Because of my previous work experience, and the impact of DSPs that I see here at EPI every day, I have a deep respect and appreciation for those who choose to work as DSPs.

That’s why I am proud to be a part of ANCOR – an organization committed to assuring DSPs have needed training, are fairly compensated, receive critical employment benefits, and are recognized for their contributions.

To further elevate the role of DSPs, a visionary group of ANCOR leaders created the National Advocacy Campaign (NAC). Through the NAC, ANCOR holds up the vital work of DSPs by working with Congress, Administrative Agencies, and the Executive Branch, as well as creates opportunities for recognition.

Once a year, ANCOR sponsors the “DSP of the Year” awards, where we honor outstanding DSPs from coast to coast. Hundreds of nominations were submitted. The nominations were then de-identified and passed on to a group of experts who had the very difficult job of narrowing the nominations to one award recipient per state and one national recipient.

The DSP of the Year awards ceremony is a joyous celebration where phenomenal stories are told and many deserving people are recognized.

I express my appreciation to all the state recipients, the national DSP of the Year recipient, and every single individual working in this role. Your work is important and you are making a difference – thank you!

Chris Sparks is Executive Director of Exceptional Persons Inc. He can be reached at chris.sparks@episervice.org
ANCOR Foundation Awards Program

Recognizing Excellence: The Legacy Leaders Circle

ANCOR congratulates the following 2015 Legacy Leaders

Ron Cohen
Rabbi Erwin H. Friedman, Ph.D.
Kathy Meath
Diane McComb
Regis Obijiski
Bill Tapp
Dave Toeniskoetter
Shirley Walker

Congratulations to all DSPs!

Scioto provides residential homes for people with disabilities in communities everywhere.

Our focus is helping providers address the complexities of providing housing for people with disabilities by allowing providers to focus on the delivery of services to the people they support.

Services that may interest you:
• Property Acquisition
• Property Management
• Design & Build
• Real Estate Development

Stop by and see us at ANCOR Conference: Ignite!
ResCare salutes the 2015 Direct Support Professionals of the Year!

We are especially proud of the fifteen ResCare winners.

You embody ResCare’s commitment to our mission and the people we serve.

Congratulations!

Visit www.ResCare.com/dsp-awards to read more about the winners.
CAU Congratulates Lynette Bernardo

Congratulations

ANCOR's 2015 Direct Support Professional of the Year for the State of New Jersey

Community Access has recognized over the years that Lynette is most capable of supporting the day to day lives of people with disabilities and taking on more responsibility as she has built a strong support team. Along with her dedicated commitment to CAU members and leadership skills, Lynette ensures the individuals she supports live meaningful lives in the community.

All know Lynette to be patient, respectful, positive and confident in all that she does.

She understands and is committed to respecting each and every person's uniqueness, she helps individuals have meaningful relationships and recognizes their own potential for lifelong learning and growth, and lastly her advocacy for inclusion and full participation.

Congratulations to all nominees and recipients!
Thanks to your contributions and commitment, we're that much stronger!
“Technology Architect” is the title Alex Andrews wears at Imagine! He does far more than build and implement technology solutions for the people who Imagine! supports. He builds hope. He builds independence. He builds lives. He tears down barriers. He builds assessments and screening tools. He builds success.

Alex’s career as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) began 17 years ago. He has worked in the day program, as a residential and home host provider and, for the past nine years, in Information Technology (IT) at this proud ANCOR member agency in Lafayette, CO that supports approximately 3,000 people.

Many around the country already know of his work; now more will know with his selection from an impressive pool of nominations as the national recipient of the 2015 ANCOR DSP Recognition Award.

Alex is still trying to get comfortable with this honor. “There are many DSPs out there doing wonderful work who deserve it more than I do,” Alex said. “My work is satisfying and I love to see what others can achieve and what they can accomplish and helping them. I am very flattered and honored by this award.”

His supervisor at Imagine!, Kevin Harding, the Director of Information Technology, said the last thing Alex wants to talk about is Alex. “He’s a very humble guy who has turned down awards and focuses on wanting to see others succeed and reach their goals. He always wants to help, to give back to the community.”

So exactly what does a “Technology Architect” do? Harding explains it this way: “Alex is responsible for the modification, implementation and maintenance of assistive technology devices and systems used throughout the company. Alex works with consumers to make sure they have the technology they need and that our staff have the training to properly support that technology.”

His work is his passion…..and his passion is his work. “I am infatuated with technology and how it levels the playing field. People who could not communicate start communicating and that leads to them making choices – their choices, not someone else’s choice,” Alex, 39, explained. “It may be using music as a sensory input. It may be using a keyboard to control things, to generate noises, to control the lights and blinds in a home or to learn numbers and how to read, how to communicate using Skype or a DynaVox.”

It seems to be a magical combination for Alex – finding the right technology, pairing it with a person who has the skills to use the technology and who needs it, and loving the relationships that develop during the process. He does it at the office and at his home. More about that later.

One man he has assisted came to Imagine! from another organization. Alex says the man was 32, had intellectual and physical disabilities, was non-verbal and used his power chair as a weapon. His communication limitations created frustration and anger, so much so that he would harm himself and others. “Anyone who had his life would be mad too,” Alex said.

When this man met Alex, his life changed. Alex gained his trust, introduced him to a communications device and other technologies to tear down those barriers. It was a long process, but today he uses his DynaVox to communicate with friends and family, as a universal remote to
control his living environment, and at his first-ever job — counting the inventory at the Twisted Pine Brewery & Pub in Lafayette. Alex helped him learn to read, to find and to get the job. He also wanted a girlfriend. Using his DynaVox and Skype (taught by Alex) he asked a girl out, and eventually they were married. Alex walked down the aisle with him.

In the late 1990’s, Alex was a home host provider for another gentleman with challenging physical behaviors who came to Imagine! after many years in a state institution. How did Alex change his life? He built his first “cause and effect” laboratory in his basement for this man, teaching him how to use technology to communicate. Then Alex used that laboratory experience to launch a tech-based home for three men, identify the right technologies for two SmartHomes and create an Assistive Technology lab for a day program. The following is excerpted from his letter of nomination from Imagine! about his work with this man: “Alex is a patient teacher who practices the principles of positive behavior. Neither left home during the first two months of living together…but Alex’s consistent approach towards positive behavior change eventually enabled him to venture into the community. He returned and graduated from high school with Alex by his side.” They remain good friends today!

If anyone knows how to combine the guiding principles of being a DSP and meld it with technology, it’s Alex.

He also has created what is called the “Functional Knowledge Inventory” used at Imagine! “He is constantly looking to identify the types of technology someone can use based on their goals,” Harding said. “His inventory assesses the person’s abilities — what they can do and not do, and they count, or read, and know colors and their left from their right, their hearing and vision. He wants to know if they have the ability to actually use the technology before it is obtained and implemented. He wants successes — not failure and frustrations.”

He’s also working locally and nationally to create assessments and screening tools to help people being supported live and work more independently, thus improving their health and safety at the same time.

Now we get to Alex the DSP at his home. Today, he and wife Diana, also a DSP, are Home Host Providers to a woman who lives with them. Through a combination of low and high-tech solutions, this woman uses an iPad for her daily living and to prepare for going to work. He remodeled part of his house for her and wired it for her specific needs for sound prompting and communications systems. After a few weeks this woman was living independently — she wakes herself up, goes through her morning routine, gets ready for work and is making herself oatmeal in a microwave.

Here’s what her father says about Alex: “Although my daughter has a wonderful support group, it is without question that her growth, independence, and joy has advanced due only to Alex’s exceptional vision and caring. Also, my wife and I have both learned a great deal from Alex about how to be consistent in our support for her. He is always willing to share his knowledge without hesitation. He has greatly improved my life and the life of my daughter.”

And he adds this profound statement: “I no longer have or allow thoughts of what Leah can’t do — thanks to Alex.”

So what does this Technology Architect have on the drawing board these days?

Not too long from now you can watch a new “webisode” on the Internet with the title “Leah’s Apartment.” Their home is the studio. “It’s a sit-com. We’ve got 200 camera lines and 100 lines of audio track laid in the house. We’re building sets and I’m the director. It’s going to show and tell you all about Leah, the technology she uses in her Smart Apartment and what all she’s learned. I’m writing the script now.”

This latest creation of what he’s building is a perfect segue into what his supervisor says about Alex.

“He was way ahead of the curve on using technology. He was doing things four or five years ago that people are just becoming aware of,” Harding said. “For him it’s not just the technology per se. It’s about a person who has had an issue and no one has even tried to solve the person’s problem. Alex will. He finds out their goals, finds the right technology and trains the person and everyone who supports this person to use it properly.”

Alex also is very aware of the environment in which he works. Imagine!, led by Executive Director Mark Emery, has a well-deserved reputation nationally as a leader in making use of technology and the introduction of SmartHomes into the ID and DD field.

That environment also is reflected in this comment from Alex: “I enjoy watching other people succeed. I don’t want them to have a winning situation. I want them to have a win-win-win outcome. I try to look at life strategically — how can we create something that you, I, and the community will benefit from.”

Tom King is a free-lance writer, living in Knoxville, TN. You can reach him at 865-659-3562 or via email at tkings535@gmail.com
Maxine is a DSP with 20 years of experience, a professional who does not hesitate to come in and work on her own time whenever she is needed. She is big on community service and volunteers for Meals on Wheels and in the community garden with those she supports. She knows that creating positive community relationships is vitally important. Maxine is respected by the families of those she supports. She is an effective advocate, coming in when she’s off to advocate for each person during their Personal Care Plan meetings.

One special relationship is with a man she supports who relies on a speaking device. She taught him how to use it, but also trains her co-workers as well so he can communicate effectively with them when she is not there.

She attends church with those she supports, even if she’s not working. One man was especially difficult about going to a doctor’s appointment. But Maxine had no trouble in making this work and she’s now been working with him for three years. The man’s sister says of Maxine: “She has been my brother’s caretaker and best friend and he does not warm up to just anyone … Whether she is working one-on-one with my brother in day rehabilitation or on an outing or preparing meals with him at home, he smiles more and shows he trusts her in his day-to-day living.”

There’s more: Maxine buys food with her own money and is known for her culinary skills. She cooks things at home for those she supports because they love her “special homemade Southern dishes” so much. She also assists with fundraisers on her time off to ensure that individuals can purchase items for which they don’t have funds.

Alabama’s DSP of the Year is very special.
Robert “Bobby” Contreras has been neighbors with the man he supports for 25 years; he’s considered part of his family. But he’s only been his professional DSP for the last 18 months at ResCare HomeCare in Flagstaff. This is a very unique relationship. Bobby is very aware of this man’s diagnosis of cognitive disabilities and intermittent explosive disorder and has been a calming presence for Scott while in the community, allowing him to experience events without becoming upset. Bobby is a father figure to him. He’s also an effective advocate, helping his friend at work and with running errands. They work together to help create a positive outlook on behalf of people with disabilities by shoveling the trailer park where they live and feeding the local stray cats.

“Bobby has helped this man learn how to enjoy the community without becoming overwhelmed and having outbursts of anger,” says Kari Watson, who nominated Bobby for this DSP of the Year honor.

Bobby also has found a creative alternative to improve this man’s health after his doctor encouraged him to cut back on drinking so much soda. “Everyday Scott gets an allowance of $3 which he immediately spends on soda. Bobby has him drinking flavored waters and teas. They cook together and have developed a healthy eating plan as well,” Kari said.

They walk together at the mall to stay in shape. “The emotional support that Bobby provides to our client is unending and he’s blessed to have Bobby as his caregiver. But if you ask Bobby, he is the one who is blessed to have this friend he supports,” Kari says.

Diane has been a DSP for six years at Bost and has been supporting the same woman all six years. She was nominated by her supervisor, Matthew Mills, for “maintaining peak job performance while maintaining a family of her own. Her attention to detail and structure has positively transformed the behavior and psychological stability of the woman she supports.” Her focus on being healthy has led to her implementing a specific diet plan for her consumer, who has lost 80 pounds. Diane also spent many hours assisting in the location of land, the construction of, and finishing off a self-help home for the woman she supports.

Matthew says their relationship is like that of sisters. “Diane has earned an amazing amount of trust from her consumer and this trust has a positive influence on the behavior and mentality of her consumer, leading to a more stable and healthy lifestyle – both physically and psychologically,” he said.

Diane is known as an outstanding advocate for individuals with developmental disabilities. Diane volunteers in the Special Olympics, and coached the woman she supports into a top finish in Bocce Ball. Diane also works next to her in a supportive employment program 15 hours per week.

Diane has helped “her sister” organize her home and is creative in the care and support for her. Diane is always encouraging the woman she supports to make individual choices. “Diane maintains integrity and professionalism at all times and has demonstrated this throughout all the changes that have taken place. She has the ability to assert her thought and opinions in a professional manner and is always considerate of what’s in the best interest of this woman,” Matthew added.
Congratulations to
Muriel Gabriel
Pennsylvania DSP of the Year!

Thank you for exceeding expectations day after day, and for demonstrating what it means to “advance the human spirit” of every life you touch. We couldn’t be more proud of your purpose and passion.

Your friends at Keystone Human Services
Continued from page 11

and the man’s daughters to make sure all those who love him are up to date on his condition,” said his supervisor, Kenyatta Pendleton, in her nomination letter. “Jimmy also serves as an information hub for the man’s four daughters, all of whom are actively involved in their father’s care.”

His work in the disability field began when Jimmy was in high school. He volunteered at his old elementary school as a teacher’s aide for a special education student for 3½ years. After high school he spent four years working for an agency that operated a school for individuals with physical and intellectual disabilities, ages 8-21.

Jimmy is fully engaged with this man he supports. They play dominos hours on end. Due to failing eyesight, Jimmy reads the two local newspapers to his friend daily; the gentleman selects which articles he wants to hear. Each day, over breakfast, Jimmy talks with this man about what he would like to do that day, allowing him to direct the day’s activities.

Committed, caring, and communicating – that’s Jimmy Rodriguez!

JENN HOULE
ResCare Premier
Niagara-on-the-Lake
Ontario, Canada

She pulls “all-nighters” for the people she supports. She helps people that she supports attend a four-day camp for individuals with Acquired Brain Injury. She stays at camp with the people she serves to help them participate in the activities and to interact with the other campers and staff. She goes on home visits with them to see their families. It may be a trip to the library or to the YMCA or to the movies. It’s what she does and what she does is work to enhance the quality of life and provide lasting memories for those she supports.

Meet Jenn Houle, an 11-year DSP who is a Rehabilitation Educator for ResCare Premier.

Ms. Houle works with many adults who have sustained an acquired brain injury. “She quickly develops rapport with new individuals we support. She is naturally energetic and full of life, which she shares with the people who can’t help but feel it and begin to experience it, too,” says Josie Turbach, her supervisor who nominated her for this honor.

Some of the people she supports are nonverbal and unable to communicate. Ms. Turbach adds: “While Ms. Houle is able to work well with individuals of all abilities, she has been a particularly vocal advocate for those who are unable to speak for themselves, encouraging their involvement within the residence and ensuring they have opportunity to engage in community activities and outings of their preference.”

Being person-centered matters to her in all of the supports she provides. She focuses on making sure that these people she supports enjoy selecting and participating in what they want to do – not what she wants to do.

CARLA BUTERBAUGH
Dungarvin
Colorado Springs, CO

Carla Buterbaugh is a Host Home Provider and a Direct Support Professional (DSP) in every sense of the title. She has been in the field for over 20 years. Her supervisor, Brandy Cline, says of her: “Throughout the years, Carla has made an immense difference in the lives of the people she has served. From easing the difficulties at end-of-life transitions, including giving the last breath of life to a man as he passed away, to providing a first-time loving home for the isolated and embracing the discarded, she has done it all.” High praise indeed.

People who have never interacted with others have thrived within Carla’s home. A man she supports – we will call him CB – moved in just after turning 21. Their bond was so strong that when Carla and her family decided to move across Colorado, CB’s parents decided that relocating with her would be best for him.

Carla has calmly dealt with CB’s issues during the past 16 years – a multitude of complexities from complications with his health, violent and explosive behaviors, and communications challenges. It wasn’t long after he moved in that she picked up on his love for music. One day he sat down at a piano and began playing his own, beautiful creation though he had never played a piano before! “Carla was blown away, but made sure to get him a keyboard at home so he could continue to explore his musical talents and embrace his newfound form of communication,” Brandy said. “To this day, CB loves music and it is one of the best ways to de-escalate his difficult behaviors. Carla paid enough attention that she was able to see things in CB that no one else knew existed.”

This is but one example of what Carla has meant to the people she has ably supported through the years.
Evans Omanga, his supervisor, shared it in nominating him.

“One of the men he supports had surgery for a small bowel obstruction. The individual’s health began to decline and the individual’s family, as well as the hospital staff, began seeking out nursing home placement. Evans contacted the family and advocated for the individual to return to his neighborhood group home because it was his home and represented familiar surroundings. The family agreed and the individual returned home with hospice services. The hospice services were terminated after six weeks because the individual flourished. The individual is still living a meaningful life, participating in outings and activities of his choice.”

That intervention by Evans helped earn him the 2013 DeARF DSP Advocacy Award.

He works very hard to connect the men to their families and encourages family members to get more involved in the lives of their loved ones. He drove one of the men to Nazareth, PA to visit a sister he had not seen in 30 years. This was a 5- to 6-hour drive on top of all of Evans’ other duties. It was a great reunion. When the sister’s health declined, Evans drove him to Nazareth again and this time the individual also met his sister’s son, who has since become the family surrogate for the individual. “These trips were add-ons to Evans’ other duties and he did not get additional pay for the extra hours as he is salaried. Evans did this because he knew it would make the individual’s life richer and more meaningful,” Ms. Allen said.

Evan is a special DSP indeed!

Kimberly Pettella, a Direct Support Manager for Mosaic for 11 years, did just that. For two years she supported a man who was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Kim made an unwavering commitment to help him through the process, including several surgeries and countless chemo and radiation sessions. She took him to every treatment and follow-up appointment. She planned her personal life around his appointments and made sure he ate at his favorite restaurants to help ensure that his weight could be maintained.

In the summer of 2013, his doctors said there was nothing more that could be done. So Kim began working with him on his “Bucket List” and made sure that he saw the Boston Red Sox play and Taylor Swift sing. She then worked hard to prepare her staff and this man’s friends and housemates of 20-plus years for his passing.

Three days before Easter in 2014, he was hospitalized. On Easter Sunday he was placed on life support. Kim’s supervisor, Jimmy Eccleston, who nominated her for this honor, tells us what happened next. “Kim knew that he did not want to be on life support. She worked with his mother, the state, and the hospital staff to ensure that his wishes were respected. He was taken off life support later that evening. Kim gathered all of his friends, staff and family to be with him and say their good byes.”

Kim left his room for an hour, Jimmy recalls, and that’s when he passed away. “We will never know what his last thoughts were, but I believe they were of Kim and all of her support,” he said. “Her support and person-centered service ensured that his final wishes were respected.”

Melvin Beach has been a DSP for five years and he “gets it.” He’s all about inclusion, allowing the men he supports to make their own choices and to have healthy and meaningful relationships. He is their advocate. He’s always positive even when others are not. He considers them part of his own family.

“He doesn’t automatically do things for the people he supports, but he helps them learn how to do things on their own. This way they can become more independent,” says Diana Hernandez of RCM, who nominated Melvin. “The people who Melvin supports look up to him as a big brother and have come to depend on Melvin; they count on Melvin.”

Here are a few things Melvin has done for the men he supports:

- Helped Melvin’s group establish a “bucket list” of things to do before he passed away.
- Planned fun outings and activities for the group.
- Assisted with medical appointments and transportation.
- Provided emotional support and encouragement to the group members.

This story about this Direct Support Manager of a Mosaic group home speaks legions about Evans Omanga. Michelle
• He shops for nutritional food; he looks for sales and analyzes prices to stretch the budget. He’s helping these men with their health and losing weight.

• He often volunteers (non-paid hours) to drive people back and forth from events, such as the Universal Soul Circus, when they didn’t have another form of transportation.

• Melvin brings those he supports to his family reunions, parties, and BBQs, as he feels they are part of his family.

• He took two people he supports on vacation to Ocean City. Rather than scheduling their activities in advance, Melvin, understanding what they enjoy, decided to pick a few activities and provide them with options so they could pick what they wanted to do – not what Melvin wanted.

When the mother of a man he supports passed away, Melvin learned that the men in the family were wearing ties with a particular shade of purple to honor her. He took this man shopping at multiple stores to find the exact shade of purple as everyone else. “This man felt like he was truly part of the family at the funeral at such a sad time. It meant a great deal to him,” Ms. Hernandez said.

Little things matter and Melvin knows that!
Recognizing Excellence

Samantha Pease
ResCare Residential
Bonita Springs, FL

“She is a dedicated individual who provides excellent human services to the people she supports while working side-by-side in harmony with her co-workers. She is a positive role model to people in the community and advocates for the individuals she works for and with. She embraces the idea of doing tasks with the individual instead of doing the task for the individual so that they achieve their independence.” Those words are from Loretta Weigand, Samantha’s supervisor, and they explain in a nutshell why she is Florida’s DSP of the Year.

Samantha has to be organized at work and at home as a single mom of three young children. Time and again she rearranges her family schedule to accommodate those she supports.

She is big on volunteering in the community. Monday through Thursday she and the people she support collect goods for a food bank. On some days they have been known to transport more than 1,000 pounds of food! There is an historical village where Samantha helps the individuals provide upkeep and care for the older buildings – vacuuming, sweeping and window cleaning. The community notices all of this. Samantha is a link to the community and takes the people she supports out every day to be part of it.

Samantha has keen observational skills, making the nurse aware of any health issues. She notices even small changes that may be the start of something requiring follow-up. “As a young mother she knows how to make her group home a warm and inviting home for all. Her respect, compassion and care is apparent in her quiet voice and gentle hand and they enable her to often get a response others may not get,” Ms. Weigand says of her.

Erik Washington
Support Solutions
Augusta, GA

Erik supports a man who has been receiving waiver services since he was in high school and who is described as “having had more than 20 hospitalizations in his lifetime for psychiatric issues. He has been supported by multiple community providers and direct care staff.” In other words, this man has been a difficult man to support. But since Erik has been working with this gentleman, he has become more interactive with everyone – including his family. It has been a one-step-at-a-time process for Erik.

Erik now has this man doing volunteer work in the community and is there to support him. He’s growing an herb garden, bicycling, shopping and learning how to cook. Erik has even helped him loose weight with the South Beach diet.

This man now goes on quarterly visits to see his parents and Erik takes him for these visits. They live 130 miles from the group home. Erik as connects them regularly using Skype. “This gentleman’s behaviors overall have decreased, resulting in increased interaction while he is out in the community. These are simple accomplishments on the surface, but for professionals, staff and others who have known this man for years, these are wondrous accomplishments by Erik,” says Alicia Sanchez, Erik’s supervisor.

Erik is described as calm, self confident, thoughtful and patient.

The man he supports enjoys swimming. Erik was not a swimmer, but he got in the pool and learned how to swim, ensuring that this man had support when going to the Family Y or taking a walk near a lake. This man has been known to jump in a nearby lake or pond.

As you can see, Erik Washington is indeed a very special DSP!
Kathy has devoted her life to supporting the elderly, particularly those with disabilities. There is a special place in the heart of this DSP veteran of 20 years for individuals with little family support. She strives to help each person she supports become as independent as possible. In addition to doing the basics of support, Kathy also works to find the appropriate support services they may need; she is an expert in the programs and resources available to seniors with disabilities. On top of this full-time job, she also volunteers 20 hours a week with a Senior Companion program.

Here is but one example of Kathy’s effectiveness as an advocate. One individual she supports is visually impaired. So she contacted the North Idaho Association for the Blind and consulted with them on making adaptations to the individual’s home to improve his daily life and ease in getting around the home and accomplishing tasks on his own. She has made similar arrangements for others with vision problems — it’s what she does.

Another individual had difficulty getting out into the community with no family support. So Kathy takes him shopping and helps him run his errands. Another man she supports when his wife is out of town said this of her: “I am confident that she will be a continuing asset to me and to your company. We know that we will continue to value her help in the coming months. Thank you for sharing her with us.”

Her nomination form said about this dedicated DSP: “Kathy exemplifies the NADSP Code #9 — Advocacy. She always finds a way to find additional advocacy services when the current services are insufficient, whether it be through her volunteer hours or contacting a resource office. She also bounces ideas off office staff and family members to ensure each individual is receiving the support they need. Kathy leaves no stone unturned.”

There often are barriers to community integration for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. But to Elizabeth “Liz” Pagel, those barriers are challenges to be overcome. This DSP of 10 years arranged a trip for eight people to go to the Illinois State Fair this past summer. Sounds like a major undertaking. Not for her. She has those she supports work in a community garden. She instructs and supports them in making crafts for their families and for people in the community, building reciprocal relationships. Liz turns fishing trips and haircuts into fun adventures.

One man the agency supports has a long history of criminal problems, including physical aggression. Team meetings were held and a discharge plan was created. Liz stepped in and advocated for a new approach to give him one more chance. He was not discharged. His dream was to have a girlfriend and now he has one. Liz helped him with developing this relationship by educating him on various topics and creating opportunities for them to date. In a way, she saved him.

She has served as president of the DSP Council in Macomb, and took charge of the Care Campaign in Illinois to advocate with local and state governments for an increase in the rate DSPs make for the valuable work that they do.

On a lighter note, she is known as a “coupon guru.” Many people receiving services live on very limited incomes and do not always get a wide range of things that many people take for granted – like shampoo, hair care products, and personal hygiene supplies. Liz is able to find the best deals. Now, most everyone “coupons” thanks to Liz and she has turned shopping into a fun activity for them.
Bryan wears a lot of hats at ResCare Residential, but the two biggest are those as director of the Community Activities program and the Life Enrichment program. A DSP for 21 years, Bryan has a serious commitment to helping the people he supports volunteer and contribute to the communities where they live. When you hear his supervisor, Garrett Huebert, talk about him you can hear the excitement and respect that he has for Bryan in his voice and in his words. Garrett nominated Bryan for this honor as DSP of the Year.

Building relationships and networking in the community are priorities he has for the teens he supports; many have lived sheltered or segregated lives, but Tony has improved their involvement at local churches, shopping, going to entertainment venues, charities, clubs, and financial institutions. His focus on community has helped others achieve more than they ever thought possible!

His advocacy work is impressive, advocating for people’s inclusion at local art classes, for home ownership, obtaining a driver’s license, voting, and improved community transit. Tony provides assistance and guidance to a self-advocacy group that meets to learn about and speak up on issues within the organization and also with state legislators.

Aberg adds this about Tony: “He treats people as worthy, dignified human beings. He respects their choices (even if they differ with his). Tony seeks to understand first versus being understood.”

This 14-year DSP is called “a leader among his peers.” He’s adept at helping individuals and his agency in transitioning individuals from institutional living to community living. That’s not an easy job. His fellow staff at Benchmark say that the relationships he builds with people he supports enables them to do things previously thought impossible.

One man was walking away from his group home, on average, 30 times a week. This is dangerous behavior any way you look at it. Yared discovered that the man simply wanted to go exploring. Yared would catch him standing at the door and would ask him – “Keys or shoes?” That meant did he want to go for a walk or go for a car ride. So he and Yared usually walk together. His vanishing acts are now few and far between and the man has lost a lot of weight thanks to the walks.

People gravitate to Yared. He easily transitions from supporting medically fragile individuals to those with high behavior needs. “His ability to work with a variety of individuals with different abilities and needs makes him invaluable,” said Ann Titus, his supervisor who nominated him for this honor. “Yared is dependable and recognizes that both individuals served and his colleagues depend on him. Managers trust Yared to assist individuals to make good decisions, and even rely on him to help train new DSPs.”

When you read Jim Aberg’s nomination of Tony for DSP of the Year, it’s little wonder that families of those supported at Opportunity Village say, time after time, “I wish you had more like Tony.” High praise for sure!

A DSP for nine years, Tony is known to excel in supporting individuals who others might see as “difficult.” When other DSPs view a situation as being impossible, all Tony sees are possibilities and opportunities. He supports teenagers attending a social skills class at the agency’s Children’s Autism Center. Tony also serves is on the Quality Council, which focuses on employee recognition and morale. He is a certified trainer of the internationally recognized Mandt System. In the trainer role Tony takes discussions to another level by exploring reasons and solutions for many of the interfering behaviors that some people deal with and have.

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to work as if it’s not a job. I like to hang out with all these guys.”

Bryan is a coordinator and supervises multiple areas. That takes time, and a lot of the time is his own. The calendar of events is developed by the people Bryan supports—not by him. “There are no activities that are out of reach. Bryan will just make it happen,” Garrett says.

Bryan has a simple approach to this: “If they think it, dream it, we will do our best to make it happen.”

KENTUCKY
JONATHAN BARJOLO
ResCare Residential
Louisville, KY

Jonathan Barjolo

DSPs can change a life. Grier Stanley’s nomination of Jonathan Barjolo as DSP of the Year makes this perfectly clear. Grier writes about this DSP of just five years: “To say that Jonathan makes a real difference in someone’s life would be an understatement. Let me tell you why. The individual Jonathan supports has had a challenging life and had well over 40 placements prior to moving into his current placement and meeting Jonathan. Jonathan has been by this individual’s side since the beginning and has worked hard learning this individual’s personality and his interests. Jonathan takes this individual to various parks to both play and to watch soccer and brings him to church where he has built natural supports. Jonathan also took the time to get to know this individual’s background and found out that his family was in the military. So Jonathan has taken this individual to military-related locations, such as tours at Fort Knox in Kentucky, on numerous occasions.”

This man he supports calls Jonathan “JJ” and while maintaining professional boundaries, Jonathan has become like a brother to this individual. Jonathan has certainly built trust and a bond with this individual, unlike anyone else, and understands him as other DSPs can’t. Jonathan has stepped up to work extra shifts, or double up to assist a new DSP who is not quite as comfortable starting out with this man.

Jonathan attends this man’s team meetings and always accompanies him to his medical appointments, including his neurology appointments where Jonathan’s advocacy and feedback for the doctor have been vital. He also has helped him reduce his smoking habit. In so many ways, he has changed this man’s life!
Dungarvin Congratulates 2015 ANCOR DSP Award Winners

Dungarvin is proud to acknowledge our fabulous DSP winners for ANCOR’s 2015 DSP of the Year awards. We are so fortunate to have each of you on our team. Words cannot begin to express our pride and gratitude for your excellent performance as direct support professionals! Thank you, and congratulations to all of our DSP winners!
A non-verbal, autistic man who had severely dangerous behaviors and anxiety – such as leaving his group home and wandering into the homes of neighbors – is now creating his own day support program agenda and completing it. Thanks to this DSP of 14 years and her dedication, research and persistence, this man is progressing when no one – except Caitlin – thought he could or would. He gets out into the community and takes walks with Caitlin and even exercises and participates in sensory activities. How did this happen?

Caitlin worked diligently with this man so he could better communicate his feelings, desires and choices. Caitlin’s supervisor, Jessica Irish, says this about her: “Many DSPs, despite the best of intentions, have limits as to the actions they can witness while maintaining a level of calm. This man exhibits many of the behaviors that cross the line of comfort. Caitlin is not fazed by any action; she recognizes his behavior for what it is – communication…. Caitlin’s calming voice and paralanguage can take him from rapid pacing to engaging in a puzzle in moments.”

Caitlin has worked for GMS since December of 2013. She entered the Brighton Avenue home as a Lead DSP, putting her on a Management track. While Caitlin thrived in this position, she asked to be transferred in order to work one-on-one with this gentleman. “Caitlin is leading through example by demonstrating the effect one can have when focusing on each detail of the individual to develop a comprehensive plan to improve quality of life,” Ms. Irish says.

As we celebrate the accomplishments of these dedicated professionals, join our campaign. Help us spread the word, help us to educate your state and federal elected officials that quality supports for people with disabilities require a stable, professional workforce!
Words matter, and these are some of the words used to paint a portrait of this DSP of 6½ years: Engaging and empowering, listener and assessor, compassionate and concerned, inspiring and unique. Ed is a Community Support and Living Arrangement (CSLA) DSP. He supervises a staff of 18 and, with them, supports 33 individuals. His primary job is to teach and reinforce practical life skills for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He integrates strategic goal setting with daily living to support each person achieve self-sufficiency. He is their advocate, with family members and the staff, providing an additional “voice” for those he serves. He is a hands-on manager.

His success stories are many. One is about a 23-year old D.C. man who suffered a traumatic brain injury in a car accident. Ed recognized his creative abilities and took it upon himself to research and apply for a grant to help pay for his college expenses. Today he is a graphics designer. After the accident this man could not walk. There was a remote possibility he would walk again, but only through exercise and rehabilitation. After work hours, Ed used his own gym membership to take him to work on rebuilding his strength and body. As a result, he continues to strengthen his muscles, is stronger every day, and taking steps is a real possibility.

As part of the agency’s Saturday Life Skills Program, Ed developed programs for menu planning, grocery shopping and money management. On Saturday the group goes to the grocery store while Ed guides the process. Additionally, as a fitness person himself, he created a health and fitness program for instruction in dieting and eating properly and exercising both inside and outdoors.

MARYLAND

**ED WAINWRIGHT, JR.**
New Horizons Supported Services, Inc.
Upper Marlboro, MD

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**Massachusetts**

**JOHN FREDERICK**
New England Business Associates
Springfield, MA

When a DSP takes a break from sunbathing on a South Carolina beach with his family to deal with and help solve an issue with a person that he supports, you begin to understand what the words dedication and commitment really mean. John, a DSP for six years, called his supervisor, Trisha Gilley, after someone else called him about the problem. “There was an issue with one of the men he works with and he was called directly. He called me right away to make me aware of the situation so that I could offer the support that he could not. While we were talking I made a comment about how he’s on vacation and should be enjoying himself on the beach. It’s rare that a team member will answer their phone while on vacation. let alone while they are sunbathing on a beach with their family.”

But that’s John Frederick and this is one of the reasons she nominated him for ANCOR’s Massachusetts Direct Support Professional Recognition Award. There are more reasons, too many to write about here.

John worked with a young man who is autistic. His work transformed this man, who was almost non-verbal with a history of self-destructive and antisocial behaviors. This young man now has an office job, remembers everyone’s name, can confidently approach different people to ask for additional work and remembers their names without a script and very little prompting. Not only is he now a part of the office team, he has begun to emerge from his shell and form real and lasting relationships with those around him. John did it.

“Staff and clients alike gravitate to John. He approaches every client as an equal who is fully capable of working and living the life that they dream of,” Ms. Gilley added.

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par for the course. Her attitude is described as “always positive and cheerful.” She is always juggling priorities.

Read what her nomination letter says about her: “Yvette’s relationship with those she supports is great and very nurturing. They feel very comfortable going to her for advice or if they need someone to talk to. Yvette has gained the respect of those she serves. She has the ability to talk to them about those tough-to-discuss topics like weight management, nutrition and exercise. She is known for getting on the floor and doing exercises with them. Yvette is a pro at turning non-favorite activities like exercising into fun.”

One woman she supports deals with low self-esteem and is negative about her appearance and weight. So Yvette leaves little sticky notes on her mirror every morning with notes like “You are beautiful!” and “You are special!” and “Be YOU!” This little gesture worked and today this woman likes who she is.

This creative and dedicated DSP is making a huge difference in many lives!

The difference that Lisa Buckentin has made in one man’s life she supports is remarkable. He’s gone from poor hygiene, bad eating habits, living as a recluse in a dirty apartment to losing 40 pounds, being known in the community and having theme rooms in his apartment. He has his own garden and is growing fresh produce. Lisa listened to him and together they discovered he has a wide variety of interests. He’s not been sick in seven years.

Her work on his apartment is fun. He has a patriotic bedroom, a Green Bay Packers Fan bathroom and hall, and a rooster kitchen/front room. He is proud of his new decor and his apartment is always in showroom condition.

Lisa, a DSP for 16 years, has been supporting him since 2007. Lisa gained his trust and encouraged him to open up. This man had always wanted to be a member of a church. For six months, once a week, he and Lisa met with a pastor of a local church who taught him about being a Christian and a church member. Lisa helped him memorize scriptures, even though he can’t read or write. They would repeat verses, sing them, and practice them. He concluded his training and was baptized.

She facilitated reuniting him with his siblings after not seeing each other for 17 years. She helped him locate his mother’s gravesite.

He has blossomed so much that now he socializes in the community when Lisa is off and goes to high school sporting events with a former principal. He has become friends with the local police officers and firemen. Around town he is known as: “the kind and jovial man...loving life, the Packers and Elvis.”

Today, he’s a different person from 2007. Thanks to Lisa, his DSP!

MISSISSIPPI
GLENDA PATTERSON
REM
McComb, MS

“So says Jessica Matthews about Glenda Patterson, a DSP for 10 years. Jessica is the Executive Director of REM Mississippi (part of The Mentor Network) and she nominated Glenda Patterson for ANCOR’s Direct Support Professional Recognition Award.

Glenda works in the agency’s “Magnolia Place” day program and supports between 10 and 12 people on any given day. In addition to the supports and activities she provides daily, she also has attended trainings on Customized Employment, so she is able to assist consumers in finding jobs.

Glenda made excellent use of her gardening skills to help the Magnolia Place pre-vocational program participants start their own “Magnolia Place Garden.” They have planted a variety of vegetables, depending on the time of year, and grew so many vegetables in their first year they brought some to the landlord and home with them so everyone was able to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Glenda has exceptional relationships with the people she supports, their families, case managers as well as the staff. The individuals she serves look to her as a teacher. A few of the clients she supports have said she makes them feel safe because they can talk to her about anything. That is a major compliment for any DSP!

If she can’t remember if she greeted you in the morning, she will go out of her way to ask, “Did I say good morning to you today?” Her enthusiasm and good spirit is contagious to everyone she is around.
Congratulations Lisa Batteen!
South Dakota's Direct Support Professional of the Year

"Lisa Batteen was born to do this work. She personifies the ethics and qualities of an excellent DSP." Jackie Schoenrock, Lisa's supervisor

"I'm glad she is my service coordinator. She is wonderful!" Cindy Wernisch, person supported

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Deborah Blong

It is apparent that challenges do not bother Debbie Blong. In her 20 years of working as a DSP, Debbie is a major advocate for self-determination. She manages one of the most difficult group homes in the organization – of the eight residents, four have Prader-Willi syndrome and three others struggle with COPD. A typical week for her is 14-hour days, 6 to 7 days a week, in addition to helping support her husband at home, who has Parkinson’s. In every situation, her first thought is: “What’s best for the individual?” She is always the first to help anyone and everyone – residents, fellow staff members and the organization.

The nomination letter for Debbie said: “While never backing down from challenging behavior, Debbie is able to use her experience with multiple diagnoses, expertise with many types of disabilities, and calm demeanor to work with each individual, resulting in a positive household that has become increasingly involved in community activities. Those in her home are medically challenged with a history (pre-Debbie) of volatility. Every day, Debbie supports the optimum physical and emotional health of each individual. She promotes positive behaviors in every situation.”

The people she supports appreciate and love her. They say things like “She’s the best Coordinator we have ever had” ... “I like everything she does” ... and “She listens to me.” The residents’ positive statements are reinforced by Debbie’s staff, who have been greatly influenced by her leadership and example. “She’s the best supervisor I have ever had” ... “Great support!” ... “Her attention to detail with all clients is amazing” are but a few of the staff comments.

Says Debbie Blong: “I really enjoying working with people and over the years working in this field, I’ve learned a lot about myself.”

Sharon Teets

Sharon supports two men who live together. When you consider what she’s helped them do, it’s quite remarkable – and fascinating.

Once she realized their love of all things Native American and Western, she helped them redecorate their home in Native American and Western artwork and items, reflecting their interests. She also took them to the Plains Museum, to Fort Cody, the Great Platte River Road Archway, and the Stuhr Museum.

Continued on page 27
CONGRATULATIONS DSPs!
Your outstanding work puts people on the course to a better life.

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Seeing beyond disability.
Congratulates
Nelson Machado
ANCOR’s 2015 DSP of the Year for New York State
And All the Award Recipients
Shawn Torres

Shawn is a Program Coordinator and manages a group home that supports four men – four lucky men. These men, Shawn’s supervisor says, are given the opportunity to do just about anything they want to do. They volunteer at the police department. They attend all of the Special Olympic events. Just as important, Shawn stresses the importance of independence and independent living skills. One example is cooking. Shawn made sure they could prepare a full dinner and also barbeque on a grill for which they budgeted and saved. Now they host parties and barbeque for their guests, sometimes as many as 50.

Relationships with these men spill over to their families. The families truly trust Shawn. “He helped mend broken family relationships and helped an individual understand and accept the need for a family guardian as a way to prevent being homeless again,” says Brenda Hill, his supervisor who nominated Shawn.

The most important advocacy role that Shawn provides is as a coach for self advocacy. Shawn teaches individuals their rights and how to stand up for them. He’s a natural leader who motivates the organization to take on projects that enhance the quality of life for individuals supported and to honor staff members. “It started with the annual picnic/staff recognition event. All individuals, staff, team members, and families are invited to this ‘family reunion.’ Shawn works with peers from other homes for food; he convinces community members to donate time and resources for entertainment and door prizes,” Brenda explained.

Shawn’s project management talent focused on vacations. First it was a simple jaunt to Disneyland for four people. Four years later, the 2014 vacation included 13 individuals and 6 staff on a cruise. This required passports for everyone. Shawn made sure it all happened. One individual returned saying “it changed his life.”

There’s that phrase again – changing lives!

Lynette has moved up the ladder quickly at her agency – she has been promoted three times in 3½ years and is now an Assistant Director. She is all about advocacy in her DSP role. Her supervisor, Paul LaMaine, nominated her for the DSP Recognition Award and says that Lynette works hard to ensure that everyone becomes involved in advocacy at some level. Most recently she has advocated that people she supports attend nationwide conferences like SABE, AAIDD, and NJCDD.

“Lynette is most capable of taking on more responsibility as she has built a strong team along with her leadership in ensuring our people live meaningful lives in the community,” LaMaine said. “Lynette has successfully helped transition a member from a supervised apartment program to more independent living in a supportive living apartment program. She also worked in getting approval for vocational rehabilitation services whereby the person obtained a good paying job in the community.”

Lynette continues to develop great relationships with not only the persons she supports, but with their family members, state-appointed guardians, the community, and other employees. She is described as patient, respectful, positive and confident in ensuring that all of the people supported have their needs met. They rely heavily on her to make sure she helps them obtain jobs, move into more independent living situations, foster relationships among other individuals, and make stronger decisions in their lives.
When Lisa Sterrantino nominated Nelson for New York’s recipient of the DSP Recognition Award, she said: “Nelson, who schedules 5 a.m. dialysis appointments so he doesn’t miss time supporting the residents, knows what it’s like to be different.” Born with chronic renal failure, Nelson had a liver transplant when he was 15.

“I know how it feels to be different and not have as much freedom as we would like,” says Nelson, who is on the national kidney donor list again. Nelson shares his mother’s words with those he supports: “There’s no room for negativity. Turn it around and turn it into something good.”

That positive outlook is what helped one man with major authority issues connect with Nelson and begin to trust him. Nelson “doesn’t tell me what I can’t do…he doesn’t judge me,” the man said. With his growing confidence and support from Nelson, he wrote to state officials about the importance of funding for his services and met with officials at local legislative breakfasts.

In addition to working as a DSP, Nelson kept his second job as a waiter for extra income. However, when he needed more dialysis, he had to give up one job. Despite making much more money at the restaurant, he decided to keep the more fulfilling position as a DSP. Nelson is adamant about ensuring his 3.5-hour dialysis treatments, 3 times per week, don’t interfere with work. His positive attitude is inspiring and rubs off on staff and, especially, the residents. “They’re like my other family,” he said. “I feel terrible when I don’t see the guys. If I’m on vacation, after a few days I’ll start wondering what they’re up to.”

Kathey is a Residential Coordinator with five years of experience in the disabilities field. In addition to her role at Dungarvin New Mexico, she’s also a full-time Treatment Foster Parent of three children, which requires a tremendous amount of her time. She does not allow that to get in the way of the great work she does for those she supports.

Kathey was instrumental in establishing a relationship between the individuals she supports and the People First group. She encouraged and backed one person in his bid to run for president of the group. Kathey was key in involving persons with the Work Hard Play Hard conference that supports people with disabilities to learn to be advocates. She researched and secured funding from The Arc so that everyone who wanted to attend would be able to do so.

Kathey also set up volunteer opportunities at a local ranch, Hearts and Minds. This opportunity allowed people to discover a new love of horses and ranching. It also opened up volunteer opportunities and job sampling for over 15 people in the day program.

DeAnn Fierro, Kathey’s supervisor, says that Kathey supports the residential program in picking up extra shifts, although she is a day program staff member and is not required to offer such support. “She will work overnights or weekends to ensure the individuals in services have stability, and by doing this, she must also assure that her family’s needs are provided for while she is working,” DeAnn says.

Kathey mentors new staff in both the day program and residential services. She offered support to the Program Directors in residential services in mentoring new Residential Coordinators. Kathey will take the initiative and run the day program when her Program Director is out of town.
also comes in each morning at another home to cover vacant shifts and to assist in supporting some of the more challenging individuals. A DSP for five years, he has become a vital player in supporting individuals who are transitioning from the group homes to the day program. He ensures the transition is smooth and he facilitates social interaction between the individuals.

He has developed a special bond with one person who had challenging behaviors. Shawron has helped lessen his episodes substantially. This has also had the effect of making the entire group home run more smoothly. He demonstrates positive role modeling in a leadership role when relating to the individuals within the home.

Shawron treats others with the respect that is deserved. He frequently voices his concerns about client care and individual needs. He has each individual’s best interest at heart and ensures that sentiment is echoed throughout the home. His advocacy work is significant for those people he supports.

Shawron often incorporates an individual’s mannerism in his own actions. This helps to foster growth in that individual by completing steps to promote independence within their own home.

This is a DSP who pays close attention to those he supports. Very close attention. That skill is an integral part of the job – understanding each individual’s needs and interests. Paul noticed that one man he supports had an interest in working in a woodshop and building things. So Paul and the man went shopping for wood. They developed a budget to build a workbench for his home. They worked together on the project for over a month, including when Paul took this man to a wood shop to cut all the pieces. Then they built the bench. When it was done he showed the bench to everyone and is very proud of his accomplishment.

Paul also was supporting a 19-year-old man with autism who had a hard time with most social situations and struggled to engage with people his own age. The young man liked cars
Continued from page 29

so Paul took him to a car show. At car events he lights up and engages anyone about cars. Paul has a relaxed attitude and a calm demeanor that soothes and he is able to talk to him on a level that only the two of them understand.

Paul was among the staff members who volunteered when group homes were evacuated because of a flood. Paul went with the people the agency supported to a hotel 100 miles away. During this time Paul spent about a week away from his family. Paul remained positive during the stressful situation and helped the people he supported adjust to the change. Paul also was involved in planning activities during the trip to help the people stay calm and reduce their anxiety.

Alexandra Koncan
Ohio’s Recipient of the DSP Recognition Award personifies two tenets of the NADSP Code of Ethics: “Promoting Physical and Emotional Well Being” and “Advocacy.” Alexandra Koncan fought for a woman she supports; it’s not an overstatement to say that she saved her life. Doctors told the woman’s family that she was in the “end stages” of her life and that it would be better to keep her medicated. The woman told Alexandra “they are killing me.” This was an active woman who was used to bowling, baseball games, and going to dances with her boyfriend.

Each week for a month Alexandra met with the family and doctors, pleading that they allow the woman to live the remainder of her life fully—not medicated and in a bed with a feeding tube and a colostomy bag. The family and doctors finally agreed. During the woman’s hospitalization, she would become combative if Alexandra was not there. The staff wanted to use restraints. Alexandra convinced them otherwise and showed them how to handle her. Her safety was never at risk once staff knew how to work with her. Alexandra canceled her vacation plans and stayed with her at night so someone would be with her. She worked her normal schedule load of 40-plus hours and then would go to the hospital to relieve the family so that they could get a full night’s rest.

“This woman was close to death and had dropped to 80 pounds and could not eat, drink or stand up. Alex fought for her right to live her life without restraints and to use her remaining time as meaningfully as possible. She is now 115 pounds again and enjoying her life with her roommates,” says Tony Thomas, Welcome House’s Executive Director. “This is something that is way, way above and beyond normal good DSP practice. Her client is now fully recovered and enjoying her life back in her home with her roommates.”

Many DSPs are very good at going the extra mile. Glory, an Agency Companion for Dungarvin Oklahoma, goes that extra mile and then some for two men she supports. One young man moved into the home in 2006 when he was 14 with violent behaviors and elopement issues. Glory asked questions, did research about him and discovered that he was taking the wrong medications. Once the correct meds were in place, this young man’s life stabilized. He went on to graduate high school, has excelled at a sheltered workshop, and is now in a pilot educational program at Oklahoma State University. He has a part-time job at a local Mexican restaurant and Glory still supports him.

The other young man presented a different set of challenges. He spent much of his childhood in institutions. He was living in one when Glory became acquainted with him and advocated for him to move in with her. The letter nominating her for this honor describes what she dealt with and overcame:

“This young man had multiple medical issues that hindered his growth. He had a history of setting fires, and an obsession with knives and blood. After three years with Glory he learned how to tie his shoes, how to eat, and how to talk. He now holds a job at a workshop. He is able to speak full sentences and is working on using knives appropriately.” He’s a different person now and calls Glory “Mom.”

Glory and her husband take these two men on vacations. They saved for new luggage, new clothes and got passports. They attend Special Olympics and camps together.

Glory does not mind going that extra mile!
A bridesmaid in a wedding… going to soccer camp…. the sand and waves at a beach. There is a common thread running through those words and that thread is Muriel Gabriel, a DSP of 14 years at Keystone. Each story involves the people she supports.

Muriel started planning her wedding in 2007 and asked a woman she supports in their group home to be a bridesmaid. It was truly a special moment and an event she never forgot. Muriel had to locate an accessible venue to host the wedding, accessible transportation to the bachelorette party and a suitable place for the party. It all worked out beautifully.

When a young man moved to his new home he had to get acclimated to his new surroundings. Muriel recognized this and spent a good deal of time getting to know him. She learned that he had a special interest in soccer. She made sure he attended tournaments and stayed involved. He also had a desire to attend a specific camp, but the camp was not accepting new members. Muriel was persistent and convinced the camp to accept one more applicant. At a social event later this man said of Muriel: “She has helped me be a better man.”

Two ladies who lived in the home where Muriel worked enjoyed going to the beach but had not been to a beach since childhood. So to the beach they went, wheelchairs and all. When the wheelchair would not go through the sand, Muriel and another staff member carried her to the beach. When the ladies got to their spot on the beach, they were able to enjoy the waves and sand under their feet and could not believe how wonderful being on the beach felt again. Muriel turned a dream into reality.

Tara works three days a week as a live-in DSP serving an individual with cerebral palsy and bipolar disorder. She focuses on supporting this man’s independence. She has him out in the community now, making friends and working on behavioral issues. Tara is supportive of his Indian heritage and provides activities at the home such as Indian-prepared meals and assisting in planning and participating in Indian community events. Since working with Tara, he has participated in a marathon, attended men’s support groups, and learned more about his heritage.

Since working with Tara, he has been more engaged in completing day-to-day tasks in his apartment. She makes mundane tasks such as cleaning and cooking into fun activities by having a positive attitude and giving him plenty of positive encouragement. He now has a sense of pride in the meals he helps prepare that are nutritious and in line with his Weight Watchers diet. They have completed art projects together and decorated his house with the art they create. She helps rearrange his furniture, since he is physically unable to complete this task from his wheelchair.

Tara uses creativity with him when he is struggling with symptoms of his mental illness. She knows him well enough to know that before he begins to “cycle” she will use humor, will dance with him in his wheelchair and often will get him outdoors. These are interventions that were not occurring before she began working with him. Since that time, his serious aggressive behaviors have disappeared and the way he communicates his needs is positive.

Another life changed and enriched by a talented DSP!

Cheri Avedisian’s biggest impact at Community is her support for the past five years of a woman who experienced a myriad of health and safety issues as she was living on her own with a limited number of supports. This woman has issues with trust. For the most part all she knew were the vices of street life – drug abuse, peddling, fraud and scams, to name a few. When Cheri became her DSP, she laid a solid foundation for her by teaching the woman how to have implicit confidence of self, money management, doing house chores, cooking, hygiene, and above all safety and protection from unsavory people that create significant emotional challenges.

“Cheri thrives on challenges by helping those she supports in enriching their lives through hard work and making positive
When you read the following words about Lisa Batteen from her letter of nomination, you will understand why this DSP of 24 years was selected as South Dakota’s recipient of the Direct Support Professional Recognition Award:

“Lisa has long term, trusting, and genuine relationships with the people she supports and their families. She provides her personal cell phone number and people supported and/or family members frequently text her. She is loved and admired by all. She can be counted on to mentor and support others. Lisa is a very good teacher, taking the time to show and explain things in an understandable way. She patiently and honestly explains the potential outcomes of choices people may make, and they know she does so from the heart. … Lisa believes she is doing what she was meant to do, and that she is making a difference in people’s lives. Lisa Batteen was born to do this work; she personifies the ethics and qualities of an excellent DSP.”

For 19 years she was a job coach/instructor at Ellsworth Air Force Base as part of a federal food service contract. Lisa is one of the agency’s advisors for the very active People First self-advocacy group. She recently took on the monumental task of taking 11 self-advocates to the national SABE Conference in Oklahoma City. She is known at Black Hills as a “person-centered thinking coach.”

Here are a few more words about her: “Generous to a fault, both with her time and resources, Lisa assists people who need her support day or night, not just when she is ‘on shift’. Lisa is caring, compassionate, and patient with everyone, no matter what challenges they face or mess they may find themselves in!”

Each year the agency selects three staff members to the “Hall of Fame” – its highest recognition for the most respected and accomplished staff. Lisa, of course, is in the Hall of Fame!

Jennifer Neeley knows that there is more than one way to skin a cat. Tennessee’s Direct Support Professional Recognition recipient recently put this philosophy into action. She’s spent hours assisting the people she supports in creating and developing online social networks for themselves. One woman she supports can’t leave her home without assistance. The new Facebook page that Jennifer created allows her to reach out and communicate with her friends and others. The improvement in the woman’s disposition is remarkable and she now believes that she has self-worth.

Another woman she supports was taking a lot of medications. Jennifer developed a close and trusting relationship with her and helped the woman reduce her pain medicine by 80%. Now she is using only over-the-counter meds to control her pain. “When I interviewed the woman,” wrote Kathy Freed in Jennifer’s nomination, “she said that Jennifer is like her own daughter. Jennifer can complete her sentences and knows what she needs prior to her asking. She said Jennifer ‘saved my life’.”

Jennifer is described as a strong advocate for the people she supports. She advocates for the medical equipment and supplies necessary to make living environments safer and to help the individuals she supports maintain their independence. One of the most recent accomplishments was to work with an individual’s doctors and family to obtain an electric wheelchair. Another of her efforts was to find a local dentist who will provide very needed dental care for the people she serves. After talking with Jennifer, the dentist agreed to do all of the dental work pro-bono early next year.
Lele,” as she likes to be called, is a full-time student at McLennan Community College and a full-time DSP as Lead Staff at a group home for young men. Being given the Direct Support Professional Recognition Award for Texas is not her first honor. She has been recognized for two consecutive years as an Outstanding DSP and received Employee of the Year Recognition in 2014. She provides supports for the agency’s most difficult and behaviorally challenged individuals.

In addition to her typical work-related duties, Lele volunteers as an Assistant Coach for the Special Olympics bocce ball, basketball and track and field teams. She is the liaison between the school system, therapeutic supports and the organization, ensuring that all parties work cohesively.

Lance Harris, a Special Education teacher for one of Lele’s individuals, shares this example of how she handles issues: “It was a very bad day for one young man. He was having a severe emotional outburst and refusing to leave the classroom. We contacted Ms. Love and as always, she answered the phone. With Lele’s intervention, the behavior of the student stopped almost immediately.” He added that Lele has a “nurturing authority” that her individuals respond to and he is secure as a teacher knowing there is someone like her who his students go home to every day.

Another young man she supports was having repeated severe emotional outbursts every day in class around 2:30 p.m. – physically assaulting the teacher and destroying property. It was Lele who intervened and discovered the cause for the outbursts – he needed an afternoon snack. Because it was close to the end of the school day, they would decline his request for a snack. He is now allowed a snack during class to curve these behaviors and it’s working.

The woman Carole Davis supported was 99 years old. After 20 years in the field, Carole understands the importance of social interaction in all of our lives. That’s why she wasn’t about to allow this lady she supports to be isolated because she was bed ridden and didn’t want to leave the house. Carole encouraged family, friends and people from church to come and visit her. Carole also helped move her bed into the living room of her home. This made it easier for family and friends to spend time with her and allowed her to see out the windows to watch the seasonal changes, to enjoy sunrises and to help her know what time of year and time of day it is.

Carole was at this woman’s home for 18 months, providing an array of supports and becoming part of this woman’s family. Carole’s letter of nomination was written in November 2014. On February 21, six weeks shy of the woman’s 100th birthday, Carole attended her funeral services. “I really and truly miss her,” Carole says. “She was like my Grandma instead of my client that I supported.”

Carole spent so much time with her that she usually knew what she wanted before she would ask for it. They enjoyed teasing one another. The woman would sometimes say: “I don’t like you doing that” even though it needed to be done. Carole would reply, “Well, when you get to feeling better you can kick me.” The woman would then say “I have one bad leg” and Carole would tell her, “OK, kick me with the other one.”

Carole’s nomination letter said this: “Carole is willing to stay with her client as long as needed. She is more concerned with her client being happy and healthy and having someone to care for her than her own time off.”
When the conversation comes around to Ramsay, the concepts of “Self Determination” and “Person-Centered Supports” describe this DSP’s approach to his role at Aacres. This is clearly seen in his support of a young man for five years. After he graduated from high school, Anna, then his paraprofessional, remained his support person. She was so dedicated to him that she quit her job at the high school and began working at the agency to support him at a much lower salary. This was at a time when job security was rare in Vermont.

Anna has been very creative with her supports for this young man. She’s there to help him communicate. He’s actively involved with a theater troupe and be it rehearsal or a performance, she’s there with him. She put her technology skills to good use, helping him use his iPad to create checklists, pictures of chores to be done, his daily schedule and his budget. Because of this he is living an independent life in his own cabin, cooking his own meals and living the happy life that he loves.

Anna also has a unique system in place to help keep him on task. It is an “I do, We do, You do” strategy in which Anna shows him how to perform a task – “I do.” Eventually he joins Anna in the task and they complete it together – “We Do.” Finally he is able to perform whatever the task independently – “You Do.”

This man’s mother says this about Anna: “She goes above and beyond in all that she does for my son. Her steady combination of presence, playfulness and order support him in being the most independent person possible.”

While La’Shon came into, and changed, her life. This woman spent most of her life wearing arm splints because of self-injury behavior. She is almost blind from injuring her own eyes. She spent many years using self-abuse as a means to escape tasks. La’Shon’s ability to build a trusting relationship with this woman has helped her learn new ways to manage her frustrations without having to engage in dangerous behaviors.

This woman didn’t trust people or work well with people she didn’t know. But La’Shon was able to build rapport with her almost instantaneously. La’Shon began working one-to-one with her in the evenings. Previously, when the splints were removed she would begin self-abusing if someone was not holding her hands. With La’Shon’s support, she has been successful for four hours each evening with no splints and now helps in setting the table, going grocery shopping, to meetings, and to dinner both at home and out in the community. La’Shon is the primary trainer with all DSP’s on how to work successfully with this woman.

The woman trusts La’Shon so much so that she was able to work with this woman to allow a physician to complete the necessary assessments to get her a new pair of glasses. And that required a great deal of trust – something La’Shon specializes in!
to get out more and interact with more people – Ramsay found him a church. He wanted to present at a professional forum, so Ramsay not only accompanied him, but helped him develop a PowerPoint presentation. The relationship he has developed with this man is a mutually strong one, and he could not be more thankful for it.”

The relationship that has developed between Ramsay and this man is a happy and solid one and it shows. As Ramsay states, “Now I serve from the heart – what I have learned, I listen from my heart and it has helped him in his home life as well as in our work together. Now we can talk as friends, now he will come to me when he needs something.”

“If you’re with Christopher Taylor, chances are good that you’re going to be doing something interesting.” That’s how Michael Summers introduces us to the person he nominated for the Direct Support Professional Recognition Award. “One of the people Christopher supports is challenged by social interaction and community participation due to his diagnoses. One of the things that has made the biggest difference in the individual’s development is introducing him to Christopher’s family. With guardian approval, Christopher brings the individual to picnics and other celebrations, and he has participated with great success. Because he trusts Christopher, his behaviors have decreased and he is finding greater enjoyment in participating in the community.”

Continued on page 37
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Jeanne, a Dungarvin employee for two years and a DSP for 30, committed the single greatest act of service in March 2014 – she saved the lives of the three men she supports. The morning began just like any other Saturday morning. She was helping them in the apartment with their morning routines as they were planning for a busy weekend. Let’s let her supervisor, Veronica Polacek, tell the rest of the story:

“As Jeanne was helping one of the men get ready for the eventful day ahead, one of the other men began to yell. As she turned to look, she saw flames and smoke billowing from the dryer. The smoke coming from the dryer was thick and black; it was soon difficult to see anything in the apartment. Jeanne quickly sprang into action and contacted emergency services. She began to assist the men to transfer to their wheelchairs and exit the apartment. This was no small task as all three men were in different places in the apartment doing different things. Two other staff, who were working in a different apartment in the building, as well as a neighbor, were instrumental in assisting with the swift evacuation. Jeanne’s ability to remain calm and focus on getting the individuals to safety was literally the difference between life and death.”

She has been supporting these men for two years and they are inseparable. She goes to events around town with them. She never fails to help them have fun. Jeanne has a caring, supportive relationship with all three and treats them the way she treats anyone.

Jeanne encourages them to speak for themselves and has helped the men build their self-esteem by making sure they look good, no matter how much or how little money they have. As you can imagine, their bond is a strong and special one!

Christopher has been a DSP for eight years and also uses those skills at home. He has a daughter with developmental disabilities and as you would expect, he has been a very loyal, dedicated advocate concerning her educational needs. He learned American Sign Language to communicate with his daughter – skills he is using with one of the non-verbal men he supports in an attempt to increase the individual’s ASL skills.

Christopher has excellent rapport with the people the agency serves. He has been trained on the therapeutic programming and behavioral needs of other individuals so he can work with them as needed. He is described as always remaining calm and encouraging during behavioral incidents, never raising his voice and always having respect and compassion for the person.

Brandi and the woman she supports spend a lot of time in the community. They make about 20 visits a week to a gas station where this woman can get a cup of ice and visit with the attendant. They also volunteer at a bakery and the Salvation Army. She calls Brandi her “wing man.” You see one of them, you see both of them. They smile a lot, joke a lot and simply enjoy being together.

The woman Brandi supports is diabetic and being healthy, eating the right foods and exercising are all hard for her. Brandi has been creative in getting her to exercise and praises her when she eats well. Brandi knows that this woman loves to help people, so now she “helps” Brandi exercise by walking around the lakes and the malls with her. She’s also “helping” Brandi learn healthier eating habits by modeling to her what a healthy diet looks like.

“Brandi is a model DSP who puts her heart and soul into her job,” says her supervisor, Shea Sparks. “She goes above and beyond to provide person-centered supports and never tells this woman how to spend her days, how to do things or what she should do with her life,” Ms. Sparks said. “Brandi helps her to be as independent as possible and to live the life that she wants to live.”
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