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A PROFESSION TO BE GRATEFUL FOR



As the association charged with representing our nation's network of community providers, it's our responsibility to elevate the work of DSPs as the profession it is—rather than as just a job. And never is that distinction made clearer for those of us more removed from direct services than when reading about the 2019 class of DSP of the Year award recipients.

Chosen from a field of nearly 350 nominations, the 55 professionals profiled in this edition of *Recognizing Excellence* truly exemplify what it means to include, support and empower individuals

with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the community. From ensuring individuals have the support they need to practice their civic duty by going to the polls to uniting people with family members they didn't even know were still alive, these DSPs are doing it all—and often without the recognition they deserve. ANCOR invests in the annual DSP of the Year awards because we know that our services—and for many of us, our life's calling—would cease to exist without the unwavering commitment of these professionals. It may sometimes feel like it is a thankless profession, so we're eager to proclaim our enormous gratitude whenever we can.

Speaking of gratitude, ANCOR extends a huge thank you to Relias, our Platinum Partner that has underwritten the DSP of the Year awards for the fifth consecutive year. I'm also overwhelmed with

gratitude for the individuals who spent countless hours agonizing over how to choose this year's award recipients from among so many inspiring DSPs. The 2019 judging committee included John Raffaele and Cheryl Dougan from the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals, as well as several members of ANCOR's staff: André Floyd, Esmé Grewal, Sean Luechtefeld, Jerri McCandless, Kate McNulty and Doris Parfaite-Claude.

Of course, our gratitude doesn't stop with *Recognizing Excellence*. Throughout the year, we celebrate the stories of incredible DSPs doing inspiring work through our *Included. Supported. Empowered.* campaign. I encourage you to join the campaign and share stories at wehaveastake.org so the millions of DSPs across the country know, year-round, just how much we appreciate all they do.

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THANK YOU, DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS!

I was introduced to this field by a friend and worked first as a Recreation Counselor and later as a Case Manager. Some of the best memories of my career are from those experiences. The joy that you experience when supporting someone's dream to become a reality is rarely rivaled in any other career experience.

As we continue to capture inspiring stories with our *Included. Supported. Empowered.* campaign, I am often reminded of those magical moments. I don't think I have watched any of the *Included. Supported. Empowered.* videos without experiencing a lightness of heart, a smile upon my face and an inspirational energy that brings me back to my roots.

That inspirational energy is why we continue to engage and educate the general public, and especially our


elected officials, on the essential nature of the successes that Direct Support Professionals create on a daily basis. It's also why we're working to paint a compelling picture of why these professionals deserve to be paid a living wage, and to acknowledge the depth and breadth of the skill and dedication needed to be a DSP. Nowhere is this picture more vividly painted than in the enclosed profiles of our DSP of the Year award recipients.

ANCOR honors outstanding DSPs from coast to coast each year because their commitment and professionalism demand celebration. Hundreds of nominations are submitted and then evaluated by a group of people with the incredibly difficult job of narrowing the nominations to our national winner, one award recipient per state and a small handful of special category awards. The process is capped off with *Recognizing Excellence*,




as well as with the DSP of the Year awards ceremony at ANCOR's Annual Conference. It's a wonderful and inspiring celebration that lifts the spirit and reminds us of what is best in humanity!

On behalf of the ANCOR Board of Directors, THANK YOU DSPs! Every time you help a dream become a reality for those we are so honored to support, you strengthen our communities. In turn, our world is enriched by the miracles you create every day.



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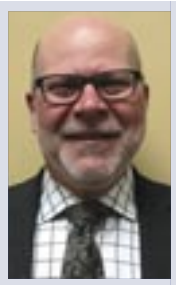
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2019 LEGACY LEADER INDUCTEES

Established in 2010 by the ANCOR Foundation, the Legacy Leaders Circle exists to recognize and celebrate ANCOR's most influential leaders. Each year, a select group of long-time ANCOR leaders are nominated by their peers to be inducted into the Legacy Leaders Circle for the significant contributions made during their tenure as ANCOR members. This year, the ANCOR Foundation inducted three dynamic leaders into the Legacy Leaders Circle at the 2019 ANCOR Annual Conference, held in May in Portland, OR. Join us in celebrating the ways in which these dynamic men and women have transformed our vibrant association, as well as their own communities.

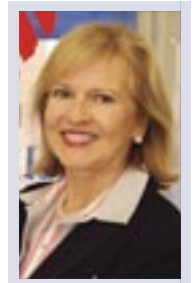
Robert "Bob" Baker | *Vice President, Keystone Human Services, Harrisburg, PA*



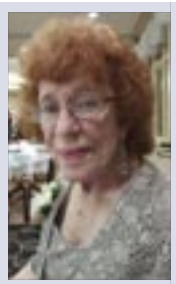
Currently Vice President of ANCOR's Board of Directors, Bob Baker has made several significant contributions in the nearly 10 years he has served as an ANCOR leader. He has been essential to the association's sustainability on nearly all fronts, including ensuring ANCOR's financial stability, strengthening its bylaws to allow more member participation, and contributing to the selection of its current CEO. Bob has experience advocating at the state and federal levels and brings that experience—along with his expertise in health care and managed care—to bear on the association's effectiveness. As his nomination stated, "Bob has a deep commitment in providing the highest quality of services and supports to individuals with disabilities. He recognizes and values individual differences and diversity as a means of validating our own uniqueness and affirming the great diversity of the human community."

Paula Hart | *CEO, Volunteers of America Minnesota & Wisconsin, Minneapolis, MN*

A member of ANCOR since 2005, Paula Hart became CEO of Volunteers of America Minnesota & Wisconsin in 2011, the same year she began the first of two terms on the ANCOR Board of Directors. She was instrumental in moving the Board toward generative thinking and processes that improved the Board function, strategic planning and outcomes. Always willing to take on the less glamorous tasks during her tenure on the Board, Paula has served on several governance task forces that have strengthened the ANCOR community. Perhaps most importantly, Paula has been a longtime advocate for people with disabilities, including those with I/DD as well as individuals impacted by behavioral health needs.



Naomi "Deane" Ruppert | *Former CEO, Emmaus Homes, St. Charles, MO*



An active member of ANCOR for more than two decades, Naomi "Deane" Ruppert held a variety of official titles: she served several terms on the Board of Directors, was appointed or elected to numerous committees, and chaired and co-chaired multiple task forces. However, those who knew Deane remember her first and foremost by her unofficial role: Social Chair. Always the first to organize dinners, special events for newcomers and informal conference gatherings, Deane made it her job to get to know everyone and make sure no one sat alone when they were at an ANCOR function.

Deane Ruppert passed away in 2017 at the age of 86. She is being inducted into the Legacy Leaders Circle posthumously.

ANCOR'S 2019 National DSP of the Year



ANTOINETTE MORRIS

TRINITY SERVICES
Des Plaines, IL

Too often, we forget that the work of a Direct Support Professional is about far more than the mundane activities of everyday life. Antoinette Morris, ANCOR's 2019 DSP of the Year, serves as the perfect reminder that life is full of ups and downs, and when it comes to managing this roller coaster we call life, DSPs are there for every twist and turn.

A DSP for more than two decades, Antoinette has excelled at making happy moments happen for the individuals she supports, often by facilitating experiences that so many of us take for granted. For example, when one of the individuals she supports wanted to get a job at Six Flags' Fright Fest, Antoinette jumped at the chance to help make it happen. She supported the young man in the process of applying for the job and preparing for interviews, and when the job offer was extended, it was Antoinette who ensured he had the transportation he needed. For Antoinette, it didn't matter that this often meant making the late-night drives through Chicago's northern suburbs herself—seeing the newly minted Scare Actor gain job experience was fulfilling on its own, but when he later landed his dream job as a cook at a local restaurant because of his prior work experience, words couldn't describe how proud she was of him.

More than just a job, opportunities to work are often the keys to building relationships for people with I/DD, and Antoinette understands the importance of relationships. When the mother of one individual she supports moved to Florida, Antoinette was there to assist him in learning how to use the video chat feature on his phone. When another individual wanted to maintain a closer relationship with her sister who is supported by a different agency, Antoinette was there to offer rides and plan reunions.

Though making happy moments happen is crucial, Antoinette may be at her best when she's bringing light to a dark situation. When one individual under her care kept returning to unhealthy behaviors, including substance abuse and unprotected sex, Antoinette supported him to enter an outpatient treatment center and accompany him to his counseling sessions in downtown Chicago each day. When another individual found out he was diabetic, Antoinette was there to help navigate the diagnosis and treatment plan. And when the death of a close friend brought darkness to one of the individuals she supports, Antoinette "helped [him] cope with his loss." As he put it, "For everything she has done for me, I can truly say she is the best support worker I have had the honor to work with."

Antoinette's commitment makes it unsurprising that she's come to light a path for other DSPs, both at Trinity Services and beyond. Now a team leader, Antoinette has been tapped to work on agency-wide retention efforts, and as her colleagues note, "She inspires her peers to be creative and dig deeper as they continue on their own journey." Moreover, she's sounded her voice as an advocate for other DSPs at the state level, becoming active in legislative efforts in Springfield to increase DSP wages.

It's not hard to see why Antoinette is a six-time recipient of her agency's Outstanding DSP award and received her agency's Positive Attitude Award in 2014. A leader, a relationship-builder, an advocate and an innovator, Antoinette truly exemplifies the tenets of what it means to be a phenomenal Direct Support Professional, and ANCOR is thrilled that she can add National DSP of the Year to her list of accolades.

ANCOR's 2019 Special Category Awards



RELATIONSHIPS

THOMAS CARTER
RHA HEALTH
SERVICES, LLC
Augusta, GA

There are no shortcuts to building long-term, successful relationships. With 41 years of service as a DSP, Thomas Carter is a model and mentor for building strong relationships that enrich the lives of the people he serves.

Although he has supported several individuals during his long tenure as a DSP, Thomas has worked with one particular young man since he was a very young child. Over the 21 years that he has supported him, Thomas has demonstrated reliability, constancy and care. Thomas has worked with this young man to learn how to manage his feelings

and try new activities to develop friendships—last year, he even learned how to fish while on his first vacation with other men in his group home! Thomas' constant support has helped the young man to build trust in others and develop social skills that have enabled him to successfully live in the group home and develop new friendships. By demonstrating how to create and sustain a long and trusting relationship, Thomas has helped the individual he supports to flourish as a young adult.

When Thomas learned that another individual he supports had not seen his family in over 13 years, he worked diligently to find his relatives. As luck would have it, the long-lost family was holding a reunion a few towns over. Thomas drove the individual to a large family reunion where he was able to "reunite with his family and spend time with family members...that had lost contact." As his colleagues have summarized, Thomas' "love, patience and...dedication" have changed lives.



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THOMAS CARTER**

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AUGUSTA, GA**



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INNOVATION

SAMANTHA GLOVER
ASPIRE, INC.
Aberdeen, SD

Samantha is also the recipient of the South Dakota DSP of the Year award.

Strong relationships are the secret to Samantha Glover's success as an innovative DSP. According to her colleagues, Samantha's "unique and sincere relationships" with the individuals she supports help her to understand "each individual's dreams, wants and needs" so that she can find innovative ways to increase their independence. In the last few years, Samantha has led the charge at Aspire, Inc., to use technology to address common challenges faced by the individuals she supports.

Technology provides new opportunities to build relationships and support independence. Using her relationships with the individuals she supports as a guide, Samantha will work with them to better understand how a device or app might make things easier, then helps them select the right device and app to use. Samantha has assisted people with "researching, purchasing, learning and utilizing electronic devices" like tablets and cell phones, and the individuals use these devices to maintain medication schedules, strengthen relationships with family, and schedule activities and events with friends. Samantha has even assisted some individuals to obtain grants necessary to access assistive technology to further improve their ability to live independently.

Samantha Glover utilizes each interaction with the individuals she supports "as a learning moment to see where she can assist the person in achieving their goals, live more independently or just have a more fulfilling life." For her innovation and dedication, her supervisors were proud to give her the agency's annual Excellence in Service Award for 2018.

ANCOR's 2019 Special Category Awards



LEADERSHIP

HAYLEY ARMOLD
PENN - MAR
HUMAN
SERVICES
Glen Rock, PA

Hayley Arnold has learned that sometimes, the best way to improve the lives of the individuals she serves is through leadership—only leaders have the power to change systems that can change lives.

Her inspiration to promote change can be found in her strong advocacy for the preferences and welfare of the individuals she serves. One of the women Hayley supports has difficulty communicating. When the individual began changing her interactions with others, Hayley interpreted this as a desire for other changes in her life and “advocated to begin a formal process to [discover her] individual

wants and needs.” Although this was acknowledged as a “difficult task, given the individual’s communication barriers,” Hayley advocated for taking the time to ensure that the preferences of the individual were expressed and acted upon. She took this experience one step further and decided to advocate for system-wide change by expressing interest in joining Penn-Mar’s Person-Centered Task Force. As a member of the Task Force, Hayley could help “infuse Person-Centered Thinking throughout the organization.”

Haley has taken every opportunity to accept new responsibilities and leadership roles so that she can train or encourage others to provide thoughtful, intentional support to the individuals they serve. In the last year, she has not only joined the agency’s Supervisor On-Boarding team to better train new DSPs, but has also taken a series of leadership and NADSP trainings to further “develop her skills and influence within the organization.” Where she leads, lives are changed for the better.



LEADERSHIP

ALLAN THIBODEAU
OH
Hermon, ME

Allan Thibodeau isn’t just a fierce advocate for the individuals he supports: he’s an advocate for the whole community and has the press clippings to prove it.

When budget shortfalls made services tight for Maine DSPs, Allan rose to the challenge and joined the Maine Association for Community Service Providers in a long legislative battle to increase wages. Allan knew that the low hourly rate contributed to high staff turnover that caused “chaos and stress” for individuals like the man he supports. For over two years, Allan spoke at press conferences at the state capitol, testified in front of Maine’s Health and

Human Services Committee, met with the president of the Maine Senate, attended rallies, wrote letters and spoke passionately about the role of DSPs. These efforts eventually gained the attention of the Bangor Daily News, where Allan was featured in a front-page article about the importance of DSPs and their fight for improved wages. His leadership and dedication contributed to new legislation that secured funding for DSP wages across the state.

Allan is equally invested in improving things closer to home. When the ownership of a local pharmacy changed and disrupted critical services, he quickly joined a three-person committee that worked with the pharmacy to find solutions. In the end, these efforts were successful, and Allan proved himself to be as adept a team member as community leader.

No matter where Allan goes next, his colleagues are sure he’ll lead Maine into the future of services and supports.

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ANCOR's 2019 Special Category Awards



NADSP TENETS

**JACQUELINE
BARNES**
RISE SERVICES
Eugene, OR

With over 15 years of experience as a DSP, it isn't difficult for Jacqueline Barnes' colleagues to come up with examples of her excellent service. Described as "attentive," "determined" and "invested," Jacqueline has spent her career developing the skills and experiences that exemplify the NADSP principles.

One of Jacqueline's special strengths is advocating for individuals to achieve their dreams, no matter what. When Jacqueline was first paired with one young man, she was

told not to engage with him because it could trigger poor behavior patterns. Jacqueline "took her time, observed quietly" and, when the time was right, asked him about the music he listened to. He soon told her about his dream of becoming a DJ! Though the young man's previous behavior patterns had made it difficult for his support staff to encourage his dreams, Jacqueline sought out a local DJ who invited the young man to a tour and information session so he could learn more about his dream job. By offering patient and respectful support, Jacqueline was able to help him overcome previous behavior challenges and realize "a small piece of his dream."

If you ask Jacqueline about this work, she'd probably say that it comes down to seeing the best in everyone and thinking creatively about how to help them flourish. For everyone who works with her, however, Jacqueline "has exemplified what it means to be a care provider."



NADSP TENETS

**MARQUAVIUS
MOORE**
SUNRISE
COMMUNITIES
Miami, FL

Though Marquavius "Mark" Moore might describe himself as a "team player," his colleagues recognize him as a leader who exemplifies several core NADSP principles for a DSP.

In the eight years that he's worked as a DSP, Mark has consistently demonstrated his ability to turn challenges into opportunities for the individuals he supports. One young man was a passionate runner and eager to realize his dreams of becoming an athlete. Although these dreams were noble, they also posed a challenge for his safety: if he was upset or uncomfortable, he would frequently run away

from support staff. Mark decided to refocus on the young man's athletic dreams and began training him in cross-country and other sports to create a structured space for running and exercise. Because of Mark's advocacy for the young man's dream, the young man's dedication and self-determination has transformed him: "he's a better runner... and has competed as an athlete in multiple events at the Special Olympics."

Mark believes in the potential for all of the individuals he supports to be the best they can be. When some individuals' behavioral issues became difficult for other members of the staff, Mark suggested creating a group sport event to teach them about the benefits of following the rules and working as a team. He not only became head coach but has helped to develop an athletic program that promotes individual wellness, cultivates relationships and inspires confidence among participants. Whether he's a coach or a team player, Mark is always cheering on his community.



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Minnesota State DSP of the Year

LISA RILEY

works tirelessly to provide engaging, meaningful, and choice-driven opportunities to the people she supports. She lives, breathes, and models person-centered thinking in everything she does, and works each and every day to break down barriers for the people she works with.



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Congratulations



Allen Selby
2019 Tennessee
DSP of the Year

ANCOR's 2019 Special Category Awards



SUPPORTING PERSON- CENTERED PLANS

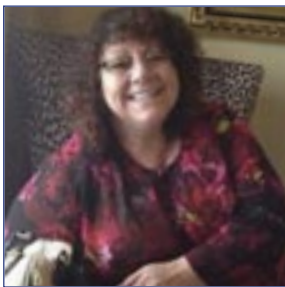
**JESSE
KNICKMEYER**
ST. LOUIS ARC
St. Charles, MO

Jesse Knickmeyer's "person-centered, individualized approach" to meeting the needs of the individuals he supports has helped several individuals to overcome employment challenges and meet their goals. In example after example, Jesse's colleagues described a three-part approach he uses to design a customized support strategy. First, he "spends time getting to know the individual, their wants, their personal goals and experiences." Next, he helps them pick a specific goal, making sure that they "[help] to make those decisions" and advocates to their support network to "make sure the individual's voice is

heard." Finally, Jesse works with them to meet the goals of their person-centered plan.

When one young man was having trouble following his supervisor's directions, Jesse sat down with each of them to learn about their perspectives and needs. Jesse not only helped the young man to better understand his duties at the center and learn strategies for accepting instruction, but also helped the supervisor understand the young man's need for positive feedback. Because of Jesse's efforts to understand the situation, the strategies that appealed best to each personality and Jesse's dedication to the individual's goals, the young man is now more independent in his work and receives positive feedback from his supervisor.

Of course, Jesse's contributions don't end with the individuals he supports—by taking on a role as mentor to his colleagues, Jesse is teaching others "to take a person-centered, individualized approach to meet the needs of the people they will be supporting." Jesse serves as a model of individualized support and is helping others to follow his example.



SUPPORTING PERSON- CENTERED PLANS

SUE SMITH
VALLEY
RESIDENTIAL
SERVICES
Walla Walla, WA

Even after 19 years as a DSP, Sue Smith is committed to learning everything she can to help the people she supports live their best lives. Whether she's learning about their goals, interests or ways to improve their supports, Sue's colleagues report that she is "dedicated to learning as much as possible to make [each individuals'] lives better" and finding new ways to make her supports both person-centered and person-first.

When Sue realized that the team was struggling to find ways to support an individual with dementia, she sprang into action. Sue immediately sought education and train-

ing to develop new skills and strategies for making sure that the goals and needs of individuals with dementia come first. Using her new-found knowledge and input from the family, Sue was able to maintain and promote the individual's person-centered plan to age in place safely and continue living in the community.

No matter what, Sue is always focused on putting the individual first. When one of the individuals she supports was disappointed to find that a popular summer camp was being discontinued, she helped them learn how to advocate to keep the camp open. She helped them make a petition, collect signatures and write a letter to the organizers—all of which led to the successful reinstatement of the camp!

Whether it's learning how to provide better support to individuals with dementia or how to advocate for change, Sue always puts the individual at the heart of her work. Perhaps no one says it better than her colleagues: "Sue never stops trying to be the best for her clients."

ANCOR's 2019 Special Category Awards



INTERNATIONAL DSP OF THE YEAR

DANIELLE HAY
BRIGHTSPRING
ONTARIO
Niagara-on-the-Lake,
ON, Canada

Often seen “smiling, laughing and joking with participants and her co-workers,” Danielle Hay has gained a reputation for “bringing fun to the rehabilitation process.”

In her role as a Rehabilitation Educator, Danielle works with individuals to meet specific and sometimes challenging rehabilitation goals. She takes time to “learn about each individual’s likes and dislikes,” and makes a special effort to use art, music and creative pursuits to develop their strength and skills. One of the individuals Danielle supports had ambitious rehabilitation goals that would allow him to better integrate into a household with his peers.

Danielle supported him to bake delicious treats as a way to improve his fine motor skills, cognitive skills and provide sensory stimulation. Her “upbeat and positive attitude” encouraged him to engage more confidently with his peers through these baking exercises.

As her colleagues will tell you, Danielle “demonstrates creative thinking on a regular basis by using leisure activities and functional activities” to fulfill the goals of the individuals she supports. When another individual had a challenging time connecting with others, Danielle talked with him about music and learned that he had a favorite band. Over the following weeks, she helped him find videos of their performances online, learn about the band’s history, and shop for CDs. The conversations they held about the band helped him to create a connection through music and improve his social skills.

With such a fun and creative approach to work, it’s no wonder that Danielle is the 2018 International DSP of the Year.

Congratulations Jesse Knickmeyer *on being ANCOR's 2019 Direct Support* *Professional Tenet Award Winner for* *Supporting Person-Centered Plans*



The St. Louis Arc's mission is to empower people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families to lead better lives by providing a lifetime of high-quality services, family support and advocacy.





**Congratulations to ANCOR and the 2019
Massachusetts Direct Support Professional
of the Year!**



Christopher Amado, Delta Projects
Massachusetts Direct Support Professional of the Year



Delta Projects supports and empowers people with intellectual and other life challenges to achieve their individual goals and aspirations in a highly personalized, safe and enriching environment.

S T A T E R E C I P I E N T S



**JACQUELYN
EVANS**

BrightSpring
Alaska
Fairbanks, AK

ALASKA DSP OF THE YEAR

Jacqueline Evans might have thought that her schooling days were behind her when she became a DSP ten years ago, but that hasn't stopped the individuals she supports from giving her high marks. "Jacqueline gets an A+ in my book," said the daughter of one woman supported by Jacqueline. "She's trustworthy, pleasant and professional. She always puts my mother first."

This kind of person-first care has distinguished Jacqueline in her small Alaska community. Many of the individuals she supports are home- or bed-bound, which can be challenging for individuals whose lives were spent practicing the kind of rugged individualism that characterizes life in Fairbanks. Jacqueline works hard to make sure that their preferences and wellness come first and tries to keep them connected to friends and family, even when their mobility is limited. When she learned that one individual had been a communication specialist in the army and an expert in operating amateur (or "Ham") radios, Jacqueline encouraged him to resume his former hobby to reach out to old friends. Before long, he had reconnected with old army buddies and "completely changed" his attitude. His wife reported that Jacqueline "brings positive [energy] into our home and this is good medicine!"

Jacqueline brings an A+ attitude wherever she goes—it's the "bright spot" in each family's day. As reported by her colleagues, "Regardless [of whether] they are bed-bound or have the ability to work a part-time job, Jacqueline meets individuals where they are and encourages them to be the best they can be."



**TOMMIE
GROSS**

RISE, Inc.
Mesa, AZ

ARIZONA DSP OF THE YEAR

If you ask Tommie Gross, the key to success is "planning ahead."

When an individual that Tommie supports identifies a new goal or preference, she works with them to develop an "action plan" to make it happen. Although some people might feel overwhelmed by the complexity of a task, Tommie meticulously maps each step and helps the individuals she supports through each one. When one individual shared with Tommie that she wished to visit the final resting place of her aunt who had recently passed away, Tommie set to work. Over the course of a few months, Tommie worked with her to develop a fundraising plan for travel costs, make airline and hotel reservations, and plan the visit. They eventually travelled to the memorial site, where the individual was able to "trace her aunt's name on the headstone...and place flowers on her grave." Throughout this process, Tommie remained focused on providing logistical and emotional support that helped this individual find peace during a difficult time.

Tommie's action plans have been critical to making dreams come true for several people she supports. When one member expressed interest in a camping trip, Tommie made a plan to find tents, beds, ADA-accessible campsites and other amenities. She found local medical facilities for emergencies and let park officials know when the campers planned to be there. Her thoroughness and thoughtfulness has led her colleagues to call her "a master when it comes to expecting the unexpected." We hope she's prepared to celebrate being Arizona's DSP of the Year!



REBECCA HANSEL

Bost, Inc.
Fort Smith, AR

ARKANSAS DSP OF THE YEAR

There is no goal too big or too small to achieve for the individuals supported by Rebecca Hansel.

One man assisted by Rebecca is involved in the Special Olympics and practices throughout the year. Although he is older than most athletes who compete in track and field events, she worked tirelessly to help him train for upcoming competitions. All of these efforts proved worthwhile when he was able to compete in the Special Olympic World Games in 2018. Not only did Rebecca's support and patience help him prepare for this "once in a lifetime opportunity," but he was confident enough in his independence to embark on his first solo plane flight. He successfully flew to the games and enjoyed the competition, accomplishing both a lifelong athletic goal and the milestone of independent travel. Rebecca's colleagues credit her "advocacy, support, assistance, dedication and love" with helping him achieve these extraordinary goals.

Rebecca applies the same amount of planning, persistence and advocacy to every goal an individual wants to achieve. When the individual she supports decided to cook more meals on his own, Rebecca made sure that he was a regular attendee at a local cooking class and took him shopping for groceries and special ingredients. He was not only able to meet his goal of improving his independent living skills but was also able to socialize with new-found friends.

Whether it's learning to cook meals independently or competing in the Special Olympics, Rebecca has shown that she will work as hard as she can to make sure that the individuals she supports "can achieve every goal possible and be a flourishing, active member of his community."



HOPE GUTIERREZ

Bayberry, Inc.
Napa, CA

CALIFORNIA DSP OF THE YEAR

There is an old saying that "Excellence is not an act, but a habit." In her 40 years as a DSP, Hope Gutierrez has made a habit of providing excellent care to the individuals she supports.

For nearly two decades, Hope provided one-on-one support to a man who had some behavioral and intellectual challenges. Although he struggled with making friends and being in public places because of "loud and disruptive" tendencies, Hope saw his potential and worked patiently to help him become the man he wanted to be. By working with him prior to going out each day, he slowly developed tools necessary to develop friendships with people across Northern California. His friend group became so robust that he and Hope would sometimes travel for two hours one way just to visit his best friend!

Hope was dedicated to helping him meet all of his goals, whether they were social, individual or health-oriented. When an opportunity arose for him to live in his own home, Hope helped him select an apartment, supported him to set up his furniture and trained his other support staff in strategies for a successful transition. Later, she used gentle conversation to help him kick a long-term smoking habit, which kept his emphysema at bay for several years. Finally, when John entered into hospice care, Hope "remained at his side to ensure his needs and preferences were met...until the day he passed away."

Described as "authentic, compassionate and humble" by her colleagues, Hope has truly made excellence the cornerstone of her career.



JENNIFER ACREE

Dungarvin
Palmer Lake, CO

COLORADO DSP OF THE YEAR

Jennifer Acree is a “walking, talking resource” for the community she supports.

As a mother to a son on the Autism spectrum and with 20 years of experience as a DSP, Jennifer has unique insight into the needs and workings of the I/DD community. Though her supervisors praised her as a patient problem-solver and strong advocate for the individuals she serves, it's her extra efforts to build networks and spread awareness that have caught the attention of fellow parents and colleagues. Jennifer has spent countless hours spearheading fundraisers for her local Autism and Asperger's Connections of Colorado Springs group (AACCS) and the FLY group. Jennifer has connected with families through these groups and shared “her struggles and how she has overcome them so other parents can learn from her experiences.” She has been especially useful to new members, who often need additional guidance as they search for resources to help them design appropriate support networks for their loved ones. As one fellow mom put it, Jennifer “is a wealth of information, especially about resources in the area or how processes work with the state and local agencies. She shares this information with our families [and] has definitely been a huge asset.”

Whether it's her colleagues referring to her as “one of the most knowledgeable and dedicated professionals that I have ever worked with” or the family member of an individual she supports gaping in awe at her “wealth of knowledge,” Jennifer has gained a well-earned reputation as an asset to the community.



DEBRA MAIN

Mosaic
Cromwell, CT

CONNECTICUT DSP OF THE YEAR

Described by colleagues as a “momma bear protecting those that rely on her most,” Debra Main does whatever she can to make sure that the individuals at the residential home are safe, happy and well cared-for.

One winter, she demonstrated her “momma bear” nature during a blizzard when the home lost power. Debra sprang into action and reserved rooms at a nearby hotel, arranged for the road to be plowed, and drove everyone to safety. Although the blizzard could have been a crisis, Debra “made the best of it” and had a pajama party with the residents at the hotel. The residents “never really knew what a stressful day that was”—Debra kept everyone safe and made sure that they had fun!

Encouraging safety and fun naturally extends to her work with the individuals she serves. When one individual was first introduced to Debra, she was nervous around people and found unhealthy outlets for her anxiety. Debra was patient with her, eventually noticing that the woman seemed to enjoy country music—she would “laugh in delight” when she saw a program or heard certain songs. Encouraged by this interest, Debra took her to a concert at a small venue, which was a success. Today, the woman is an “avid concert-goer” and has overcome many of her anxieties about larger crowds, such that she now interacts with people “in a confident and curious manner.”

After 15 years of service as a DSP, Deb truly is “the heart of the home” and a great “momma bear” to the individuals she serves.

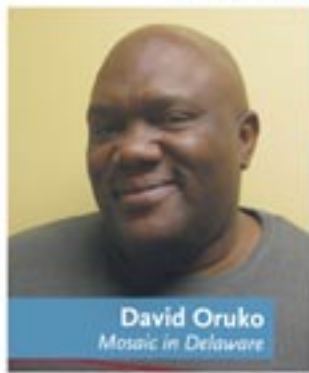
CONGRATULATIONS!

CONNECTICUT



Debra Main
Mosaic in Connecticut

DELAWARE



David Oruko
Mosaic in Delaware

KANSAS



JoDee Bryant
Mosaic in Southeast Kansas

NEBRASKA



Lisa Behrens
Mosaic in Beatrice

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DAVID ORUKO

Mosaic
Elkton, DE

DELAWARE DSP OF THE YEAR

When a local radio interviewer asked David Oruko what it takes to make a “true impact” in the life of an individual with disabilities, he reflected on his 25 years as a DSP. “Personally,” David replied, “I think it’s the little things that individuals out in the community take for granted—something as simple as learning to buckle up, how to use a fork and how to vacuum your own house. When we provide those [opportunities] to the individuals, we teach them to be [independent]...it’s really fulfilling.”

David has proven himself to be a strong ally for self-advocacy among the individuals he supports. Family members and colleagues recounted stories of his tireless efforts to help individuals with vision impairments learn how to safely navigate a kitchen and cook their own meals, teach individuals with limited motor skills how to shave, or help newly independent individuals do their own laundry. David isn’t afraid to speak up to make sure that the voices of the individuals he supports are heard: when a case manager initiated one man’s annual planning meeting solo, David interrupted to ask that the man be given the chance to facilitate his own meeting. Everyone was astonished to receive his prepared meeting agenda and learn more about the man’s hopes and dreams for the coming year.

David might not have known what to expect when he started that radio interview, but he definitely knows how important the work of DSPs can be in the lives of the people they support!



LINDA BALLARD

RCM
of Washington
Washington, DC

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA DSP OF THE YEAR

Linda Ballard knows that the key to person-centered supports is communication—and she'll do whatever it takes to keep the lines of communication open.

When Linda was first paired with an older gentleman, most of his existing support staff believed him to be nonverbal. Linda began reviewing his history to find new ways to connect with him and increase his ability to communicate his wants and needs. When she found that he had been able to speak prior to a health episode that occurred over 10 years ago, she made it her mission to help him find his voice! By patiently working with flash cards of colors and animals, he slowly grew his vocabulary and began speaking simple sentences to staff. Although “people who worked with him for years were absolutely astonished,” Linda knew that with a little bit of trust, determination and hard work, anything was possible!

Linda’s “vivacious and enthusiastic personality” is an inspiration to the individuals she supports. When one individual was shy and hesitant to make eye contact with people, Linda provided patient encouragement that helped him to become more “social and vocal.” He was able to develop relationships with Linda and others that “really was that of a family.”

As her supervisor summarized, Linda “understands that trust leads to openness and communication, and that is the key to be able to truly deliver person-centered supports. She encourages people to be the best version of themselves.”



Congratulations, Linda Ballard!

District of Columbia 2019 DSP of the Year!

We appreciate that you value making a difference in people's lives!





**PHILLIP
KIBBAT**

BrightSpring
Florida
Clearwater, FL

FLORIDA DSP OF THE YEAR

Described by his colleagues as “compassionate and tenacious,” Phillip Kibbat has cultivated a reputation for never giving up on the individuals he supports.

When a blind gentleman was first assigned to Phillip, he expressed an interest in learning braille. Phillip immediately found a braille learning program, but the man was rejected for being “too old to learn braille.” Compassionate about the man’s situation and tenacious in his mission to help him reach his goals, Phillip instead sought out self-teaching braille materials and asked colleagues for support. Phillip engaged on a months’ long attempt to learn braille on his own so that he could teach the man how to feel the cell blocks and identify letters. Two years after beginning this journey, the man now knows the entire alphabet and can spell several words.

Phillip’s focused, compassionate care has also been noticed in the wider community. When one young woman became upset during a group outing at a local park, Phillip immediately began to console her. He was so effective in helping the woman gain control of her feelings that a passerby who witnessed the event later called Phillip’s agency to compliment his approach to care. Not only did Phillip help ensure that the day in the park was enjoyed by the group, he also modeled patience and thoughtfulness in the community.

Phillip is “so in tune” with the residents that his colleagues believe that he has “answered his true calling in life”—as a tenacious advocate for the individuals he supports! ages people to be the best version of themselves.”



Lafawndra Allen
Texas



Phillip Kibbat
Florida



Jacquelyn Evans
Alaska



Gabriel McEskew
West Virginia



Danielle Hay
Canada



Donnitta Otte
Wisconsin

Congratulations

to our 2019 award-winning
Direct Support Professionals!
Thank you for helping people live
their best life every day!



Tanya Scherer
Michigan



Shane Whitaker
North Carolina



**ROSE MARY
BRADLEY**

Lynndale, Inc.
Augusta, GA

GEORGIA DSP OF THE YEAR

Expertise in small business entrepreneurship might not have been listed in her job description, but Rose Mary Bradley has risen to the challenge.

When one of the individuals she supports expressed interest in starting his own business, Rose Mary leaped at the chance to support him, both as job coach and business adviser. After learning that he wanted to sell snacks to offices in the local community, Rose Mary helped the individual develop a business plan: together, they researched what types of snacks to sell, how to balance costs and profits, how to set up an attractive display stand and how to establish rapport with local businesses. Today, the individual's snack business continues to thrive, giving him both an additional source of income and "a great deal of pride in managing his own business."

Rose Mary takes this entrepreneurial spirit with her into everyday challenges and opportunities within her agency and community. When a temporary decline in contract work threatened to derail the financial or work skill goals of some of the agency's individuals, Rose Mary suggested that they start an internal van wash crew. On a regular basis, a few individuals wash the agency vans to "enhance their work skills and earn income—and the vans "look awesome representing the agency out in the community!"

Rose Mary works hard to make sure that the community is aware of the agency's work and provides opportunities for those with I/DD. Whether she's working as a job coach or skills adviser, Rose Mary is in the business of making dreams come true!



MACY HENZE

Consumer Direct
Care Network
Meridian, ID

IDAHO DSP OF THE YEAR

If one of the individuals that Macy Henze supports is having trouble completing a task, she has a simple solution: just slow down.

Colleagues and family members have noticed how Macy's patient approach helps cultivate confidence and enables independent living. As the parent of one young man observed, "There is a difference in the way Macy approaches her time with [him] compared to the teachers in school, therapists and other DSPs.... While others have chosen to limit the length of time spent with [him] to a few hours at a time, Macy...wants to slow down the pace of activities so that [he] can truly complete tasks and projects independently."

When Macy noticed that the young man grew bored when doing household chores if he was unable to see the results of his work, Macy found ways to provide visual indicators of progress: she sprinkled baking soda on the carpet before vacuuming so he could see the results. Now that he has learned how to focus on tasks, he is able to clean without visual or verbal prompts. This skill led to a successful job at a local restaurant where he sweeps and cleans tables.

With Macy's patient support, the young man has developed necessary skills for independent living, become more confident, and frequently advocates for himself. As one colleague observed, "I've seen a change in him over the past year and I think that, through his successes, he has learned to believe in himself. Macy planted the seeds for that growth."



**GARY
FERGUSON**

Marcfirst
Normal, IL

ILLINOIS DSP OF THE YEAR

Gary Ferguson is a cheerful presence in the lives of his coworkers and individuals he supports. “He’s like Santa Claus,” said one woman, “bring[ing] humor and positivity wherever he goes.”

This joyful approach to service has made Gary a favorite among the individuals at his agency. According to one colleague, Gary is the only DSP who has ever been mentioned by name in an individual’s person-centered plan: an avid baseball fan wanted to go to a Cubs game, but only with Gary! Many others call him by name when they have specific needs or wants. For example, one man requested Gary to be his job coach, while others look to him daily to tell a “new bad joke.” Sometimes it seems that only Gary is able to intuit the needs of some of the non-verbal individuals at their agency. When one woman looked wistfully at a peer whose face had been painted, Gary understood that she also wanted to have her face painted and made sure that the artist understood which image she liked best.

People are “at the center of Gary’s heart, and he in theirs.” He knows that “people are happier when they are connected to others,” so he makes a special effort to help them attend Parks and Rec events, community activities, and special days with their families. His supervisor summarized his career best when they said: “Gary Ferguson has spent almost 30 years as a DSP, making people laugh, bringing hope and connection to each life he touches.”



**JOHNEKA
JEWELL**

Dungarvin
Indianapolis, IN

INDIANA DSP OF THE YEAR

Johneka Jewell might not have x-ray vision or super-strength, but she’s a superhero in the eyes of the individuals she supports.

When a fire broke out in Johneka’s residential home, she immediately leapt into action. Johneka was able to get everyone out of the house safely before calling 911—an impressive act, given the unique mobility and behavioral challenges faced by the individuals she supports. This could have been a traumatic experience for the displaced women, but Johneka was a beacon of calmness and strength: she reminded them of coping strategies to ease their transition to a temporary residence, coordinated their care so that there were no interruptions in their service, and made sure that medications and essential documents were retrieved. As Johneka’s colleagues noted, “Her quick thinking and bravery ensured that everyone made it out of the house to safety.”

Even when she isn’t escaping burning buildings, Johneka performs heroic feats in the lives of the women she supports. Johneka knew that one woman was interested in engaging with the community but refused to leave her bed. After years of refusals, Johneka eventually realized that the woman was uncomfortable with the high number of transfers (e.g., bed to wheelchair, wheelchair to car) required to participate in activities. Johneka proposed new activities that “eliminated the need for the car entirely” and has accompanied the woman on more community outings in the last few months than she has attended in years.

It’s clear that Johneka’s acts of heroism—big and small—improve the lives of the women she supports.



LINDA RENN

The MENTOR
Network
Vinton, IA

IOWA DSP OF THE YEAR

Sometimes, a little attention to detail can make all the difference.

For the past several years, Linda Renn has supported a woman with unique needs, including Autism and blindness. Linda quickly learned that the woman struggles with change, feels most comfortable following a routine and responds best to detailed descriptions about upcoming plans. To help communicate with the woman and prepare her for changes to her environment or plans, Linda learned braille and makes sure to print a plan or schedule for the woman. This has helped to ease her concerns about changes and allows her to look forward to special activities, such as visits with her family.

When the woman was assigned to a new group home, Linda knew that the change could be very difficult for her. Linda not only offered to be part of the woman's transition team, but also trained new staff in the best ways to interact with her, described the details of her routine, assessed the new home to make sure that it would suit her, and toured the home with her prior to move-in. Linda even opted to move into the house as a staff member so that she could help with this transition. All of these efforts paid off: the move went "very smoothly" and the woman is thriving in her new environment.

Because of Linda's close attention to the details that matter most to the individuals she supports, she is truly able to make a positive difference in their lives.



JODEE BRYANT

Mosaic
Pittsburg, KS

KANSAS DSP OF THE YEAR

With 20 years of experience as a DSP, JoDee Bryant transitions seamlessly between her role providing direct support to the individuals she serves and mentoring the next generation of DSPs.

As a "strong advocate" for helping the individuals she supports, JoDee won't hesitate to approach Case Managers and ask for an individual's goals to be changed. When one woman who had never had a job before expressed a strong desire to start working, JoDee was determined to help her make her dream come true. Together, they advocated to change the woman's person-centered plan and started to "build skills that would help her obtain employment." Because of JoDee's unyielding belief in the young woman's potential, she now "has a part time job that she is very proud of."

When she is not providing direct supports, JoDee is using her considerable skill and knowledge to help mentor others in the community. She has "taken the initiative" to mentor social work students who are volunteering at the agency, providing them with her insights into how to provide high-quality support. She also reviews her peer's documentation to make sure that information about daily medication, therapy, individual goals, etc., are captured in each individual's log. If an error or omission is found, JoDee uses this as a learning opportunity to help her fellow DSPs understand the importance of good record-keeping.

As her supervisor wrote, "'Team player' and 'selfless' are two characteristics that are often used by her coworkers to describe her." This team player and selfless DSP has indeed proven to be an important part of her agency and community.



**JOHN
MATTINGLY**
Tri-Generations
Louisville
Louisville, KY

KENTUCKY DSP OF THE YEAR

A young man bubbled with excitement about his upcoming team meeting. As he talked about music, social outings and goals for the coming year, he looked to his friend and DSP, John Mattingly, for assurance. No matter what, he knew that John had his back.

Earlier that year, the young man experienced anxiety and depression when the day program he had attended for over 25 years closed its doors. Eventually landing in the hospital and “unable to participate in daily life,” he was in need of new emotional tools to overcome this loss. John stepped in to help him reconnect with friends from the day program and refocus his coping strategies. Over the course of several months, they planned and hosted a Halloween reunion that gave everyone the opportunity to have some fun, reconnect and share contact information. At the same time, John also shifted the focus of the man’s journaling from his anxiety to other topics. John “created and printed prompting questions” that he taped into the journal, which helped the young man to rediscover the things that bring him joy.

The coming year will bring a lot of things to look forward to, but John and the young man also know that they have some work to do. At the end of his team meeting, the young man looked at his friend, John, with a smile and said, “We are working on it, aren’t we, John?”

With “the same friendly smile,” John replied, “Yes we are, buddy. Yes we are.”



**MARVETTE
HARRIS**
Volunteers
of America
Southeast
Louisiana
Metairie, LA

LOUISIANA DSP OF THE YEAR

Marvette Harris goes the extra mile for the individuals she supports—literally.

When one man was reconnected with his family after decades apart, he was ecstatic. His family was eager to see him and wanted to host a 60th birthday party for him, but faced a seemingly insurmountable dilemma: they lived in another state and were unable to travel.

Marvette was undeterred and soon set upon a plan to help him attend the party. After putting the appropriate supports in order, Marvette drove him and his friend over 350 miles each way so that he could celebrate his birthday with his family.

Marvette’s dedication to supporting family relationships is one of the hallmarks of her service. Another man who she supports had been separated from his mother for years due to a long period spent in an institution. Although his mother lived in another state, Marvette helped arrange for his mother to visit, which reestablished their relationship. She has now been to visit him twice and frequently talks to him on the telephone.

Marvette’s colleagues describe her commitment to the individuals she supports with awe—not even a hurricane can slow her down! After Hurricane Katrina devastated Louisiana, Marvette worked tirelessly to “reestablish community, housing, jobs, friendships and safety” for the individuals served by her agency. A true “connector,” Marvette will travel any distance to connect people to the resources they need to thrive.



KIM REDMUN

John F. Murphy
Homes
Auburn, ME

MAINE DSP OF THE YEAR

Helen Keller once said, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." Kim Redmun has taken these words to heart and emphasizes teamwork in her daily interactions with the individuals she supports.

When several individuals at her agency lost their jobs, Kim saw an opportunity. She pulled together a collaboration of individuals, parents and coworkers to identify the kinds of work that the individuals loved to do and how they could market that work to local businesses. Soon, Kim was supporting the individuals to learn about becoming owners of a small business that offered short-term clerical and administrative services. Their business, Paper Pushers Plus, LLC, "thrived for almost 10 years," providing this dedicated team of individuals with confidence, financial support and new business skills.

Although there are plenty of opportunities for individuals at Kim's agency to use teamwork to advance their interests, Kim also encourages them to volunteer and "share their gifts and talents to help others." For example, individuals at the agency made holiday window decorations for local hospice patients. When they expressed an interest in doing more to help, Kim invited the local hospice coordinator to speak to the group about the work that she does. The individuals were so invested in helping the patients that they were soon making fleece blankets with a local volunteer.

As her supervisor said, "If Kim is your DSP, you are guaranteed to leave...feeling good about who you are and what you have accomplished." With a little teamwork, Kim helps everyone accomplish great things!



MARIAN MULBAH- POQUEE

Mid-Atlantic
Human Service
Corporation
Bel Air, MD

MARYLAND DSP OF THE YEAR

Described as a "role model for other DSPs in the agency," Marian Mulbah-Poquee is a strong and silent supporter for the individuals she serves. She lets them take the lead and "dictate what they want for themselves," then figures out how she can assist them.

A critical part of facilitating independence is supporting individual choice. Marian encourages the women she serves to pay for their own purchases and handle their own money. In this way, they not only exercise agency over their shopping choices, but also learn about financial responsibility. Marian also supports autonomy inside the home, where she teaches them safety skills, gardening and basic home care so that they can spend more time living independently.

These skills for self-advocacy and autonomy translate into civic participation in the public sphere: each of these women is an active participant in a local advocacy group. The group provides the women with an opportunity to learn about issues affecting their community and provide their opinions. The women have become so active in the group that Marian supported their efforts to attend Developmental Disability Day in Annapolis, so that they could advocate for themselves with lawmakers.

Marian wants the individuals that she supports to be involved in their community in as many different ways as possible. As a tireless advocate for "her ladies," Marian provides them with the space and choice to lead full and independent lives.



**CHRISTOPHER
AMADO**

Delta Projects
Dedham, MA

MASSACHUSETTS DSP OF THE YEAR

Relationships are at the heart of Christopher Amado's work as a DSP. As his colleagues put it, Chris is "always the first person to facilitate bridging connections between individuals and their family members."

After one individual was reconnected with her mother and sister after years apart, Chris began talking with other individuals he supports. He soon learned that many of them missed their family members and had lost touch with beloved siblings, aunts and cousins. "Taking initiative," Chris collected phone numbers and other contact information, and helped facilitate calls between each individual and their family members. For many, this has rekindled long-lost relationships and led to regular phone calls, visits between the family home and the individual's residence, and celebrations among family. Chris' colleagues attribute his success to both his unwavering dedication to the individuals he serves and his bilingualism; by speaking two languages, Chris is able to "further promote the ongoing communication with family members of individuals that do not speak English."

Chris has not only rekindled family ties but also supports events and opportunities to strengthen them. Over the past four years, he's taken a lead role in planning summer cook-outs, dinner parties and holiday gatherings. By providing opportunities for friends and family to gather, Chris helps build relationships and bridge connections—keeping relationships at the heart of each individual's life.



**TANYA
SCHERER**

BrightSpring
Michigan
Saginaw, MI

MICHIGAN DSP OF THE YEAR

Sometimes, the "other duties as assigned" listed at the end of our job descriptions become some of the most meaningful roles we play.

For Tanya Scherer, one of those "other duties" was learning sign language, which became immensely important when she started her role overseeing a program for deaf and hearing-impaired individuals. Tanya, who hadn't known any sign language before she joined Community Alternatives, knew that she'd have to dive in head-first in order to provide the level of support she knew her individuals deserved. She signed up for language classes alongside the individuals she supports, studied the materials, and even met with other individuals in the classes to give them a deeper sense of the unique communications needs of the individuals she supports.

Tanya's commitment to providing tailored support to deaf and hearing-impaired individuals can be seen far beyond her efforts to master sign language. When individuals come to Community Alternatives after experiencing homelessness, they often have no natural supports to speak of, let alone the resources to cover their basic needs. As she always does, Tanya rises to the occasion, collecting gently worn clothing from people in the community and delivering them to the individuals most in need. When she does, their faces light up—and from then on, they're drawn to Tanya's generous spirit.

Tanya's colleagues are as quick as the individuals she supports to praise her positive presence. "Tanya is an amazing team player, always there when you need a go-to, and always willing to help," one colleague noted. Of course, none of that is surprising to anyone who knows Tanya, as she's proven since day one that when it comes to "other duties as assigned," there is no challenge to which she doesn't feel compelled to rise.



LISA RILEY

MSS
Eagan, MN

MINNESOTA DSP OF THE YEAR

After fifteen years of service as a DSP, Lisa Riley is an expert at finding or creating opportunities to improve the lives of the individuals she supports.

Although attending physical therapy can seem like a chore for some individuals, Lisa looks for opportunities to make it fun. When one individual needed to increase his lung capacity, Lisa worked with him to find ways to meet his physical therapy goals while also piquing his interests. Today, he regularly attends physical therapy and can be frequently found at a local rock-climbing gym. Lisa helped coordinate these activities to improve his physical health and incorporate some fun into the process.

Lisa applies this same creative thinking to other common challenges faced by the individuals she supports. For example, Lisa has helped several individuals with communication or mobility challenges to use assistive technology to meet their needs. Whether it is a communication board that enables someone to engage with family over email and social media, voice command systems that allow them to select music of their choice or net switches that control the room temperature, Lisa is an eager advocate for technology that increases autonomy and choice. It's no wonder that she now leads the assistive technology committee at her agency and helps train new employees in the field.

Lisa's colleagues are quick to praise her "tireless" dedication and "person-centered thinking in everything she does." From rock climbing to room temperature control, Lisa is committed to providing "engaging, meaningful and choice-driven opportunities to the individuals she supports."



ALEIA DYE

REM Mississippi
Oxford, MS

MISSISSIPPI DSP OF THE YEAR

If you asked Aleia Dye how she manages to make a difference in her work, she'd tell you, "it's the little things"—things like bringing an individual she supports along for rides in her Jeep.

But if you asked anyone else how Aleia manages to make a difference, they'd consider the steps she takes anything but little. That's because what Aleia would consider the "little things" make a huge difference in the life of the young man with Autism she supports. For him, those rides in Aleia's Jeep have been nothing short of transformative.

The individual Aleia supports has experienced trust issues with his DSPs in the past, and others on the REM team haven't been able to get him to open up about his dreams or the supports he needs and achieve those dreams. But going for rides with Aleia has helped him build a connection with her, and that connection has made all the difference. As her supervisor put it, "Aleia's patience, kindness and support" and her "I won't give up" attitude "have helped open his world to new experiences and encouragement to achieve his goals."

With a sense of mutual trust, the individual Aleia supports has made strides in other realms of his life, most notably his communication. Whereas he previously refused to use his talker, he now does so much more often, both with Aleia and with others around him. That has enabled him to express what he wants in life, build relationships with his peers, and experience—in some ways for the first time in his life—a true sense of community.



**MONA
MERGENTHAL**

Emmaus Homes
St. Charles, MO

MISSOURI DSP OF THE YEAR

It's always a jolly holiday with Mona Mergenthal around!

Mona knows that vacations, events and holidays give the individuals she supports a special opportunity to create fond memories and lasting relationships. "For EVERY holiday," write her colleagues, "Mona makes it her mission to help the individuals she supports decorate their homes based on the holiday or season." She goes out of her way to help them plan holiday parties, cook special meals, look at Christmas lights and "experience the magic of the holidays" year-round. Each person finds a reason to celebrate because of Mona's enthusiasm for holiday cheer.

Throughout the year, she works hard to find opportunities to cultivate friendships. When three of the ladies supported by Mona wanted to go on vacation out of state, Mona set to work developing a plan, securing funds, making an agenda and arranging travel. She even made gift bags for each woman that included their favorite activities to take on their road trip. After the memories were made and everyone returned home, Mona kept the magic alive with a photo album that she presented to each woman and their families.

According to her supervisor, "Mona's dedication and commitment to the individuals she supports...has been recognized through countless phone calls, letters and emails from community members, families and coworkers." The individuals supported by Mona, as well as Mona's colleagues, enjoy spending time with her and are grateful for her efforts to bring a little jolliness into their lives.



**LISA
BEHRENS**

Mosaic
Beatrice, NE

NEBRASKA DSP OF THE YEAR

To illustrate how essential Lisa Behrens is to the health and well-being of the individuals she serves, her colleagues suggested a thought experiment: "Imagine if you were unable to speak with words. Who would you choose to speak on your behalf? Do you have someone in your life who could?" For several lucky individuals, that person is Lisa.

With over 30 years of experience as a DSP, Lisa is her agency's go-to gal when it comes to building "rapport, trust and relationships" that magnify the voices of the individuals she serves. When one young man became frustrated due to his limited ability to communicate with others, he often became aggressive or withdrawn. Lisa could see that this affected his ability to make friends or even finish school. By working closely with the young man to learn how he communicated his wants, needs and thoughts, Lisa was able to help him develop strategies for positive interactions with others. Now, he is well on his way to completing his high school education, has made good friends and is living comfortably with roommates in his group home.

Lisa's supervisors have called her a "one-of-a-kind employee" who delivers care with "dignity and respect." Her dedication to the individuals she supports starts with understanding who they are and what is most important to them—and making sure that their voices are heard.



Congrats!

For Winning
Missouri DSP of the Year!

MONA

From all of us at

 **Emmaus**



**LINDA
BROWN**

Dungarvin
Silver Springs, NV

NEVADA DSP OF THE YEAR

After nearly 40 years as a DSP, Linda Brown has not only helped individuals with I/DD lead better lives—she’s been a pioneer in creating inclusive support models.

Linda’s work as a DSP began at a day school for children with “profound disabilities and traumatic brain injuries.” Unsatisfied with the crowded classrooms and lack of individual support, Linda asked to take ownership of the program. She not only decreased class sizes and created a more stimulating learning environment, but she also partnered with local schools to integrate her students into the general population. According to her supervisors, “Linda was part of the change that eliminated seclusion and isolation for individuals with disabilities,” and is a “pioneer of the inclusion program that schools use today.”

In the years since, Linda has used the same holistic, inclusive and individual-focused approach to help the individuals she supports lead their best lives. When Linda was paired with a young woman 14 years ago, the woman had such an intense fear of spiders that she was unable to work. Since she lives in a desert with lots of spiders, this fear seemed insurmountable. Linda took “a leap of faith” and began familiarizing the woman with animals and insects to show that they are not so different from humans. After months of feeding animals and seeing insects, the woman’s fears abated. Today, she even has spiders as pets!

Whether she’s supporting individuals in her community or advocating for change in the field, Linda is a pioneer problem-solver who is proud to be a DSP.



**NICOLE
DUFOUR**

The Institute
of Professional
Practice, Inc.
Concord, NH

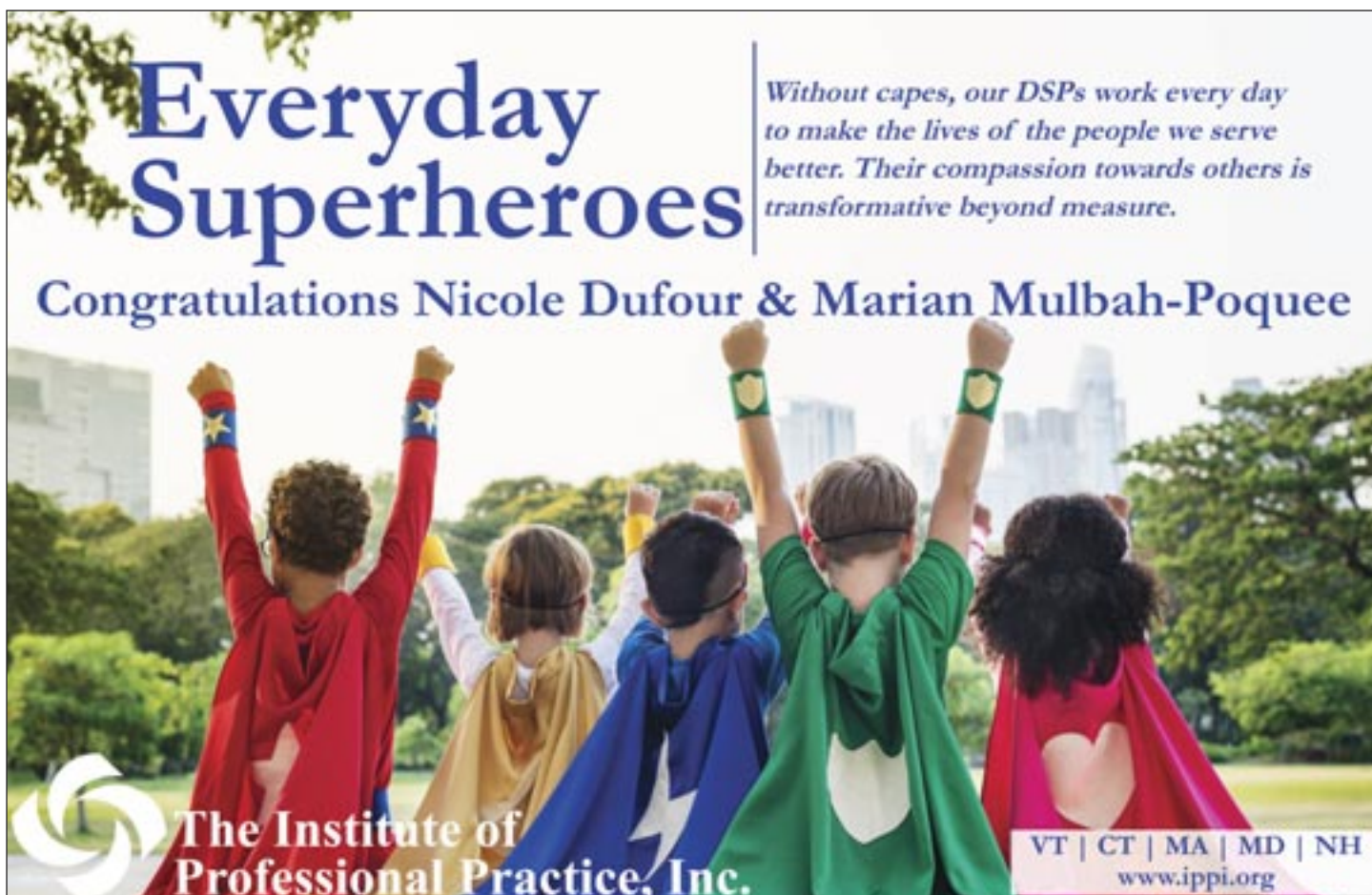
NEW HAMPSHIRE DSP OF THE YEAR

Described as “fearless and trustworthy” by her colleagues, Nicole Dufour is a strong and compassionate advocate for the individuals she supports.

For the last 25 years, Nicole has been the home provider for an individual with intensive support needs. When he first came to the agency, “people were afraid of him because of how dangerous his behavior was,” while his limited vision and verbal skills made communication nearly impossible. Nicole was unwavering in her belief that this individual could live a fulfilling life, so she began working hard on his communication, behavior and self-soothing skills. Today, she has not only helped him to safely and meaningfully socialize with family and friends, but has taught others how to interpret his preferences. One colleague who witnessed this transformation happily reported that he now has “numerous people in his life who appreciate and value his presence.”

Nicole’s natural talent for compassionate service combined with over 30 years of experience as a DSP makes her an obvious candidate for leadership. She has served as a mentor among her agency peers, a statewide trainer, a member of several teams committed to improving service quality and staff retention initiatives, and an effective Transition Coordinator. When an individual with intensive needs transitions to her agency, Nicole works with the team to learn about the individual’s priorities, select a DSP who is a good match for their needs, and provide tailored training for support staff.

It’s no wonder, then, why Nicole was named New Hampshire’s 2019 DSP of the year! they are and what is most important to them—and making sure that their voices are heard.



DAUSY WURIE

Dungarvin
Somerset, NJ

NEW JERSEY DSP OF THE YEAR

Dausy Wurie believes that active listening is fundamental to providing quality, person-centered support. According to his colleagues, Dausy's motto is "get to know the person served and your job and that person's day will be 100 times easier."

Dausy starts each relationship with the individuals he serves with a one-on-one meeting. Talking to them helps him understand their needs, wants and preferences so that their person-centered plans reflect their priorities. Often, Dausy will advocate for a change in a person's goals because they are no longer interested in them, or because a goal was selected by someone other than the individual. Dausy then makes sure that this information is shared with the rest of the support staff so that there are no delays in helping the individual advance toward their new priorities.

These one-on-one conversations also help Dausy find innovative ways to offer support. When one individual refused to eat because he wasn't interested in his daily sandwich, Dausy got creative. He knew that the individual was "fascinated with different shapes," so he used cookie cutters to change the shape of the sandwich. Now, the individual is happy to eat "circles" and "stars" for lunch.

Active listening and innovation have sometimes helped Dausy to make dreams come true. One man was an avid sports fan who wanted to play for the Rutgers University basketball team. Dausy found other agency athletes and assembled "Rutgers" and "Princeton" basketball teams. Over the course of an afternoon, they played a game, cheered on by counselors and staff. Knowing the person's dreams helped Dausy make them come true.



**BRENDA
VASQUEZ**

RCA
Albuquerque, NM

NEW MEXICO DSP OF THE YEAR

The term that Brenda Vasquez's supervisors use most often to describe her career as a DSP is "servant leadership." Every day, she works hard to "enrich the lives of individuals, build better organizations and ultimately create a more just and caring world."

Brenda displays servant leadership as a staff member in an ICF/IID group home. When an older gentleman who is deaf moved in, he had difficulty adjusting to the new environment and was often aggressive with Brenda. Rather than retreat, Brenda worked hard to help the man take charge of important choices in his life: she took it upon herself to learn American Sign Language so that they could communicate about his needs, wants and decisions. Brenda met with him weekly to learn new signs and help teach other staff about things that were most important to him. As one colleague put it, "By becoming the teacher, he felt empowered to instigate positive change."

Whether she is working in the group home or at her agency, Brenda does everything she can to empower and enable others to do their best. She often facilitates orientations and trainings for new staff so that they are able to offer professional and tailored support to the individuals they serve. Brenda has also taken leadership training classes and CMA certification courses, and works with the agency's staffing and recruitment committee so that she is able to steer the agency and its staff toward high-quality service. After 17 years as a DSP, Brenda remains committed to leading through service.



**MARC
O'MARA**

Heritage Christian
Services
North Tonawanda,
NY

NEW YORK DSP OF THE YEAR

Marc O'Mara splits his time between his role as an overnight DSP and general contractor, but you'd never know it—almost.

When the men and women who Marc supports expressed a desire to spend more time together as a group, Marc looked for creative ways to make it happen. The individuals lived as neighbors in an apartment setting but lacked a larger place where they could gather after work or on the weekends. One day, Marc noticed some vacant office space in their building and asked the landlord if it could be used as a group gathering place. With the landlord's approval, Marc designed and built a bonus room where the individuals he supports are able to engage in social activities and after-work fellowship.

Marc's tendency to "build up" the people he meets carries over into the one-on-one support he offers the individuals under his care. Each month, he sits down with each person and talks about the kinds of events and activities they would like to attend in the coming weeks. Because he knows each person so well, Marc will often suggest things that they might like to do, like attending concerts, going to flea markets or participating in church events. In this way, Marc helps each individual build relationships with people in the community and maintain an active social life.

Whether he's building relationships or bonus rooms, Marc's 19 years as a DSP have made him a valued staffer at his agency and a steadfast support to the individuals he serves.



SHANE WHITAKER

BrightSpring
North Carolina
Kings Mountain,
NC

NORTH CAROLINA DSP OF THE YEAR

Whether he's installing air conditioners or speaker systems, Shane does what he can to make sure the individuals he supports are "cool."

Summers in North Carolina can get very hot. When the air conditioning at one of the agency's group homes broke, Shane knew that all of the residents would be uncomfortable, while others might be at risk if the temperature continued to rise. Even though it was his day off, Shane drove over an hour and a half each way to pick up and install window units so that everyone could stay cool. His selfless act of heroism saved the day!

Shane's "positive attitude" and willingness to do whatever he can for the individuals he supports is also expressed in small, day-to-day efforts. For example, all of the individuals Shane supports have goals related to cultivating healthy relationships with others, so Shane works hard to help them communicate effectively. He meets with each man to maintain appropriate tone of voice, topics of conversation, and facial expressions. These efforts have helped the men express themselves during everything from medical appointments to job interviews! Shane also helps the men to pursue their interests in technology—as one colleague put it, "all the men in the home...love electronics." As a fellow tech-geek, Shane helps them set up computers, TVs, game systems, radios and speakers. They are able to find entertainment, search for jobs, and communicate with family because of these efforts.

In the short three years that Shane Whitaker has been a DSP, he has clearly made a big impact in the lives of the individuals he supports.



AMBER ESTERGALL

Welcome House
Westlake, OH

OHIO DSP OF THE YEAR

It isn't easy to oversee the medical care for "over 30 very medically needy clients," but as her agency's Medical Care Coordinator, Amber Estergall makes it look effortless.

The Coordinator position was very new and undefined when Amber stepped into the role. Taking a holistic approach to individual wellness, Amber developed an organized system to ensure that everyone received quality services and supports. She read through each individual's file and medical records so that documentation of their needs could become actionable: regular or follow-up medical appointments, new activities promoting healthy diets and individually tailored exercise programs have become a structured part of each person's care plan. Given the complex health challenges faced by the individuals she supports, "innovation is a key component of her job" to ensure that everyone's needs are met in a way that respects their individual autonomy and choice.

In addition to her role as Medical Care Coordinator, Amber provides direct support to several individuals. Because she "recognizes the emotional needs of these individuals" and dedicates herself to "promoting physical and emotional well-being," Amber is a role model for providing holistic, person-centered support. When one individual expressed interest in healthy eating, Amber not only attended a Healthy Lifestyles Cooking program with him, but also "train the trainer" sessions so that he could become a leader in healthy living among his peers. He is happier, healthier and has made new friends because of Amber's attention to his needs.

From her role as leader to DSP, it's clear that "there is nothing Amber wouldn't do for the health and well-being" of the individuals she serves!



**TRAVIS
DOTTRICH**

Home of Hope
Vinita, OK

OKLAHOMA DSP OF THE YEAR

The ability to make choices for oneself is a critical part of living independently. For Travis Dottrich, the most important part of his work is helping the individuals he supports make and express those choices.

One of the men Travis supports is non-verbal. Though he has high levels of comprehension, his difficulties with verbal expression were a cause of frustration that sometimes led to aggression or other behavioral challenges. This made it difficult for him to cultivate friendships or work cooperatively with other support staff. Travis believed that the man would be much more fulfilled if he were able to be understood, so he worked with him to develop effective coping strategies during times of stress, as well as stronger social skills. He also paid close attention to the man's vocalizations to learn how he expressed his likes and dislikes. With Travis' help, the man now has a large support network that is better able to understand how he expresses himself, as well as a robust group of friends and a serious girlfriend.

The power of decision-making in the lives of the individuals Travis supports is clear. When the man's family trust paid for a new vehicle to support his active lifestyle, Travis found ways for him to choose the vehicle he wanted. Though the car salesman "learned a few things about providing choice" during this exchange, "by the end of the sale, he was asking [the man] questions instead of Travis!"

With such a stellar approach to his work, it's no wonder that Travis was chosen as Oklahoma's DSP of the year.



**MARIA
MORALES**

Community
Support
Services, Inc.
Salem, OR

OREGON DSP OF THE YEAR

According to her colleagues, Maria Morales' approach to her work can be described in three words: "make it happen." No matter how big or small their goals may be, Maria is determined to help the individuals she supports to meet them.

One individual Maria supports was eager to go to Crater Lake National Park. At the time, it wasn't safe or practical for him to visit because of some physical limitations and the short, 40-minute lifespan of his oxygen tank. Maria met with the man to talk about how they could make his dream a reality. First, she encouraged him to return to physical therapy so that he could build enough strength to safely visit the park. At the same time, Maria looked into options for portable oxygen concentrators (POC) that would allow him to travel without the heavy, bulky tanks. Though it took a lot of phone calls with suppliers, Maria secured a POC around the time that the individual's physical therapy began to yield results. His resulting visit to Crater Lake was indeed the stuff of dreams!

This change in his health, outlook and portability has given the individual a new lease on life. He has rekindled his relationship with his girlfriend, begun hanging out with friends again and attended an all-day July 4th barbecue. His dreams of going to Crater Lake and reengaging with friends are dreams no more—as a determined and enthusiastic team, he and Maria were able to "make it happen."



**GAYLE
FERONA**

Keystone
Human Services
Harrisburg, PA

PENNSYLVANIA DSP OF THE YEAR

As an energetic and enthusiastic Employment Specialist, Gayle Feron understands how the right job can change the lives of the individuals she supports.

On the surface, one man who Gayle supports seemed to lead a pretty “fulfilling life”—he had friends, enjoyed traveling and volunteered at a local food bank. In spite of all this, it still seemed like something was missing. Gayle learned that the man had great employment potential, but a previous negative experience made him hesitant to pursue financial independence. Gayle spent time with him to understand his thoughts and preferences so they could find employment options that would suit him. She soon gained his trust and they found a job that met his “specific job criteria, paid a decent wage and integrated him into his community.” In the last year alone, he has received “several pay increases and a promotion,” which has given him confidence and a reliable source of income.

Of course, the effects of good employment extend beyond the workplace. Joining a new company also provides individuals with a new social network. Gayle encourages the individuals she supports to foster new relationships by exchanging contact information, inviting others to after-work events and exploring shared interests. By helping to ground each individual into their community as a worker and friend, Gayle helps them lead their best lives. Described by her colleagues as “a leader, an advocate and a valuable member of our team,” Gayle is an invaluable link between individuals, their communities and the employers who are glad to have such dedicated employees!

CONGRATULATIONS
GAYLE FERONA!

2019 Pennsylvania
DSP of the Year



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JOSIAH OLOWOPOROKU

Community Living
of Rhode Island
Warwick, RI

RHODE ISLAND DSP OF THE YEAR

Even after 13 years as a DSP, Josiah Olowoporoku's supervisor remember why he was hired: Josiah "had all the traits we would want in a DSP, including compassion, respect and the ability to positively influence each participant to seek out their own identity!"

Josiah's compassionate approach to care means that he is sensitive to the needs of the individuals he supports. When one man seemed lost and began acting out, Josiah quickly stepped in. He learned that the man is of Nigerian descent and thought that reconnecting to his family's culture might provide a source of pride, identity and stability. Josiah has helped the man prepare special meals, found traditional clothing for him to wear to church and other celebrations, and is helping him rediscover his culture through books and videos. Today, the individual proudly identifies as a man of Nigerian descent and has "enhanced his self-esteem and his dignity!"

When Josiah was paired with another young man whose traumatic brain injury contributed to incontinence, Josiah knew that a little extra compassion was needed. The man was embarrassed by his condition and often acted aggressively. Josiah worked with him to develop a toileting schedule, as well as coping mechanisms to manage his feelings. Now, the individual is able to fully engage in his plan of support.

As his colleagues once said, Josiah is "an example for all of us of compassionate excellence." Whether he's helping someone rediscover their identity or feel comfortable in their own skin, Josiah is led by his compassion for the individuals he supports.



CRYSTAL CAMPBELL

Charles Lea Center
Spartanburg, SC

SOUTH CAROLINA DSP OF THE YEAR

Crystal Campbell knows that sometimes, being a good DSP is about more than meeting an individual's goals: it's about reconnecting them to their communities, families and younger selves.

As individuals age or progress through later stages of dementia, it can be difficult for them to keep in touch with the interests and events that once defined them. Crystal knows how important it is for the individuals she supports to retain a sense of their identity, so she takes special care to connect them with their past through scrapbooking and journaling projects. Each of the men she supports has used these projects to reach out to friends and family, refresh their memories of important people and events, and hold onto a sense of their younger selves. Sometimes she takes a more hands-on approach: when she found that one man was a big Elvis Presley fan, she helped him plan an Elvis-themed birthday party, complete with an Elvis impersonator! She even helped the man and his friends visit Graceland.

After 23 years of caring for older adults, Crystal makes sure that each individual she supports not only retains a strong sense of their past, but also continues to work toward a happy future. Whether they seek new projects, part-time work or church families to fill their days, Crystal is there to support them—one connection at a time.



ALLEN SELBY

Core Services
of Northeast
Tennessee
Johnson City, TN


TENNESSEE DSP OF THE YEAR

Allen Selby knows that progress doesn't always follow a straight line. Though it's possible to get discouraged when an individual he supports encounters a setback, Allen's positive outlook and dedication are often enough to get them back on track.

One of the individuals Allen supports had been living independently for a while when serious medical and mental health issues made this arrangement untenable. The individual agreed to move into a supported living home but quickly found that he was unhappy and preferred to live alone. Allen worked with him to better understand why this arrangement didn't work in his life and helped the man advocate for two significant changes: a new, full-time job and the purchase of his own home so that he could live independently.


Upon the individual's invitation, Allen became his job coach and on-call living support. He helped him find a new employer who offered the man a 40-hour per week job that gives him pride in his work, financial independence and the ability to afford his dream home. Allen also supported him to participate in an enabling technology project that identified specific kinds of technology—such as sensors and emergency response alerts—that help the man live safely at home without 24-hour care. Now, the individual has an active social life filled with lots of friends and activities. His friends say that they “have never seen him so happy.”

Although the man's path to happiness took a few twists and turns, Allen was there to provide the support and encouragement he needed to live independently.



Congratulations

South Carolina DSP of the Year



For almost two decades Crystal Campbell has been an advocate for the men and women in which she has supported. She has guided them in their journey to be more independent, educated them and, most importantly, become their trusted friend. Crystal's smile is contagious and brings joy to those she's around. **The Charles Lea Center is proud to have Crystal on its team!**

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LAFAWNDRAL ALLEN

BrightSpring
Texas
Austin, TX

TEXAS DSP OF THE YEAR

When her colleagues call Lafawndra Allen a “lifesaver,” they aren’t exaggerating—her attention to detail and dedication to the individuals she supports has literally helped save lives.

Most of the people under Lafawndra’s care are “non-verbal, [have] high medical needs and have behavior concerns due to their inability to communicate their wants and needs.” When one individual developed an infection that resulted in hospice care, Lafawndra paid close attention to his condition and worked hard to translate his needs to medical staff. She spent “many hours at the hospital to advocate for him,” which meant a change in care that eventually saved his life. According to her supervisors, after only a few days of Lafawndra’s care, “the individual was eating, gained weight and hospice was no longer needed. Several months later, he continues to thrive.”

Lafawndra takes special care to make sure that the individuals in her group home are loved like a member of her own family. In addition to advocating for them during a crisis, she also does everything she can to make them “feel loved and taken care of.” On a day-to-day basis, this means that she and her staff prepare a healthy, home-cooked dinner for the residents and eat together as a group.

The importance of such simple, daily rituals was highlighted by Lafawndra’s supervisor, who said, “I believe that Lafawndra has used [food as a way] to save her individuals. She pours an extra dash of love into her recipes.” Lafawndra certainly has found the recipe for excellent care.



KEVIN HADSEL

Families First
Wilmington, VT

VERMONT DSP OF THE YEAR

Thinking “outside the box” comes naturally to Kevin Hadsel.

In the two short years that he’s worked as a DSP, Kevin has distinguished himself as an innovative, “dreams can become realities” go-getter whose creative approach to service is appreciated by his colleagues, the individuals he serves and their families. When one of the young men supported by Kevin added “being received as a good man” to his person-centered plan, the team struggled with how to put this goal into action—but not Kevin. He immediately “embraced the challenge” of identifying concrete behaviors that would help the young man meet his goals. By working diligently to develop a plan that cultivated the skills of etiquette, communication and sharing, Kevin became an innovative support professional and mentor to the individual he assists. It’s no wonder that one parent said that Kevin provided the kind of “extra special care...we would expect from a family member.”

Of course, Kevin’s efforts to improve the lives of people in the community extend beyond individual support—he also helps lead two pilot programs designed to facilitate independent living. In this capacity, Kevin serves as an important member of the planning team, a house parent and advocate. Because of his unyielding belief in the capabilities of the individuals he serves, Kevin has encouraged the team to “[try] strategies before discounting them as impossible,” and helped develop new approaches to support independent living.

By approaching his work with creativity and enthusiasm, Kevin was recognized as his agency’s 2018 DSP of the Year. Combined with his “gift of loving all humanity,” his colleagues can’t wait to see what he’ll come up with next.



SKYLER ROSS

Resources for
Independence
of Virginia
Fairfax, VA

VIRGINIA DSP OF THE YEAR

There are times when respecting an individual's "dignity of risk" poses a challenge for DSPs. One of the young men that Skyler Ross supports has a history of substance abuse and mental health issues, yet has a goal of continuing to live independently in his own apartment. These behaviors often led him to sleep on the street and threatened his ability to engage "in activities of daily living in a healthy and safe manner."

Skyler knew that addressing these issues to maintain his life in the community required a customized, multi-pronged approach. Over several weeks, Skyler worked with the individual to improve his independent living skills. He created visual aids to remind the man to complete his chores so that the home would be a more inviting place to live. Skyler also helped him identify community resources that would help him remain active and healthy, such as food banks and recreational activities. Next, Skyler worked to address the underlying substance abuse. After finding local support groups, Skyler accompanied the individual to several meetings and encouraged him to participate with others. Now, the individual has a natural support group to help him address his addiction when staff aren't available. By providing him with tools for independent and healthy living, Skyler has helped this individual to maintain his apartment and independence.

Striking a balance between independence and ensuring the health and welfare of an individual can be tricky—but Skyler will do whatever it takes to get an individual back on the path to safe and independent living.

Congratulations Skyler Ross Sunrise's Direct Support Professional of the Year



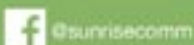
Skyler Ross

2019 Virginia DSP of the Year

Resources for Independence of Virginia, Inc.

Skyler is an exceptional DSP who focuses on the individual's personal needs, goals and desires. His demeanor and disposition consistently set the appropriate path for other DSPs to follow. He works hard to ensure each person supported accomplishes those things they value thereby allowing them to live valuable and meaningful lives in their homes and within the community.

www.sunrisegroup.org







CINDY PLY

Bethesda Lutheran
Communities
Renton, WA

WASHINGTON DSP OF THE YEAR

Enjoying the great outdoors is an important part of life in the Pacific Northwest. For one woman who Cindy supports, it was difficult to take part in outdoor activities because she is blind and has some mobility issues. Although other support staff were stumped about how to satisfy her love of nature, Cindy talked with the woman about the things she liked to do and began researching outdoor activities and excursion options. The woman now attends a weekly horseback riding lesson and spends as much time with the horses as she can. The woman's love of nature didn't stop at the stable door, however. She also told Cindy that she wanted to "see" the ocean waves. Cindy took her to the beach so she could "feel the wind, hear the water, taste the salt in the breeze, smell the fresh air and feel the waves crash around her feet." No matter what, Cindy is dedicated to helping the individuals she supports to have happy, fulfilling experiences.

Of course, Cindy's commitment to the individuals she supports extends to their physical and emotional health. When one man had a medical emergency, Cindy traveled with him to the hospital and stayed by his side. Even after her shift ended, she continued to stay with him because she didn't want him to be alone. As her colleague put it, "Supporting [him] did not have a time limit, not to Cindy."

Whether it's time spent in a hospital room or horseback riding, it's clear that going "above and beyond" is all in a day's work for Cindy.



GABRIEL McESKEW

BrightSpring
West Virginia
Buckhannon, WV

WEST VIRGINIA DSP OF THE YEAR

Gabriel McEskew knows that each individual defines happiness in their own way. As a DSP, he does whatever he can to help the individuals he supports lead happy, fulfilling lives.

Physical health can have a huge impact on an individual's quality of life. When one man decided to lead a healthier life after years of unhealthy eating and lifestyle practices, Gabriel was an enthusiastic cheerleader and mentor. He educated the man about healthy food choices and encouraged physical activity. Although the man had previously "refused to walk across a parking lot," Gabriel found that subtle exertion could yield big results: after months of fishing, walking in local parks and healthy food choices, the man lost over 100 pounds. His colleagues report that this has led to a "long-term change" in the man's outlook, increasing "his quality of life as well as his self-esteem and self-worth."

Whether the individuals he supports have health or social goals, Gabriel works hard to help them lead their best lives. When he learned that one man was unable to visit his family more than a few times each year due to a strict medication schedule, Gabriel became certified as Approved Medication Assistive Personnel. Now, Gabriel accompanies the man to visit his family once a month.

Gabriel's colleagues have called him "a helpful and trustworthy person who will help anyone in any way he can." From exercise to family events, Gabriel will do whatever it takes to help the individuals he supports find happiness.

2019 DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR



DEE OTTE

BrightSpring
Wisconsin
Jefferson, WI

WISCONSIN DSP OF THE YEAR

Although Donnita “Dee” Otte is a capable DSP on land, she seems to work her best magic in the water.

One of the individuals Dee supports had dreamed of going to Disney World and swimming. Though he had wanted this for many years, his medical needs made travel difficult. Dee became a strong advocate for his dream and made arrangements with his managed care organization, fellow caregivers and family to ensure that safe and appropriate travel arrangements could be made. Seven months later, she and the man traveled to Disney World. The man met several Disney characters and, due to the hotel’s wheelchair lift, was able to get into the pool. For the man and his family, it was a “truly life-changing experience.”

Dee applies this same optimistic thinking to every challenge or opportunity that arises. Although one man felt “resigned to spending his life in a wheelchair” due to persistent seizures 10 years prior, new medications had recently improved his health. Dee became a champion for the man to receive physical therapy and retrain his atrophied muscles. She not only “ensured her team followed all schedules and routines left by the physical therapist” but often accompanies him to the pool in her time off so that he can develop core.

Both in and out of the water, it’s clear that Dee brings magic into the lives of the individuals she supports.

CONGRATULATIONS *Marc O'Mara*



NYS Direct Support Professional of the Year
awarded by the American Network of
Community Options and Resources (ANCOR)

Thank you, Mark O'Mara, for listening to people and partnering with them to achieve what matters most in their lives. Your commitment and advocacy are an example to all of us at Heritage Christian Services.



Congratulations!!

Maria Morales

Oregon's DSP
Of The Year!



A committed employee who naturally exemplifies doing what it takes to ensure individuals live a life of their choosing.

We are grateful Maria and proudly salute you!!!



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We are especially proud to congratulate the hard work and dedication to excellence of the

Kentucky DSP of the Year.

John Mattingly

John, Left — Ray, Right



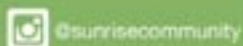
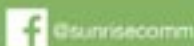
Congratulations Marquavius Moore Winner of the ANCOR 2019 NADSP Tenets Award



Marquavius Moore
Sunrise Community, Inc.

Marquavius is a committed DSP. He is dedicated employee, who consistently meets and surpasses his weekly assignments. His leadership and commitment to his work is reflected on the individuals he serves daily. He has an amazing personality which allows him to fully understand each individual's likes and dislikes allowing him to provide the individuals he serves with the personalized support they need.

www.sunrisegroup.org





INCLUDED.
SUPPORTED.
EMPOWERED.

Together we have a stake in building opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We know the critical role DSPs play in helping people with I/DD thrive.

Included. Supported. Empowered.
exists to ensure the rest of the world knows, too.

Ready to share your story?
Get in touch today at
WeHaveAStake.org

Thank you for all you do to support people in your community!



Relias is proud to recognize all of the great work that DSPs do to support individuals in living meaningful lives.

CONGRATULATIONS

to all of this year's award winners and thank you for your impact on so many!



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