Recognizing Excellence

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- Barbara Merrill, ANCOR CEO

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Join The Campaign!

By Barbara Merrill, Esq.
ANCOR CEO

Excellence. Passion. Commitment. These words only begin to capture the extraordinary people profiled in these pages – ANCOR’s 2016 Direct Support Professional Recognition Award Recipients. On behalf of the entire ANCOR community, thank you! ANCOR’s National Advocacy Campaign is all about you – recognizing that each and every day you support people to realize the promise of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Your stories – and the stories of your colleagues across the nation – show us why your work matters. You are truly our heroes.

The judging process is always incredibly difficult – this year’s National Recipient and State Recipients were chosen from a large, deeply impressive group of nominations. I want to thank everyone who submitted a nomination, and the people who stepped up to serve on the judging panel: Alex Andrews, ANCOR’s 2015 National Direct Support Professional of the Year; Joe MacBeth, Executive Director of the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals; and our ANCOR staff and consultants – Esme Grant, Gabrielle Sedor, Melanie Byas and Diane McComb. And a very special thanks to Katherine Berland, whose dedication to the DSP workforce and organizational skill ensured a smooth judging process for all.

We are also very grateful to our Platinum Partner Relias Learning, who has generously underwritten the DSP Awards for the second year in a row. Relias, thank you!

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

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

Barbara Merrill, Esq., is CEO of ANCOR. She can be reached at bmerrill@ancor.org
We felt it was essential that people were exposed to all aspects of community, from dining in restaurants (which I liked) to the community symphony (which I did not like, but one of our persons served loved). That’s what DSPs do: facilitate interesting, enriching, and novel experiences for the people they support.

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

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

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

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

To further elevate the role of DSPs, a visionary group of ANCOR leaders created the National Advocacy Campaign (NAC). Through the NAC, ANCOR holds up the vital work of DSPs by working with Congress, Administrative Agencies, and the Executive Branch, to advocate for fair pay and benefits. The NAC also provides a framework for the work of DSPs to be recognized.

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

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

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

Chris Sparks is Executive Director of Exceptional Persons Inc. He can be reached at chris.sparks@episervice.org
The ANCOR Foundation’s awards program recognizes, validates and showcases excellence, leadership and innovation that strengthens a national culture of communities of choice for people with disabilities. In so doing, the ANCOR Foundation expresses both its gratitude and high esteem for the individuals, organizations and work accomplished, and holds up as national role models of distinction the leaders and organizations upon whom it confers distinction.

Recognizing Excellence: The Legacy Leaders Circle

ANCOR congratulates the following 2016 Legacy Leaders

Regis Champ
Maureen Corcoran
Tim Kraal
Janet Stover
Marty Lampner
Dan Rosen
Karin Stockwell

The ANCOR Foundation Legacy Leaders Circle celebrates the accomplishments of the men and women who have paved the way to life in community settings for people with disabilities. These visionary leaders have not only helped shape and guide ANCOR over the past 46 years but made meaningful inclusive communities a reality for the countless Americans with disabilities.

The ANCOR Foundation Legacy Leaders Circle honors our finest and most influential leaders while creating and funding opportunities for the development of future leaders in our field.

The 2016 class of inductees into the Legacy Leaders Circle – introduced at the ANCOR Conference: Get Smart! Get Inspired! Get It Done! – are:
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INDEPENDENT OPPORTUNITIES congratulates

Josh Alford

on being ANCOR’s 2016 National Direct Support Professional of the Year

Congratulations!

Independent Opportunities is very proud of Josh’s level of commitment and standard of excellence he provides to the people we support.
Josh Alford is a first responder in the truest sense of the word. He’s also a Direct Support Professional with a love of frog giggin’ and eating fried frog legs. He’s hauled cattle around the country in big rigs, spent six years working as a carpenter and grew up in Southeast Kentucky working on dairy farms. And he’s only 28 years old.

But he found his calling at Independent Opportunities Lake Cumberland in Somerset, KY, a small town of 11,500. “I can’t ever imagine doing anything else now,” he says of his position as a Crisis Response Specialist (CRS). “My job has become way more than just a job.”

This young man with skills galore and a penchant for direct support work has been selected as ANCOR’s 2016 National DSP of the Year and the people at Independent Opportunities (IO), a proud ANCOR member agency, can’t say enough great things about him. Josh and all the recipients of the State DSPs of the Year will be honored at ANCOR’s 2016 DSP Recognition Awards ceremony on May 3rd during its national conference at the Chicago Marriott Downtown.

As a CRS, he is the person on call 24/7 for emergency situations in the agency’s 48 staff residence homes – to take someone to the emergency room or make sure they get the correct medical treatment if sick or injured, to calm serious behavioral situations or to find someone who has walked away from a home. “If people run away, I go find’em,” he says. He works 14 days on and 7 off. “In my spare time I also deliver meds to the homes,” he says. “This keeps me in touch with everyone and gives me a chance to stay connected to people I’ve helped so I can keep up with them.”

When you hear him talk about his work, well, it’s clear it’s not work to him. “I try to put everybody before myself. I try to never look at anything I do as a job. I’m not in this for the money. If you’re in it for the money then you’re not giving it 100%,” he says. “I found out pretty quickly that I was naturally good at this. I fell into it. This was never a field I thought about being in. I was going to be a schoolteacher and teach shop. But truthfully, I can’t imagine ever doing anything else now.”

Before joining Independent Opportunities, he worked as a carpenter for six years at Bluegrass Oakwood, an Independent Care Facility in Somerset that supports people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. “I fell in love with the people we supported there and when I got laid off, I became a DSP at Independent Opportunities where my girlfriend worked,” he explained. “Best move I ever made coming to work here.”

In addition to the 48 staff residence homes, IO supports 50 family home providers, three day programs and training for supported employment. Josh is part of the agency’s DSP workforce of approximately 200.

He was a DSP in a staff residence for 1½ years when Leslie Hall, the agency’s Regional/Executive Director, realized that he would make a great CRS. “He’s
perfect for this job – he’s patient, unselfish and very understanding. He has a vivid imagination and a wonderful sense of humor. He displays integrity, responsibility and dedication in all aspects of his life,” she says. “He’s very non-assertive, more on the quiet side, but he has no trouble speaking with anyone. And he’s so reliable and so good at what he does. There’s not a lazy bone in his body.”

Earlier this year he was honored by the Kentucky Association of Private Providers (KAPP) as its DSP of the Year.

Josh and his fiancé, Nicole Wolf, are foster parents to twin girls who are medically fragile, born prematurely due to their mother’s addictions. They are in the process of adopting the girls. Nicole is the Family Home Provider Coordinator for IO and works days. When Josh is on his two-week shift, they see very little of each other.

Leslie, who is also Nicole’s supervisor, nominated Josh for the ANCOR award. Here is a portion of what she wrote about him in her letter of nomination:

“Patience, selflessness, and understanding -- three traits of an outstanding DSP. But Josh is much more than that. He’s also a mentor, a friend, a foster parent, and an outstanding advocate for those we support...Others may wonder how he can handle all of the negative situations he is faced with and still remain positive in this field? I would have to say that he thrives on having a positive impact and bettering each life he comes in contact with. Josh doesn’t just fix problems on the surface. He finds the issue in order to help each person work toward overcoming whatever they may be facing.”

What an affirmation for a great DSP!

Josh has a strategy to cope with the negative aspects of the job.

“I stay upbeat and positive. I try not to dwell on the negative. You have to. When you are having a bad day you don’t want someone else to have a bad day with you,” he explained. “You can’t help somebody be happy and healthy if you’re not that way yourself. I’ve got everything in the world to be thankful for. I’m lucky. Sometimes all someone needs is someone positive to help them out a little.”

In his position, he says, “I get to see everybody at their worst. But I try to be a friend to everybody. It’s easy in this field to become callous and not have time or take the time to sit down and really listen to someone. I try to keep myself from falling into that. I’d by lying if I said I didn’t love what I do, and I mean really love it.”

When Josh was hired, Shannon McCracken was the agency’s Regional/Executive Director. Today she is the Executive Director of KAPP and one night she saw Josh in his DSP/CRS role up close in an emergency room.

Shannon had an uncle with Down syndrome and profound developmental disabilities who was not supposed to live past the age of 9, she says. “He fooled everybody,” she said. He lived to be in his early 50s. In December 2014 he suffered a heart attack in his staff residence in the middle of the night. The staff revived him and got him to the ER, she said. “I called my father and my aunt who lived in Monticello and we went to the ER. We got there and there’s Josh waiting for us. Here I was an administrator and I got to see him from the perspective of a family member.”

And what did she see? “I was able to witness how perfectly suited he is for his job. His demeanor is incredible. He’s not shy really, but he is intentionally shy -- respectful and thoughtful. He had all of the information we needed when we got to the ER, but he stood off to the side and was just there for us. He didn’t offer inappropriate comfort, which people try to do sometimes. He had a bag of vending machine change for us and phone chargers that we needed – little things like that -- and whatever we needed he’d go get it for us. Later that morning he went home and showered and then he was back with us. This man is pretty special.”

Leslie thought back to when Josh was a DSP in a staff residence. A man he supported loved country music and wanted to visit Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, TN to see a dinner theater show. “Josh created a entire playlist of his favorite country songs for the three-hour ride to Gatlinburg,” Leslie says. “He was hesitant about the trip but Josh worked with him and got him to go.”

Josh even called ahead to arrange it so they could arrive at the theater before the big crowds so he would be relaxed. He had a lot of fun and even became part of the show. Josh says they stayed a week and took in a few more shows. And the week they were gone was Josh’s off week. “Yeah, it was on my own time, but if you look at your job like it’s just a job, you don’t do things like that,” Josh said.

Josh also helps train new hires and what he says to them is very instructive and practical: “If this isn’t what you really want to do, you will hate it. You have got to want to do this work. You won’t get rich. It’s not a 9 to 5 job. But it’s a very rewarding job. If your heart is in the right place it’s a great job and a great career.”

Tom King is a free-lance writer, living in Knoxville, TN. You can reach him at 865-659-3562 or via email at tking335@gmail.com
Recognizing Excellence

2016 Direct Support Professional of the Year

STATE RECIPIENTS

ALABAMA
PATRICIA HINTON
Resources for Independence / Sunrise
Northport, AL

The Mission Statement at Sunrise is: “To provide people with disabilities the assistance and support necessary to enable them to live valued lives in the community.” The agency says that this statement “exemplifies Ms. Hinton as she embodies those qualities of a DSP.”

Here are a few other words that are used to describe this DSP of 14 years: “A go getter” and “a protector.” She shows an “advocacy approach” and always demonstrates “the NADSP Code of Ethics of person-centered supports.”

The nomination highlights her person-centered approach to two people she supports: “She respects their desires, preferences and has always, through the years, worked hard to maintain the focus of support through different experiences with them. She provides the individuals with the experiences of making independent choices as best as they can, and what they can’t do, she is there, with an inborn desire to carry on.”

She views those she supports as extended family. She shops with them to buy birthday presents for family members. She has great rapport with both family members and guardians. She is trusted.

Here is how she describes her work with those she supports: “My goal is to make sure they were treated as other people are treated, and taught how to be as independent as possible for their daily living needs. There were times I worked in the role of being a Team Leader and Interim Home Manager. Yes, it meant working extra hours, working on off days, but to see their eyes light up when I entered their home, or grab my hand placing it lovingly on their face, made it all worthwhile. This shows that there is a special bond between us. I will continue to advocate, nurture our relationship, and respect their individual preferences, to assist them in living productive lives in their home and community.”

ARIZONA
MADELINE “MADI” KNAUER-GRAHAM
Mosaic
Phoenix, AZ

She is known as “Ms. Madi” and has talents galore. She helped one young man express his dreams by helping him write speeches, practice them and even taught him warm-up techniques. Today, this young man speaks across the country teaching service providers, people with disabilities and others about the power of personalized services. With her coaching, he has become a powerful self-advocate. She also teaches basic sign language.

Ms. Madi is the agency’s most requested DSP and has the largest caseload in her program. Parents and the individuals she serves do not want to part with this 25-year veteran DSP. She becomes part of the family.

One young woman she supported used an augmented speaking device but refused to use the tool in public. So Madi created the “Out and About Group” 10 years ago to support this woman. She reached out to this woman’s speech pathologist to find another individual about her age who used this same speaking device. They found someone and a friendship blossomed. They learned to talk with one another and were soon out in the community, ordering meals at restaurants and asking for help when it was needed. The group remains active today.

Ms. Madi has changed the life of one young man with Down Syndrome and his family. She first taught him in a special education class as a 4th grade student. The relationship grew and so did the bond between the families. They even vacation together. Read these words from this young man’s mother about Madi:

“Madi has been not only a strong foundation for our son and us; She has been the bridge that has connected us to so many worldly experiences….She has been right there with him through school, college, advocating, and Boy Scouts, hiking up some treacherous trails. Madi touches everyone’s life she comes in contact with, leaving little pieces of herself behind.”
Much of Danny’s life as a Residential Home Adviser revolves around a man he has effectively supported for many years. The man has autism. Danny was able to quickly form a personal relationship with this man, and he has thrived ever since. His nomination as the Arkansas DSP of the Year says this of Danny: “He communicates kindness and respect, being a model for others in the use of language in supporting others effectively. He is patient. Danny recognizes that the individual he supports is his own expert in determining his choices.”

Danny is always working to be a great professional. During the years of supporting this individual, he completed his undergraduate degree in Rehabilitation Science from Arkansas Tech University in 2001 and later earned a Master’s in Counseling and achieved licensed credentials. He continues to seek out and attend ongoing continuing educational opportunities to gain knowledge and keep up with the trends and needs in our communities.

He is a creative DSP, helping with and supporting this man’s artistic abilities to create his own gifts for his family members.

This man’s sister added a few comments of affirmation to Danny’s nomination form, writing that she and the family have great respect, admiration and appreciation for Danny. Here are a few of her comments:

• “My brother’s health, behavior, and daily routine are stable due to the structure and program that Danny has helped create and maintain.”

• “It is important for him to be in a calm, simple, structured environment which is what Danny has created for him.”

• “Danny is a Licensed Professional Counselor and has specialty training in Autism and knows my brother inside and out. He truly enjoys living with him. Danny understands all of my brother’s areas of need and assures all areas are met with the level of supports required in order for my brother to achieve success in his independent living goals.”

Advocacy is a major part of this ResCare DSP of the Year in California. She is instrumental in encouraging people the agency supports to attend self-advocacy conferences like the People First Conference. She helps them visit the State Legislature and become registered voters. Everyone knows about her focus on person-centered supports, so much so that one man she works with said: “She helps me be in charge of my life.”

Many call her “Armie” and she is respected and loved by everyone. Her relationship-building skills are well known, and they lead to mutual trust. One man she supports said: “She cares for me but she also cares about me….I really love Armie.”

Another man wanted to remain in his home instead of moving into a skilled nursing program. Armie worked with his doctors, specialists and insurance agencies to get him a high frequency chest wall oscillation device to help with his health. The device allowed him to remain in his home. She also worked hard and found him a more suitable day program that was a better fit to care for his medical needs.

One of her supervisors says of her: “I have never experienced an individual that more embodies all of the NADSP tenets than Armielynn. She exemplifies what being an outstanding DSP means. I have observed innumerable DSPs over the years and I have never seen anyone develop and maintain relationships better than Armielynn.”
Mosaic congratulates Madeline (Madi) Knauer-Graham, Arizona state winner, and thanks all of our Direct Support Professionals for helping us provide a life of possibilities for people with intellectual disabilities.

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“Always happy and smiling” is how one person she supports describes Kayla, who has been in the profession for 14 years. She is a Rehabilitation Specialist/DSP and a strong proponent of individual rights and advocacy and person-centered supports. She models her belief that each person has a voice and the right to be treated equally.

Let’s go back to the “always happy and smiling” Kayla. Here is how she is described by Josie Turbach, who nominated her as the top DSP in Canada: “She ignites that very energy she has in the individuals she is working with on a daily basis. People who work with Kayla are typically seen smiling and laughing, even during rehabilitation therapy programming. Kayla Finstad looks for opportunities to suggest innovative activities for the people she supports in order to make their rehabilitation exercises fun and meaningful. The people she supports appreciate the thought that Kayla puts into individualizing their activities and making necessary exercises appear exciting.”

There’s more. She is beloved by those she supports with her calm demeanor and her commitment to their goals. She recently began working with a person who is known to be difficult, especially with social and health professionals. Kayla stepped up and developed a strong relationship with this person through her calm and professional approach and her disposition. He now trusts her when he would not trust others.

“Kayla not only demonstrates the person served-first philosophy, but she trains new staff to think and act in the same manner,” Turbach says.

This Host Home Provider is a DSP who changes lives. Eight years ago a man moved into her home. He had lived with other providers and was known as “the grumpy old man.” He had experienced homelessness, addiction, victimization and health concerns. He drank, was a heavy smoker, exhibited negative behaviors and paid little attention to health and hygiene. Here’s what Jodi did: She educated him about the consequences of this lifestyle and promoted a healthier one. She helped him establish relationships and implement what he was learning. She offered consistent supports along with a safe and happy lifestyle. He no longer drinks. He cut back on cigarettes and accepts help with relationships and these lifestyle changes helped get his diabetes under control.

Jodi, a DSP for 25 years, has always opened her home to many people with a variety of circumstances. She builds relationships based on caring and trust. One man who lives in her home was asked if he liked living there. “I’m not moving out and you can’t make me,” he said. He’s still there.

This portion of her letter of nomination, written by Genelle Thompson, pretty well says it all about this DSP: “Jodi encourages the people she supports to initiate and maintain relationships by providing reminders for phone calls or suggesting an invitation to dinner. Jodi invites each person whom she supports to join her family. Two men call her parents Grandma and Grandpa, as does the rest of the family, and are included in family functions.”

She spent time helping one man who came to her home have his suspension of rights discontinued by working with him and his guardian and implementing supports to help him remain safe and healthy. She worked for months helping one man deal with sexuality issues. Challenges are just part of her life and work.
Shannon was the St. John’s DSP who began supporting this man. The results are reflected in these quotes from his family:

- “He is arriving at both his music class and lessons on time and thus this important part of his life is making him very happy”
- “His apartment is sparkling now.”
- “He is a social animal and last Sunday he visited the Air and Space Museum. The regularity of such journeys is terrific.”
- “It is especially noteworthy that if Plan A hits a snag, Plan B is put into place.”
- “The level of overall support for him is terrific.”

Shannon provides person-centered supports and always assists them in determining the best course of action. She focuses on their choices – not hers. She develops great relationships with those she supports and with their families.
Direct Support Professionals know what it means to make a difference

We know how important that is.

Congratulations to the 2016 DSPs of the Year! We Appreciate You.
Recognizing Excellence

She was 14 years old when she first volunteered to work with people with disabilities. Now she’s an 18-year veteran DSP who has followed that passion she discovered as a teenager. She’s known around the agency by everyone as “Boo.” When she’s on shift, everyone knows it’s going to be a good day! She takes pride in building relationships with those she supports and with their families.

Here is how she is described by a co-worker: “Her relationships with the clients and their families go beyond that of just a DSP. Taniskia does not consider her time spent with clients as work, but rather an ‘Extension of her Life.’ She creates a family atmosphere that not only allows those she supports to thrive and succeed, but also provides reassurance to family members that their loved one is being well cared for.”

Advocacy is always a part of her professional approach. “Taniskia strives to change the negative stereotypes society has for disabled clients. She is making a difference in their lives,” writes Cory Young in nominating her as the state DSP of the Year. “She ensures that when our clients are engaged in community activities, they are treated with respect and dignity.”

“Boo” is a busy lady. She has 8 children at home. Here’s what the mother of a woman she supports has to say about her: “I can’t say enough good things about her. She is caring, calm, loving, reliable, consistent and hard working. Our daughter is so fortunate to have her as her house manager and aide. The difference Boo has made in her life is notable. Boo genuinely loves to work with the special needs population viewing them the same as every one else. There is one final point ... she is an excellent communicator and works well with all family members.”
Peter is a DSP making a difference – a big difference – in lives. One man he supports has had many problems and issues.

Into this man’s life steps Peter, who doubles as a Program Coordinator for REM. Here is part of the story of Peter and this gentleman written by Sara Miner, who nominated Peter: “Chris is a completely different man since the day Peter entered his life. Chris had difficulty managing his finances, cooking, and keeping a job. His anger and aggressive behavior were significant and he had several serious brushes with the law. Looking at Chris today, you wouldn’t even know that those things were ever a problem. He treated Chris with respect and the results have been nothing short of amazing. Chris independently cooks and cleans for himself. He has obtained his driver’s license and is working full time at a garage working on cars — something he always wanted to do. Most significantly, Chris manages his emotions and has mastered the social skills needed to be safe at home and in the community. In fact, he is doing so well that his team is discussing the possibility of Chris moving out on his own with only periodic supports.”

Another man he supports had major issues with self-confidence and independence. Today he’s working in a bookstore and has become a chef. He’s much healthier than he was before Peter came along.

Peter is also an advocate for those he supports. He volunteered for the agency’s Autism Champions Group and is a PIA instructor and attends community advocacy meetings. “Peter has never ending hope for the individuals we serve and is willing to selflessly give up his free time to make sure his individuals and our staff are well cared for,” Sara added about this unique professional.

INDIANA
PENNY HOSTETLER
Dungarvin
South Bend, IN

During Penny’s 17 ½ years at Dungarvin, she’s supported multiple individuals with varying challenges and issues. But for the past six years she has found her niche in working with one woman who decided she wanted to live on her own and raise a puppy. But this woman did want to upset or disappoint her housemates or her staff. Penny encouraged her to speak up and not to apologize for speaking her mind. So she spoke up and now lives in her own apartment – with her dog.

The NADSP (National Association of Direct Support Professionals) Code of Ethics tenet that Penny lives by every day is Self Determination. She urged this woman to speak up, to make her wants and opinions known, and to make sure that she was not speaking for this woman. Here is a prime example related by her nominator, Susan Ranaghan Gichohi:

“The woman Penny supports has been working with the local advocacy board to have a legal guardian appointed. Midway through the process of one of her friends being appointed her guardian, she had second thoughts and wanted to ask a different friend to take on this role in her life. She was so worried that her friend would be upset with her or that other team members would be angry with her. Penny encouraged her that it was her right to find out her options and eventually she spoke up and asked her lawyer to pursue a different path.” Self-determination worked again this time.

Penny also works with this woman on her many parties she loves to have. The woman says “my claim to fame here is that I’m known as the hostess with the mostest.” She and Penny have a delightful time planning and pulling off parties. They make a great team!

INDIA
Cary is an Art Program Director who has been a DSP for 14 years. In 2013 she began supporting individuals in the agency’s Emerging Artists Program and has made a huge impact on the community and on the artists she supports.

Cary and the artists have had a profound impact on how others in their local community view people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Cary has been able to break down stereotypes by emphasizing the artistic abilities of the individuals and their unique interests and strengths, which naturally shifts the focus away from their disability. During a community art show in early 2015, as patrons stopped to view the artwork, the artists easily engaged them in conversation and answered their questions. It was obvious that these patrons viewed the two gentlemen working the show as legitimate artists and it was as if their disabilities didn’t exist. The story gets better.

As a result of Cary’s continued advocacy and positive public perception of Emerging Artists, the program is now being included in the design of a new cultural arts center being developed in this Kansas community. This will allow the art studio to be moved from the center-based day program to a location that includes a variety of arts-related organizations.

Beth Johnson’s letter of nomination speaks volumes about this talented DSP: “Everything that Cary does exemplifies the respect of human dignity and uniqueness of the people she supports. She shares stories that demonstrate the amazing talent and gifts of the people we support. Each time one of the artists achieves a new milestone, Cary eagerly shares it with others and her joy and enthusiasm is contagious. Over time, this is shaping the perception of others towards people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in a manner that is leading to greater levels of community inclusion.”

You know you are hearing about a very special DSP when these phrases are used about them: “The most creative and flexible DSP at our agency” and “She has a special gift for earning the trust of participants who have come from very bad living conditions and people who have been abused psychologically.”

The DSP, who also is an In-Home Coordinator, is Melissa Hughes.

Linda Dye, R.N., nominated Melissa for this honor. Melissa was given an additional responsibility as well as being the agency’s Community Access Specialist. This came her way because she has the ability to bolster the confidence of the most anxious and potentially reclusive of participants the agency supports.

This story from Ms. Dye speaks loudly about her: “She worked informally for a long time with two middle-aged indigent brothers with disabilities who initially were not our clients. Few people in the area knew they existed because of their isolated and rural childhood home. After their parents’ deaths, they were unable to care for themselves, were living in a house that was falling down around them, and had never been exposed to modern plumbing, heating, and appliances. They were fearful of any outsider. Melissa was one of the very few people they trusted. After they received emergency SCL funding, Melissa worked tirelessly and patiently to integrate them into a more typical community setting, as well as get them much needed medical care.”

Melissa respects everyone’s human dignity, Ms. Dye says, because “she has an inherent understanding and optimism for people as they hope and dream for the future. She works smoothly with participants from all socioeconomic backgrounds, and can always see potential even in people who come from abject poverty.”
LOUISIANA
THEO CAMERON
Womanspace Louisiana RHD
New Orleans, LA

Theo is the Operations Coordinator at this agency that serves and supports the hardest-to-reach homeless women (veteran or non-veteran) with severe mental illness and/or substance abuse. A DSP for 11 years, she is described as a professional with a “can-do” attitude. She facilitates groups and individual sessions with women in substance abuse recovery. She was in recovery herself for many years, so she understands well the necessary supports needed to build coping skills and to maintain sobriety.

Her typical caseload is about seven clients. They trust her.

She works on their hygiene issues. When they relapse, Theo is there. She helps them deal with their cravings. Theo cares about these women and their futures. Her supports are always person-centered.

Theo is creative in helping these women be successful and instill pride. Linda Chew nominated Theo and she passes along this story that speaks to those issues: “Our program has five bedrooms with four clients to a room. Individual staff members are assigned a room to monitor for cleanliness and safety. Theo is very creative in the way that she works with her clients,” Linda writes. “I call them ‘Team Theo’ because she encouraged them to think of the room checks as a friendly competition. Therefore, the clients in her room became excited to have everything clean and put away so that Team Theo would have the best room each week.”

She adds this: “Theo is great with clients. She really cares about them all and they trust her.”

 Congratulations!
2016 Iowa ANCOR DSP of the Year Recipient

The MENTOR Network thanks Peter Mullany for his hard work and dedication to enhancing the lives of those we serve.

From your friends, clients and coworkers at

Peter Mullany
REM Iowa

The MENTOR Network salutes all nominees and recipients of ANCOR’s 2016 Direct Support Professional of the Year Award.

www.thementornetwork.com
“Wow!”

Forty years of providing excellent care to people in need of supports. We are so proud to introduce this year’s inspiring 2016 award winning DSPs!

Jodi Shumaker
Colorado

Penny Hostetler
Indiana

Karen Sofranko
Nevada

Mattie Irvin
Oklahoma

Yolanda Lozoya
Wisconsin

“I am always humbled and inspired by the stories of the work DSPs perform. It always renews my energy levels to hear the great things that our DSPs are doing.”
Dave Toeniskoetter, CEO

www.Dungarvin.com

...respecting and responding to the choices of people in need of supports.
When one hears this DSP of seven years say to those he supports “This is your life, don’t look at me!” you know advocacy is a major part of his supports. The three gentlemen Tyrone supports all create their own daily schedules. They choose how to spend their time – be it picnics, flying kites or visiting fire stations. To these gentlemen, he’s known as “Ty.”

His penchant for creativity is refreshing. He was nominated by Jessica Irish and here are her words about this DSP’s creativity:

“Tyrone makes working on goals an everyday part of life. One gentleman has goals regarding completion of physical therapy and memory. Tyrone can be found quizzing him on his eight siblings’ names while assisting him in stretching. There are no bathroom checklists or repeated prompts during morning routines at the home. Tyrone sets up the bathroom with visual prompts based on the individual needs of each of the people in the home. If someone often forgets to wash their face, the cloth is on the sink. Items are not handed one by one to the person; hygiene baskets are arranged in the order of routine and within the reach from a wheelchair, allowing each person to drive their own routine.”

As a seasoned DSP, Tyrone also helps the Program manager train new staff members in the home.

One man who has known one of the men Tyrone supports for 33 years said this about this DSP: “His concern for the needs of those he cares for is unmatched.”

Jasmine has been a DSP for 10 years but has worked for The Chimes for only a year. That year was enough for the agency and Mark Beatty to nominate her for the state’s DSP of the Year honor. Mark’s nomination is built around the person-centered supports that Jasmine provides, supports that have worked well in the 1:1 settings.

Additionally, she advocated for individualized programming in the Liberty Club West Program and this has resulted in more community outings for everyone. The outings have been more customized to address the preferences of the persons served. As Jasmine says, “It’s not just a matter of getting out of the building and going somewhere staff want to go; it’s about taking the time to discover where the persons served want to go.

One lady she supports is now shopping for herself and going on Friday lunch dates with her boyfriend. She is teaching this lady new skills about counting, colors and reading. She has dexterity problems, so Jasmine is helping her to make jewelry as gifts. They now have “Tea Time” for talking and often invite others to join them. She showed her how to plant a garden and care for the plants. The results of all of this: her behaviors have markedly decreased and her socialization skills have increased.

Beatty writes of Jasmine: “She comes to work with the attitude that it’s a new day and a new day means new beginnings.”

As we celebrate the accomplishments of these dedicated professionals, join our campaign.

Help us spread the word, help us to educate your state and federal elected officials that quality supports for people with disabilities require a stable, professional workforce!
Amanda Noyes
CCRI, Inc.
Moorhead, MN

Michigan’s DSP of the Year is a Rehabilitation Educator who is seemingly everywhere in their small town. She’s active in the community, supporting ResCare’s clients but also assisting other local disabled individuals in town by taking them to medical appointments, going fishing, shopping for groceries and even sewing their clothes. She also is the agency’s “go to” DSP for any sewing that needs to be done. She works on Relay for Life clothing and when pants need to be hemmed, she’s taking care of that. She replaces shirt buttons and also creates Halloween costumes for the clients who need them.

SueAnn’s supports are all based on the NADSP Code of Ethics. But she thrives the most on Tenet 2 – “Promoting Physical and Emotional Well-Being.” Melissa Hasler, who nominated her, says this about her: “SueAnn develops solid relationships with all of our people supported, as well as staff members; and she gains the respect and trust by all of those she meets and works with.”

She says that SueAnn works with a client, who, if left up to him, would eat pizza and drink soda for every meal of the day. “She really works hard with him, teaching him the importance of healthy eating and staying active. Every week SueAnn creates a healthy menu and ensures that he follows it,” Hasler says.

Not only does she support the clients served, but she also supports staff members. She offers rides to those in need, helps buy groceries for those who cannot afford it, and babysits children for staff. SueAnn is truly appreciated by all who are fortunate to know her. She spends time with her clients on off days and even comes to team meetings on her off days.

A DSP can change a life, and at CCRI, Inc., Amanda has done just that. First it was focusing on NADSP Tenet 2 – Promoting Physical and Emotional Well-Being. The woman Amanda supports came to the home with a weight problem. She had little motivation to exercise and poor eating habits. With constant encouragement from Amanda, she is now eating healthier and enjoying foods she would not eat. With the weight loss, she is now exercising and running. She runs in 5K events and Amanda runs with her. Now she wants to try a 10K.

“Amanda helps this woman believe in herself and envision her goal. She does not focus on any setbacks but rather praises even the smallest of accomplishments,” says Rachel Gustofson, who nominated Amanda. “Amanda works hard to build her up and understands the road to changing your lifestyle can be difficult and filled with many obstacles. Amanda is never harsh or critical of her choices. She remains a constant supporter and gives her the praise and attention she needs.

With a renewed sense of accomplishment, this woman wanted to participate in the 4-H competition at her home county fair. She wanted to showcase her weight loss and how she changed her lifestyle. With Amanda’s help, she created a display that depicted her hard work and displayed the importance of portion sizes, calorie counting and exercise. The project earned her a pass to the Minnesota State Fair, where she won first place.

And that’s not all. She was recently nominated as the Special Olympics Athlete of the Year in her neighboring state of North Dakota. This DSP transformed a life!
The Missouri DSP of the Year is a Children’s Program Coordinator with 25 years of experience and the word that families and co-workers use most about her is “respectful.” She is known as an effective role model for her staff, providing guidance and knowledge. Julia is flexible and trusting. “For parents of children with a disability, Julia represents an unwavering advocate who identifies resources to help them and honors their priorities for their child. It takes a compassionate, respectful, and energetic person to provide support to an individual with a disability, and Julia embodies those traits each and every day,” says Kate Hannon in her letter of nomination.

In these 25 years, she has touched the lives of hundreds of families with her tireless and calm presence. In her position she is responsible for working with families to help them identify and find the resources they need for immediate and future needs while encouraging them to become their child’s best advocate.

In the early 2000s, Julia became interested in the dangers of using alcohol during pregnancy. In addition to being the agency’s Children’s Program Coordinator, she now serves as the Prevention Program Coordinator. “She has been responsible for getting the message out about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and how to prevent it. She is a representative at numerous community events, regional conferences, and health/educational fairs educating the public that no drop of alcohol is safe during pregnancy,” Hannon said.

Really understanding the people she supports has made Linda an exceptional DSP. She worked for more than six years with PJ, who had not spent a Christmas with his family for over 15 years. Linda worked to address the concerns of his team and family to design a plan that let PJ reconnect with his family.

When it comes to relationships, Linda knows how to help others shine. She works with Dick, an individual with autism, who has a difficult time showing emotion. She got him listening to music that he enjoys and excited about activities that have helped bring out his personality. He now smiles, laughs, and even makes jokes.

“Family” is a core tenet Linda lives by. She knows how important relationships are, so she fosters a sense of family among the people she supports. They have created their own “family” traditions, with everyone in the house taking part in weekly dinners and special birthday celebrations.

She sets example and leads, enriching peoples’ lives along the way. When she first started at the group home six years ago, the people there were stuck in their routines and unwilling to try new things. Linda started up new activities and encouraged the residents to join her. Soon others joined in, learning new activities and different ways to enjoy life. One of the men she supports, PJ, said “She would understand you right away and take care of you.” Linda is truly cherished by the people she supports.
CONGRATULATIONS
PATRICIA HINTON OF RESOURCES FOR INDEPENDENCE
OF ALABAMA
&
ELRED AHLAKOR OF RESOURCES FOR INDEPENDENCE
OF VIRGINIA

On behalf of those we support, staff and our Board of Directors we thank you for your commitment to caring!
Eva’s work and support with a woman is the basis for her being selected as New Hampshire’s top DSP.

At the agency this woman is known for turning left when you ask her to turn right, for not following directions and being very difficult. She also is very active at work, which means her staff support person must be “on” at all times. Eva is always “on.”

She is with this woman five days a week, six hours a day. In addition to work, she now has this woman swimming, shopping, cooking and working. “There’s a noticeable ‘calmness’ with her when she’s working with Eva that demonstrates the trusting relationship they have,” said Danielle Fuller, who nominated Eva for this honor.

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Eva is described as a DSP who is calm and in control at all times and does not show frustration. Her approach is “laid back.” Those at the agency talk about her work ethic and the genuine passion she has for the job.

In addition to her DSP work, Eva is working on a degree in Psychology and recently became a Home Care Provider. “She is the future of our service delivery,” Danielle added.
Congratulations
Linda Miller!

New Jersey’s 2016 Direct Support Professional of the Year

Linda’s 30 years of dedication have impacted countless individuals with diverse challenges throughout Bancroft’s continuum of programs. Thank you, Linda, for your compassionate mentorship, endless enthusiasm, and most importantly, for embodying Bancroft’s mission of helping those with autism, intellectual or developmental disabilities and neurological conditions reach their full potential.
The people at Bancroft know Linda up close and personal. She has been a DSP there for 30 years and today works with the oldest individuals the agency serves – and she has supported a few of them for all of those 30 years. She makes it a point to know every detail about what works for each person – what they like and don’t like, how they move about, what worries them, and what they can and cannot eat. Every person at Bancroft loves spending time with Linda.

Linda is an artist and is creative in her approach in almost everything she does. She connected the agency with Art-Reach, a Philadelphia non-profit that connects underserved populations with cultural experiences. She has done much over the years to maximize the utilization of this wonderful resource – bringing art and culture into so many people’s lives on a regular basis.

The NADSP Tent 2 of “Promoting Physical and Emotional Well Being” is reflected in something as simple as a vegetable garden, an annual springtime undertaking by Linda and those she supports. She involves people in every single aspect of it. It’s not Linda’s garden, it’s everyone’s garden. This will typically start out with a great conversation. “What’s your favorite food?” Linda might ask. If the answer is lasagna, then “Okay, let’s find out what ingredients are in lasagna and then we’ll grow some of them.” Of course, throughout the season they will cook together using the vegetables and herbs from their garden. There will be many lessons along the way and lots of physical activity that she has incorporated without anyone noticing that they are exercising. And having a great time doing it!

She is a role model, an advocate and a DSP who knows that building relationships really matters. All of this and more is why she’s New Jersey’s DSP of the Year!

New Mexico’s DSP of the Year has been in the field for only two years, and she supports a man – a big man – who has infantile autism. He was abused as a child. His behaviors can be challenging, to say the least: daily concussive head banging and physical aggression. Iris has had to learn his “unspoken language.” He is non-verbal. “Every day is something new. Some ideas work once and never again. I have to think on my feet,” Iris says.

Iris creates a visual schedule using photos to show him which staff is on duty and what changes to expect or where they are going on a particular day. When he refuses to get dressed, she plays a dressing game with him. When dinner is late and he’s upset, she plays catch with him until his meal is ready. When a padded headboard was to be installed on his bed, Iris told him a “story” about the adventures of a new headboard that would keep him safe. Without Iris’ creative approach, the headboard would have been ripped from the bed!

“I try to honor his needs, give him space, treat him like an adult and I try to communicate and let him know he is not alone.” Iris says. Because of her supports and care, this man has made seemingly small, yet profound achievements: participating in drum class; having blood drawn at medical appointments; feeding ducks at a pond; visiting the zoo; petting a stranger’s dog; eating at a public, buffet style restaurant despite food-seeking behaviors; and waving “hi” to people in the community.

Antoinette Wright, who nominated Iris, says about her: “Iris honors what he likes and does not like and empowers him to live a happy, healthy and safe life. Most strikingly, Iris spreads this compassion to her team and to his family.”
**NEW YORK**  
**STEPHANIE GIORGENTI**  
The Resource Center  
Jamestown, NY

Among those Stephanie supports is a severely autistic man with very limited communications skills. She was hired to provide one-on-one support for him. It has not been an easy job, and at one point she gave her two-week notice to move out of state. “Two days before her last scheduled work day she called her supervisor saying that she didn’t want to leave. When she was asked why she changed her mind, she said: “I just love my job too much to leave.” Stephanie has been there ever since.

Since Stephanie began supporting this man in his group home, he is now able to write and tell you his address and phone number, to ride the bus to his day program, make his own lunch without any prompts and he’s currently learning to answer the phone each morning when his bus driver calls to let him know they are on their way to pick him up. They go to movies and he shops for his own clothes. She taught him how to use an iPad. She helps him make his favorite treat – Jell-O. None of this happened before Stephanie entered his life two years ago.

Stephanie is a parent and this man’s mother writes about her: “She has infinite patience with my son. She has a rapport with him that one else has. She cares for him as her own. I don’t know how he would fare if she were not there for him. I don’t think I am ready to find that out any time soon.”

What a tribute to a great DSP!

**NORTH CAROLINA**  
**EDWIN ROBERTS**  
Community Alternatives, Inc. / ResCare  
Charlotte, NC

He is an “exuberant employee” and has shown “impeccable dedication to our organization” is what Theresa Dunn at Community Alternatives says about the professional she nominated as the state’s DSP of the Year. Edwin has been a DSP for 12 years and has great relationships with those he supports, the staff and the guardians. He has been the agency’s Employee of the Month several times.

According to observations and responses from the guardians of the people supported, Edwin “lives and works by the NADSP Tenet of Integrity and Responsibility,” Dunn says.

These words from two parents of people he supports says it all about him:

- “First of all, this is truly an honor, as a parent, who has known Edwin for 11 years, to be able to write what I truly appreciate about him and why I strongly feel he should be chosen for this honor. Edwin’s mood or personality never changes, which is a wonderful trait around people with autism. My son prefers to be alone. Edwin can get him out to play basketball, go shopping and interact with people. Only people who have a special heart can work with our very gifted, very wonderful sons or daughters who live with a disability they never asked for. Edwin has a very special, unique heart. Whether he wins this award or not he is already a winner in my son’s world and that means everything to me.”
- “He has taught life skills to my son that I never thought he was capable of learning...Another thing I admire about Edwin is that he is so effective setting boundaries. When my son wants to break those boundaries, Edwin is still encouraging and supportive.”

Can there be higher praise for a DSP than these testimonials?
Todd is an Employment Specialist/DSP and a wonderful advocate for those people he supports. Josh Villbrandt, who nominated Todd for this state award, calls him “a champion….an everyday advocate who understands that advocacy and independence go hand in hand.” He is a veteran DSP with 26 years in the profession.

One woman he supports wanted to resign from a job for a higher paying one. The employer tried to bully the woman to find out why she wanted to leave. Todd stepped in and told the employer that she didn’t want to give her reasons. He helped her stand up for herself and leave with dignity.

He’s a creative DSP. He has created some assistive devices to help the people he supports perform better at their jobs. He has developed task lists, picture task lists, has set up natural supports and used the hierarchy of prompting to the advantage of the individuals. There is no business off limits for his clients. If there is a position that matches the job goal of the person he supports, Todd will talk with the business and see if he can get the person in to do a job shadow or an assessment.

Here is one of his success stories: One young man with Down syndrome moved in from a nearby rural community, and over the course of many months, Todd was able to help him get a job in the warehouse at Sears, and while he required 100% support at the start, this young man is now down to about 20% support with a lot of natural supports filling in the gaps. He is a valued member of the Sears team.

Ohio’s DSP of the Year makes lasting impressions. Here is what one woman she has supported wrote about this talented DSP:

What Judy Perry means to me:
J—Jolly person because she always makes me laugh
U—Understands me and always listens to me.
D—Dedicated and knows her job.
Y—Whatever you ask her to help you with it’s always a YES!

That tracks what Mary Miles wrote about Judy in her nomination letter. “Judy is a DSP who upholds and lives up to the NADSP Code of Ethics and Person-Centered Supports. She goes above and beyond to ensure that her work ethic follows each item in the Code every single day. Judy ensures person-centered supports with all of her individuals.”

She schedules and runs all doctor appointments, both routine and emergency. She is excellent at relaying all of the important information to the team and highly advocates for an individual if she sees signs/symptoms that she feels needs immediate medical attention.

Judy is like most all DSPs – she has a soft side. This story is vintage Judy Perry: “One man she used to support was diagnosed with end-stage cancer. Judy visited him and wanted to spend some time with him. He had declined physically and was not eating well. Judy decided that she was not only going to visit him but would prepare him a special meal. Judy used her own resources and time and cooked his favorite Spanish rice and beans. He and Judy are both of Hispanic descent, so he probably did not get these favorite foods very often. Judy said he had a great time with her, smiling and singing, and enjoying the Spanish rice and beans.”
The Oklahoma DSP of the Year is the companion/foster parent for a 10-year-old boy with a multiple diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, moderate intellectual disabilities, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, and Reactive Attachment Disorder. He has lived with Mattie and her family for the past three years and they view him as their son. He has struggled in school. Today, things are much improved. Considering his challenges, it is amazing what he does today:

- Vacuums their home.
- Earns money cutting their grass and works for several friends caring for their yards.
- Sings in his church youth choir.
- Plays instruments during church services.
- Participates in and delivers meals for Meals on Wheels.

With Mattie’s guidance, these jobs and his talents have increased his self worth and self esteem.

Mattie, a DSP for seven years, was nominated by Dungarvin’s Heather Brown. Heather said that Mattie is strong in following the NADSP Tenet 9: Advocacy. “Over the past several years there were numerous meetings to discuss how we could support this young man in all settings. Even when it appeared that people didn’t understand or weren’t willing to assist, Mattie never quit and because of her efforts there have been improvements in his life,” Heather says. Because of her advocacy, he now has a volunteer advocate to assist him.

The Dungarvin team met with the school numerous times to discuss the process of getting the paraprofessional started. “Mattie has continued for the past three years to advocate for him. His team members have changed periodically and Mattie has consistently been there to support and advocate for his needs,” Heather added.
The key components of the work done by a DSP revolves around Advocacy, Relationships and Creativity. For 37 years Jerome Williams has been a DSP and for 24 of those, he has doubled as a full-time certified art teacher. Keystone’s Patricia Sipe nominated him as the state’s DSP of the Year. About him she says: “He has a natural gift for relating to others and has creatively supported the individuals he serves, no matter what obstacles or challenges they face.” He supports individuals in the Home and Community-Based Services program.

Ms. Sipe adds this: “Although he was also a full-time teacher for 24 years, Jerry made himself available 24/7 for the people he supports. At times, he would go from teaching school to spending all night in the emergency room with someone. When one of the women he supports developed cancer, he supported and assisted her through her difficult and serious mental and medical issues and the necessary after-care.”

He and a woman that he supported developed a strong bond, so strong that she asked him to give her away at her wedding. He did just that, driving from Harrisburg to Philadelphia on his own personal time.

Several years ago he began supporting a young man with many challenges. Jerry saw the goodness in him and knew he wanted a new way of life. He and Jerry created Hoops 4 Hoops, a non-profit sports outreach program geared for young men in Harrisburg. “It took several years of hard work and dedication, but Hoops 4 Hoops is now a successful and well-known program, complete with a Board of Directors. It offers an array of civic and community-based activities, services, and supports to young adults in the city of Harrisburg,” Sipe said in her nomination of this talented DSP.

“Andrea has been in my life for 3 years! When she came to work here I thought she was going to be just another staff who would do her job and leave. MAN, I was wrong! Andrea is so different from other employees I’ve ever worked with! … I’ve never met somebody who cares so much about me. Andrea helped me change my attitude for the better without knowing it. I’m so very grateful she came into my life!”

Those heartfelt words are from a person Andrea supports – words all DSPs would love to hear. Rhode Island’s DSP of the Year has been in this profession for 25 years, all at West Bay. She’s all about Advocacy. One woman wanted to use the library. Andrea helped her get a library card, choose books on CD and introduced her to the library staff so she knew who to ask for help. She showed her how to keep track of due dates to ensure the books were returned on time. This was a big part of helping this woman become her own advocate.

Andrea accompanied a woman she supports to a doctor’s appointment. The doctor was talking to Andrea about the woman’s plan of care. She noticed that Andrea subtly cued the doctor to address her so she would be the focus of the conversation. It took several delicate cues for the doctor to understand. He then made eye contact with her and spoke directly to her regarding her needs – not to Andrea. The individual said later that she appreciated this approach, as it made her feel more empowered and respected. The positive outcome of Andrea’s advocacy was when the woman returned to this particular doctor, she was addressed directly by him. That’s the definition of advocacy.
This South Dakota DSP of the Year is known as “Carly.” She has been working at Aspire for all of her seven years as a DSP and most of the people she supports are non-verbal. Meranda Leidholdt nominated her for the award. She says of Carly: “She makes herself a vessel for the person to communicate and advocate for themselves no matter what setting she is assisting them in.”

Carly has been a regular part of “DSP for a Day” activities when state legislators are invited to observe the work of the DSPs. She assisted one individual with pureeing a meal and helping him eat while explaining to the legislators about these needs and how important it is to follow dietary recommendations. She and two legislators and a person she supports volunteered at a Kids Against Hunger event. “In assisting that individual she not only promoted community awareness, but explained to the legislators why we do what we do -- that the main goal is to have each individual become a contributing member of the community,” Leidholdt says.

Creativity is a big part of Carly’s supports toolbox. She participates in the day services program and has helped everyone become more “crafty.” She has worked with her housemates in refurbishing all of their nightstands, end tables, and dressers. Carly and one woman converted an old dresser into a flower planter and also tore a TV apart and made that into a flowerpot. Everything she does is about advocacy, creativity and building relationships!

This DSP who is a Home Manager for D&S is all about Person-Centered Supports. Nominating her as Tennessee’s DSP of the Year was Robn Traugott. In her nomination letter, she tells us this about this talented woman: “As a Home Manager, Shawn is responsible for setting the example of the NADSP standards for her staff to follow. Shawn exemplifies Person-Centered Supports and really pushes her staff...Shawn makes sure that those she supports are given choices on everything. Shawn presents choices for them to decide what they wear, where they go, and everything in between to ensure they have the most possible control over their own lives. Shawn always asks, she never demands or tells them what they should do.”

She has been supporting two women for 10 years now – since she became a DSP. They have been through a lot together and have cultivated and built incredible relationships. The mother of one of the ladies says of Shawn: “I am crazy about Shawn and the girls are too! She treats them like they are her own and will do anything for them!” When one of the women hears Shawn’s voice when she comes to work, her face will completely light up. “She is non-verbal but the expression of happiness on her face when she hears her tells everyone just how much she loves and trusts her,” Traugott says.

Her nomination letter concludes with this observation: “Shawn has been instrumental to both ladies in gaining the confidence necessary to strive and achieve their respective life skills. It is obvious to everyone around and in the community that this is not just what Shawn does for a living, but rather a powerful definition of who she is!”
If the four men in Wendy’s community living home have an idea about something they each want to try, this Tennessee DSP of the Year will accommodate them. She worked with them and their families in planning vacations. She taught one of them to dance. She keeps them connected with family and friends. Diana Fedinec nominated Wendy and shares this story: “She took it upon herself to start organizing events for the men, keeping them included in activities connected to their family and friends. She began planning holiday parties and Christmas events, special recognition days like Mother’s Day and an annual Family and Friends gathering which grew to more than 60 in attendance at a local church. These events have impacted the way the men socialize with their families and friends in the community. These days of celebration and unity give them fellowship, something they treasure above all, and the confidence to interact with others in their community and home life.”

The gentleman she taught to dance has improved his balance and motor skills. Today, he ventures onto the floor in public at the local school Sock Hop event. In support of his success, Wendy threw a Rock-N-Roll 60’s birthday bash for him that included a DJ and a night of dancing, games, food, decorations and costumes. He confidently danced with several women dressed in poodle skirts and with the biggest smile on his face.

She has been the agency’s Employee of the Year and completed the Home Manager’s Certificate program in Tennessee. A 13-year DSP, she helps the agency in training and mentoring new DSPs. “Wendy’s commitment to the men she supports stems from her passion and professionalism,” Diana says about her. “She holds her actions accountable to the families of the persons she supports with continual communication through her paperwork, phone calls, and visits.”

This soft-spoken DSP models her belief that “all DSPs need to lead with their heart.” The staff at ResCare says that she is a role model for co-workers. Those she supports look to her as their mentor.

One man says he “found a friend” in Keisha and he is not one of her clients that she supports. He checks in with her when he has questions or needs advice or simply just wants to talk. He invited her to go to church with him because he wanted her to meet his new girlfriend. So, on her day off Keisha felt it was important to be there for him so he knew and understood that relationships matter. The pastor of the church, by the way, was the girlfriend’s father. “It was a simple act that meant a great deal, and it showed that Keisha is more than a caregiver,” said Shelly Bugenis in nominating Keisha as the Texas DSP of the Year.

She is a strong advocate for her clients. That, Shelly says, began when Keisha was young. She saw caregivers mistreating her family and she learned to speak up when she witnessed inappropriate actions, even when those actions were unintentional. She reminds doctors, sales staff and anyone else to speak directly to the person she is supporting – not to her.

“Keisha engages all people – abled and disabled. For Keisha, it is simply doing something for someone to make sure they have a better day,” Shelley says. “She does it because they are a person, not a person with a disability. She leads with her heart.”
Tim is a Community Employment Specialist DSP at Lincoln Street and for the last 17 years has supported a man who came to the agency after experiencing years of trauma as a result of being institutionalized. He also has no family in his life. Tim helped this man get a job with an upscale inn in the community. He supports him at work and as his DSP. This man he supports struggles with mobility issues, so Tim creatively modified the equipment to allow him to scoot through the inn, completing his tasks efficiently and assuring that it is constantly in working order. Tim advocated for just the right work hours to balance the need to focus and the need to become part of a work culture and have strong co-worker relationships.

At Lincoln, they use words like “his calm logic and warm heart” and “the epitome of respectful relationships” to describe this man who has been a DSP for 25 years.

Cheryl Thrall, who nominated Tim, says the agency surveys the employers to determine their satisfaction with their staff supports.

“The businesses where Tim supports people always have positive feedback on his support efforts and valuing the person we serve as their employee,” she says. “We are celebrating Tim’s 25th year as a DSP at our agency this year. In those 25 years, he has nearly always received significant votes to be our Employee of the Year and has won the award.”

And now he has earned the honor of being Vermont’s DSP of the Year.

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CODY VANDRIMMELEN
Danville Services of Utah
Provo, UT

A DSP for 26 years, Cody has been supporting clients of Danville Services in Provo for six of those 26 years. John Stevens, Director of Residential Services, nominated Cody as Utah’s DSP of the Year. Cody’s role at Danville is a challenging one, to say the least. Stevens writes of her: “Due to Cody’s extraordinary ability to be patient, loving, kind, and to listen for the needs and wants being expressed by the people she serves, she has been asked to lead a group of people who face some of life’s most profound and difficult challenges.”

One wheelchair-bound man she supported had no ramp at his home. Cody managed to have a ramp donated and then talked with the local fire chief to pick up the ramp and install it. It greatly improved his life, making things safer for his family, his support staff and for him.

The mother of a young boy Cody began supporting in school when he was 5 years old wrote a testimonial about Cody. In part, she said: “My son was born with severe brain abnormalities and was not expected to live. But he fought on with constant smiles and belly laughs. He had severe cerebral palsy, cortical blindness, wheelchair bound, seizures, rods all the way up his spine. Completely tube fed, and many different medicines for seizures. Cody loved him and was so good with him during the day…. she was the only one he trusted. She could tell how he was doing just by little changes in his eyebrows or how happy he is that day…. Cody is one of the best special needs caregivers out there and she was my son’s caregiver for 10 years.”

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TIM BROWN
Lincoln Street Inc.
Springfield, VT

Tim is a Community Employment Specialist DSP at Lincoln Street and for the last 17 years has supported a man who came to the agency after experiencing years of trauma as a result of being institutionalized. He also has no family in his life. Tim helped this man get a job with an upscale inn in the community. He supports him at work and as his DSP. This man he supports struggles with mobility issues, so Tim creatively modified the equipment to allow him to scoot through the inn, completing his tasks efficiently and assuring that it is constantly in working order. Tim advocated for just the right work hours to balance the need to focus and the need to become part of a work culture and have strong co-worker relationships.

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And now he has earned the honor of being Vermont’s DSP of the Year.
The 8th Tenet of NADSP Code of Ethics is “Self Determination.” At this agency, this DSP of 26 years is known as David. He was nominated as Virginia’s DSP of the Year by Latoria Bethea, and here is what she wrote about David and NADSP Tenet No. 8 and a man he supports:

“Every day that David works with him he makes him feel like he can do anything he wants to do. He has taught him to cook using the stove and the microwave. He has taught him to manage his hearing aids and contact lenses, to make healthy lifestyle choices. The individual’s family loves David working with their son. David has helped him use his iPad for email and games and he has established a relationship with the Apple store and a technician will help teach him new apps and show him how to use them to increase his independence….In short, David helps the person achieve his own dreams and desires. He teaches, demonstrates, supports, and encourages him -- but doesn’t do for him.”

David also takes him to the gym for Tae Kwon Do and he’s earned a black belt. He’s in Special Olympics and in a camping club plus cycling and bowling – and boxing. He loves to box. The gym hosts boxing matches so David has t-shirts printed for fans to support him. There is music and smoke and David even got him a robe with his nickname “Silky Tiger” on it. “This man is a typical citizen in his community due, in part, to the activities David helps him with,” Latoria says.

Here is what the man he supports says of David: “He is an outstanding guy. He helps me and is caring. He takes me to Tae Kwon Do and the gym in his car and I love it. David is not grouchy either.”

Debbie is a Community Support Specialist DSP. She supports three housemates who live in a three-bedroom home. The man of the house is a Native American and she makes sure he is able to attend tribal events throughout the year. She also advocated for the purchase and installation of soundproof walls in his room to accommodate his loud singing and music without fear of complaints from his neighbors.

A woman in the house is deaf and engages in a lot of self-injury and assaultive behaviors at home and while in the community. Debbie works hard to minimize these problems. The other woman is wheelchair bound and requires a highly trained staff to transfer her. She has made sure that the woman’s mother, physical therapist, and other staff member are properly trained and retrained.

Debbie, a DSP for only four years, was nominated by Jeffrey Couture, the agency’s Director of Client Services. He says of her:

“Individualizing supports is one of Debbie’s skill sets. Due to the high staff turnover rate in the Supported Living Industry in Washington State, Debbie has been very busy training and retraining the site’s staff team. For the past several months Debbie has maintained flexibility in her schedule based upon client and agency needs. It has not been uncommon for Debbie to work various shifts, including overnights throughout the week due to staffing shortages. Despite the revolving door of staff, Debbie has always maintained a positive attitude and a strong work ethic. Debbie’s positive attitude has rubbed off on her coworkers and the housemates she supports.”
Yolanda is a Community Support Coordinator DSP who works at a Community-Based Residential Facility helping support six individuals. They are described as people who all have a very clear idea about what they want from life. Yolanda is all ears all of the time in helping them lead self-directed lives. “That is the driving force behind everything Yolanda does in supporting these individuals,” says Susan Eler at Dungarvin Wisconsin. Susan nominated Yolanda for the DSP of the Year award.

Her nomination focuses on the support she provides for one man. He was a race car driver and sustained a traumatic brain injury in an accident during a race. He wants to be an active part of the lives of his children, his grandchildren and his community. “Yolanda is the person on whom he depends. He knows she is his champion,” Susan says. “She talks with him, not to him.”

He wanted to celebrate his birthday at Hooters with dinner and drinks. So Yolanda obtained authorization from his doctor for him to enjoy an alcoholic beverage during the party. They had a great time! He’s a big fan of the Green Bay Packers and she helped him color his hair green and gold to support the team.

A major event came up in his life. His daughter was getting married. Susan recounts the story: “Yolanda took the lead in coordinating all of the arrangements for him to be able to attend his daughter’s wedding but to also give her away. There were parties to attend, the tuxedo fitting, the rehearsal dinner and gift shopping. He was a very proud father that day and Yolanda made sure he was ready for the big day. Thanks to her assistance and support, he was able to fully participate in this special occasion.”
This DSP of just more than a year is recognized for her adherence to and respect for Tenet 1 of the NADSP Code of Ethics: Person-Centered Supports. Shea Sparks of ResCare Wyoming nominated Raquel as the DSP of the Year for Wyoming. Here is how she describes Raquel’s Person-Centered Supports focus: “Raquel displays person-centered supports each day. She pushes each person to be as independent as possible while cheering them on to each goal. Raquel pays close attention and listens to each person, which helps tremendously to learn the likes and dislikes of the individual. With her support, Raquel’s people surpass their goals because of her dedication. She comes to work fully dedicated to those she supports, which has made a lasting impact on them and her co-workers.”

She supports two men full-time and works with others as well. She makes each person feel special and important, Shea says. She listens to their concerns and issues and the people she supports know that she will drop what she is doing to help them work through a problem. “The best quality about Raquel is that she does all of this with a smile on her face and a willingness to help, which creates an amazing bond with the people she supports,” Shea writes of her.

Raquel uses her artistic talents to help those she supports with their art projects. She finds creative ways to incorporate financial skills into the day’s activities, understanding that financial independence is important for her people. “As always, Raquel is there, cheering on each person she supports with a smile on her face. She is constantly using her creativity and imagination to brighten up a person’s day,” Shea writes.
Recognizing Excellence

Real Heroes

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They Become DSPs

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Congratulations to

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The Passion You Deliver Transforms Lives!

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Judy in the words of your colleagues and clients you are ....

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2016 Direct Support Professional of the Year Award!

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Melinda Parker
2016 Connecticut Direct Support Professional of the Year!

The Institute would like to thank Melinda for her hard work, enthusiasm and dedication in making a difference in the lives of those we serve.

All of us at IPPI are so proud of you!
We are honored to have you on our team!

www.ippi.org
Congratulations, Theo Cameron!
Louisiana DSP of the Year

Thank you for your passion, commitment and dedication to our mission — from all of us at Resources for Human Development.

www.rhd.org

Congratulations Wendy Saulsberry!

2016 ANCOR DSP of the Year for Tennessee

SRVS Board, your fellow employees, the Memphis community and the families of the persons you support are grateful to you for your dedication and compassion! Congratulations!

Congratulations

Stephanie Giorgenti

on being named New York State’s Direct Support Professional of the Year!

We are excited and proud that ANCOR has chosen you as New York State’s Direct Support Professional of the Year! Your kindness, patience, compassion, and professionalism are valued by everyone at The Resource Center, but especially by the individuals whose lives you improve every day in your role as a Behavior Support Professional. Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition!

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She Brings Joy To People With Disabilities
Cody Vandrimmelen is Utah’s DSP of the Year

We rely on our DSPs to bring joy to people with disabilities each day, and we are deeply honored to see their hard work recognized by ANCOR. Thank you Cody for all that you do! You’re the best.

Cody Vandrimmelen is Utah’s DSP of the Year

For the past 26 years, you have demonstrated your commitment to improving the lives of the people we support. We are proud of you and your contributions!

Congratulations
Caitlin Summers
Oregon’s DSP Of The Year

For your dedication in providing uncompromised services, Oregon salutes you on a well deserved award.

Community Support Services, Inc
Working Together!
visit us at www.cssincoregon.com

Congratulations
Todd Sheldon
2016 North Dakota DSP of the Year

For the past 26 years, you have demonstrated your commitment to improving the lives of the people we support. We are proud of you and your contributions!

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Congratulations
Andrea Winslow on being Rhode Island’s 2016 DSP of the Year

From the West Bay community, we thank you for your dedication, commitment and passion in supporting each person to live a fully inclusive and satisfying life.

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Congratulations Amanda Noyes
On being named the 2016 Minnesota Direct Support Professional of the year!
We are so proud to have you on the CCRI team.

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Jasmine Brown
ANCOR’S 2016 Maryland DSP of the Year Award

Congratulations
FROM

Empowering People,
Enriching Lives

ANCOR’s 2016 WA State DSP Award recipient

CONGRATULATIONS
DEBBIE DILLARD

You make a huge difference every day.
PSRS recognizes, honors, and THANKS YOU for your dedication & commitment to positively impacting and transforming the lives of people with disabilities.

2016 Supported Living Rally at state capitol Olympia, WA

Congratulations Julia Schaffner
2016 Missouri DSP of the Year

Congratulations from the
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Congratulations Jerome Williams
Pennsylvania 2016
Direct Support Professional

On behalf of the people we support, the Organization’s Board and all of your colleagues
— We thank you for making our mission and vision a reality. We are moved by your dedication, creativity, passion and hard work!