New Jersey
Direct Support Professionals

Making a Difference in the Lives of People with Disabilities

DSP Recognition Week
September 2013
Introduction
There are approximately 25,000 Direct Support Professionals working throughout New Jersey. Direct Support Professionals are the enthusiastic, compassionate, hard working employees committed to supporting people with disabilities at home, work, and in the community. They are the back-bone of the developmental disability service system.

This booklet was developed to recognize the DSPs across the state of New Jersey for their dedication to those they support. In the pages that follow you will find stories from organizations in recognition of their staff and anecdotes from DSPs sharing their passion. Also included, marking the one year anniversary of Super Storm Sandy, are narratives about DSPs who went the extra mile during this natural disaster to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of the people they support.

Thank you
Direct Support Professionals!

The NJ Partnership for Direct Support Professional Workforce Development
Sandy has worked for Avenues to Independent Living for a number of years, during which time she has held various titles and worked in a number of different roles. As a Direct Service Professional, Sandy’s clients can always count on her to be prepared with fun and engaging activities. She’s been instrumental in creating a new group for Avenues’ clients, helping them to feel valuable and important within their home communities.

In her role as a job coach, Sandy has made an extra effort to understand the unique needs of each of her clients, and consistently goes the extra mile to ensure that when the people she works with find a job, it’s in a field they enjoy with supports that meet their needs. In Avenues to Independent Living’s new venture with Support Coordination, Sandy has jumped in with both feet, and has made an extra effort to make sure that her clients and their families are aware of not only the resources available to them, but how to confidently access those opportunities. Sandy is an asset to Avenues, and we’re always confident that she puts her best foot forward in representing our company.
Nancy Binck
Avenues for Independent Living

Nancy has worked for Avenues to Independent Living for many years, and is one of the most diverse Direct Service Professionals we have. In an environment where our clients typically have difficulty adjusting to new staff, Nancy proves to be the exception to the rule. After meeting Nancy for the first time, most clients are immediately drawn by her fun-loving personality and her encouraging nature. Clients always want Nancy to come back for more, and it’s through this type of word-of-mouth recommendation that Nancy has helped our client base grow. Nancy is always reliable, and can be counted on to pick up a task or help out at a moment’s notice. Nancy is invaluable to Avenues, and we are proud to have her on our team.
When thinking of recognizing DSPs with a story, I thought of all the little things one of my staff members do that make such a big difference. Quanee Calhoun is a full time Direct Support Professional at LADACIN Network. She is approaching one year with our Agency, and has fast become an intricate part of our team. Quanee has developed a positive relationship with all of our clients, but especially with one young man. This young man not only struggles with communication, but also with needing a wheelchair for mobility due to a diagnosis of cerebral palsy, and trying to live a normal life of 25 years old. Quanee sacrifices her own time and works on her days off to make sure that he has been able to go on outings and visits with friends his age.

Her dedication to the clients can best be recognized by a simple act of kindness expressed recently; the same young man waited a month for a promised visit from family who resides out of state. Due to circumstances beyond our control his family was unable to come at the last minute. He was heartbroken. Quanee was not scheduled to work that evening (and I know was looking forward to finally having a quiet evening off), but she contacted me and asked to extend her shift so that she could focus on keeping his spirits up. This is a prime example of the kind of heart we want to be working in our houses. It is important to realize the little things really do make a big difference in the lives of others, and they do not go unnoticed. I feel very fortunate to have her on my team. Quanee, thank you for all you do!
Cynthia Campbell  
*Avenues for Independent Living*

Cynthia has worked for Avenues to Independent Living for two years. In that time, she has built a relationship with her clients based on mutual respect and compassion. In recent months, Cynthia has begun working with a client who very much wishes to succeed in a work environment, but who needed to build the skills to make her a valuable employee. Cynthia took an active role in this aspect of her client’s life and goals, and made an effort above and beyond the typical Direct Service Professional. Cynthia took the time to learn her client’s strengths, skills, and challenges, and worked with her client both toward finding a job that sparks her interests and passions and ensuring that the job was a success.

Cynthia spent countless hours training with her client on the job, ensuring that she understood the duties assigned to her and the expectations of the job she was beginning. Cynthia’s client has been working successfully now for quite some time, and attributes part of her positive outlook toward work and her future to Cynthia’s empathy, hard work, and dedication the people with whom she works. Avenues to Independent Living is proud to have staff members like Cynthia on board to serve our community.
Venturing into this field takes a strong sense of compassion. It is a job – a lifestyle – unlike any other. It is our human nature to help others, but to fine ourselves in a culture we fit into is a feeling I could never describe. I could certainly describe to you my day: a routine of clocking in, stepping full into a day of adventures and of uncertainty. Our consumers face challenges that most of us could never dream of. Each day is unlike the last, and I’ve found that to be true on more than one occasion.

I’ve tied shoe laces, taken a walk, listened to a consumer’s fears, and coached their goals. Sometimes it doesn’t feel as if it’s enough – but yet, somewhere deep inside, I know that it is, and I am greatly appreciated. I have a life outside work – I attend college, I see new things and go through different stages.

I could also describe to you my daily chores. I could relay to you the stories, the fear, the jubilation – all the emotions I’ve felt having the privilege to work alongside these consumers, who are these incredible, amazing people. What I do everyday, I don’t do it for credit or fame, or for the opportunity of recognition. I do it for the feeling I get when I help someone achieve their dreams. I do it for the feeling I get when I listen to someone’s cry. I do it for the passion, because a life without passion isn’t a life worth living at all.

I love what I do. It’s why I wake up each and every morning. I am honored to be a Direct Support Professional.
A little over six years ago, I was offered the opportunity to work for what is now the NJID. Inexperienced as I was at first, I came to realize that these clients, each with their own handicaps and difficulties of life, were human beings first and that was how I developed relationships with them, not based on their disability but on their personality, just like everyone else. They have opinions, wants and needs, and I formed special and unique bonds with each of them; building trust, respect, and friendship over the years.

“Sam” is a strong willed man who has very distinct ideas and opinions about how he wants to live his life. We have shared stories of family and of people who are important to us. He shares his opinions on love and relationships and when we talk he knows he is heard. This alone is enough to make him beam and it makes me proud to know I am a part of his life.

“Sally” is another client I have grown close to. She has had her share of heartache. But when we are together, she talks about her fears and disappointments with me. She cries, and sometimes gets angry, but we sit together, I console her, and at the end she always feels better. A needed hug and a kind word sometimes is the best thing to heal someone’s soul.

There were times when a client had a medical issue and had to be taken to JFK Hospital. I would go and sit with them so that they would not be afraid and to make sure that they were advocated for. I have enriched the lives of the men and women who reside at Group Home 6 and they have enriched mine.
Irene Davis  
*Eastern Christian Children’s Retreat*

Irene has been a DLA (Daily Living Assistant) for many years here at ECCR. Her devotion to our residents is unparalleled. She is the Lead DLA on her unit and has the respect of all who work with her, especially the nursing staff! Even during her own serious illness, she could not wait to get back to “her residents” and meet their every need. All are in need of some assistance with their daily routines and Irene is not only able to recognize them but also is totally committed to providing what is needed. She will always pick up extra duties when needed and she makes herself available to help all her co-workers.

Irene’s attendance and never tardy record are attributes to be emulated. In this day and age, when the work ethic is somewhat tarnished, Irene continues to not only work her scheduled hours but picks up extra hours when needed. I was her direct supervisor for many years and always could breathe a sigh of relief when Irene was on the job. She is an excellent teacher of new staff and observer of seasoned staff and will intercede when the occasions call for it.

Everything Irene does is to better the life of the residents on her unit; she leaves nothing to chance. On top of it all is Irene’s genuine love for all she cares for and does not expect a word of praise for what she does. She has always been and always will be a woman I greatly admire and I am very glad to know her.
Jodie DePalma  
*New Jersey Institute for Disabilities*

I enjoy seeing the people I support meet their accomplishments throughout the years. Watching them take small steps and grow into responsible and capable people with full lives of their own. I enjoy sharing their happiness with them, going out in the community and enjoying all kinds of recreational activities together.

I also really love working with the residents in one to one situations, where we focus on individual successes like when we are gardening together, cooking together and completing tasks of daily living together. There is great pleasure for all of us when any of us reaches a goal or masters a new skill.

When I come to work each week, the greeting I receive from my consumers is uplifting and inspiring, and I always feel a sense of pride with them. I consider myself honored to work with this group of people and for NJID for the past 28 years.

I love being a DSP because I know I make a difference in someone’s life, and they make a difference in mine!
Dawn Diffendall

The Arc of Gloucester County

Dawn Diffendall is a great supporter and advocate of the individuals with developmental disabilities she works with at The Arc Gloucester’s Franklinville ATS. Dawn mentors a group of consumers who are members of our Aktion Club; a club that encourages giving back to the community through service projects. She assists two consumers from The Arc Bakery with participating in these meetings. In addition to facilitating their transportation to and from the meetings, Dawn assists with checking emails about the meeting and with making the appropriate RSVP’s. She works with the members to prepare for the next meeting and with their service projects. Dawn encourages consumers to work to their greatest potential and to be as independent as possible. She also assists consumers with other activities in the program, with volunteering their time at a local nursing home, and with special events sponsored by The Arc Gloucester.

Dawn is patient and demonstrates a caring and professional attitude at all times. The pride Dawn takes in her job is also evident Monday through Friday at Franklinville ATS where she works as a technician. When she had the opportunity to offer the individuals in the program the opportunity to participate in a Leadership Workshop, Dawn was right there to encourage them. Dawn is involved in all aspects of the day program such as; self advocacy, computer skills, hygiene, healthy menu planning, locating and purchasing groceries, cooking and baking, and assisting consumers in learning how to prepare for an employment interview. With everything Dawn does at Franklinville ATS, she also finds time to assure that everyone has a fun time at program celebrations by putting on her “Dawn the DJ” hat. In doing so, she provides all types of music, assuring as usual, that everyone enjoys their time at Franklinville ATS.
Danny Dwyer
Allies, Inc.

Danny Dwyer is a dedicated direct support specialist who joined the Allies Green team in 2010. Since participating in the Greensleeves mission Daniel has been instrumental in creating positive change in our “not so” traditional day program. Greensleeves is an innovative program developed by Allies to provide vocational training and community integration in green employment opportunities. The Greensleeves program is also dedicated to teaching sustainable living, creating environmental awareness and providing opportunities by fostering the abilities of the people served in our program.

Danny’s dedication to service is second to none. He is always eager to help make each day full of hope and excitement. Danny engages each program participant in current environmental issues and recycling tips. This is particularly evident when one of our team members is able to confidently share this information with the community.

“I love to witness the confidence and the expression of new knowledge when one of our team members can share a recycling tip with our community. Just the other day; one of our program participants, explained how to harvest rainwater from one of our up-cycled rain barrels. The customer was genuinely impressed and stated that they enjoyed learning new knowledge,” shared Danny.

Danny consistently seeks new strategies through innovative ideas to help make the Greensleeves mission more accessible for everyone. Our Greensleeves team knows that they can always count on Danny. He greets everyone each morning with a smile and kind words. What a perfect way to start your day.

In fact, Danny has such a good work ethic that he hasn’t missed a day since 2010. This is such an admirable attribute since so many depend on his care.

Recently, Danny has been instrumental in launching our partnership with
Planet Aid. Planet Aid is also a 501c 3 nonprofit that collects and recycles textiles. Our contribution to Planet Aid supports community based projects that improve health, aids vulnerable children, trains teachers, increases income and enhances the overall quality of life for people across the globe.

Danny shares “I am amazed and humbled every day I come to work. I hope to make a positive impact in the lives of the people I serve. Working at Greensleeves and serving individuals with special needs has instilled a sense of pride in the career path that I have chosen and has created a desire for me to further my education in social service.”

Rebecca Eisele
The Arc of Atlantic County

Rebecca Eisele (Becky) has worked for The Arc for 16 years. She has worked in several different programs where she realized that many individuals we serve love to be in the spotlight and performing. Becky submitted a proposal to The Arc’s upper management asking if she could start a performing arts club.

This club is called Spotlight Players and has presented two performances each year over the last six years. Becky does not turn anyone away. She figures out how to utilize each person’s gifts in the production. Some individuals enjoy behind the scenes work, painting sets and making costumes, while others enjoy singing, dancing and acting on stage. She has expanded the program to include group trips to area plays and performances to get ideas and see how others act on stage. She has recruited family members, friends and other community volunteers to host these productions that attract more than 200 audience members each time. We look forward to the Spotlight Players next performance on September 29, 2013 at 2:00PM at the Katz JCC in Margate, NJ.
Kelly Gallagher  
*Avenues for Independent Living*

Kelly is by far one of the most dedicated and creative employees Avenues to Independent Living has. She cares for a number of clients at a time, and where typically the population we serve prefers to have staff on a one-on-one basis, Kelly has created a day program where all clients are engaged in a group activity and have grown to genuinely enjoy each other’s company. Each week, Kelly brings her group to volunteer at the Kennedy Health System, where they assist with creating and distributing patient information packets and discharge instructions. In the rare event that Kelly takes a day off, it often takes 4 or 5 staff members to cover the workload that she handles all on her own. As a member of the Board of Directors for Avenues, Kelly works on her off time to ensure the future of our company and that we can continue to do our work with our clients.

Elvis Henry  
*Cerebral Palsy of North Jersey*

Elvis Henry was a major help to me when I became supervisor at the Pleasant Valley Way Group Home in October of 2012. Elvis was very knowledgeable of the consumers that reside at the home. One of the consumers was not so much himself one day upon returning from day program. He connected with the consumer, gave me hour on the hour updates and expressed that this consumer was just not himself. With the help of another staff member, they took him (the consumer) to the hospital. The consumer passed away but because of Elvis the consumer passed away peacefully. He was 87 years old and got the medical attention he needed and was comfortably expired. Elvis always ensures that the consumer’s best interest and well being is carried out. He is a great asset to the Agency, for he is a great mentor and teacher.
Kenya Jordan  
New Jersey Institute for Disabilities

When asked why I love my role as a Direct Support Professional many things come to mind. For 16 years I have spent my time caring for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities at NJID, and I am truly humbled by this opportunity. I have met some amazing people and I have been honored to be part of their lives.

I recall a time when I was asked to assist a consumer in making her final transition in life, to the ‘other’ side. Deb was fun and full of life. When she found out she was dying, she didn’t give in instead she took charge. Deb made decisions about treatment, her attendance at routine activities and that she wanted to live her life out in her home, a group home. She wanted to be in familiar surroundings, with the people she loved. Deb was happy to see me and knew I would do whatever I could to help her be happy and comfortable in her last days. Some thought that it would be too hard to care for her during this time, but I was honored to be among a small team of people making sure she had everything she needed.

The other ladies at the house were going through a tough time too, and each of them needed love and attention from the DSPs to get through this time. Many had never had an experience like this and the chance to share their feelings about losing someone and by making gardens for Deb, writing/drawing about their feelings and creating memory boxes were just what they needed. The DSPs in the house made sure the other ladies got out and maintained their normal routine as much as they could and that they each had the time they wanted with Deb during her final hours. This story isn’t so much about me, but about how wonderful it falls to make a difference in the life of another person, and THAT is why I love being a Direct Support Professional!
Julius Joseph
*Cerebral Palsy of North Jersey (CPNJ)*

Julius Joseph is a DSP at the Orange Adult Training Center. Parents of a person that Julius supports say that he strikes them as a warm, caring individual. They share that he is extremely patient with their son, David, and always tries to prompt speech from him which is very important given David’s limited language skills. Julius is helpful and kind and a real asset to the staff of CPNJ.

He is a joy to the day program. He loves his job and it shows in his demeanor with the individuals he serves and his peers daily. In the morning once he transports his consumers to the program, he runs two music groups daily of 6 consumers in each group. In his music groups he makes sure everyone is involved. On any given day there are only 6 consumers who are assigned to each section but there are always about 7 more consumers trying to get in just to be part of the music group because of how much fun he makes sure they have.
Sylvia Lewis
LADICIN Network

Sylvia Lewis has been employed with LADACIN Network for 9 years. She is a Certified Home Health Aide and works at LADACIN’s supervised apartment facility in Lakewood. Sylvia has a great rapport with clients and staff. She often goes above and beyond when providing services to our clients and does it with the upmost respect, dignity, and patience.

One evening Sylvia was assisting a female client with personal care when she noticed an abnormal lump on the client’s left breast. Sylvia completed a self examination of both breasts and quickly notified the office manager and suggested that she see her physician. The specialist was called first thing in the morning and the client was scheduled to be seen right away. They performed several exams later revealing that the client had breast cancer requiring a full mastectomy of her left breast. Due to Sylvia’s quick action we were able to get our client the best care and attention through this crucial time of her life. The client is now free of cancer and doing exceptionally well. This is one of the many examples of Sylvia’s dedication to being a direct support staff member. The passion for her job and compassion toward the people she serves does not go unnoticed from her supervisor, her peers, and most of all from the population she serves who love and appreciate her.

Ashley Mann & Qualisha Williams
Cerebral Palsy of North Jersey (CPNJ)

On the evening of January 15th, Ashley and Qualisha saved the life of a consumer who was choking on a piece of pizza. One of these remarkable staff successfully administered the Heimlich Maneuver while the other called 911. When the EMTs arrived, the consumer was talking and nobody would have known that she had been in a life-threatening situation just a few minutes earlier. The EMTs checked her out and determined that she did not even need to go to the hospital. Ashley and Qualisha remained calm and composed when it mattered the most. CPNJ thanks all of its DSPs for their dedication every day and recognizes these 2 staff members for their life-saving efforts on January 15th.
Amanda Miller
Abilities of NW Jersey, Inc.

Amanda Miller has been employed at Abilities of NW Jersey, Inc. for the past 4 years. During this time, Amanda has worked in both the Individual Specialized Program (serving individuals with challenging behaviors) and the Employment Pathways Program (providing individuals job coaching services in the community).

Amanda has shown herself to be both reliable and flexible which are critical in this line of work. She possesses good judgment and her interactions with others are outstanding. She presents herself in a professional and positive manner.

Amanda is responsible for creating and implementing activities for the consumers with whom she works. She has done an excellent job coming up with activities that can benefit everyone in the program. She holds monthly Job Club meetings and discusses topics pertaining to the world of employment. She is a very compassionate and caring individual and it reflects in her interactions with the consumers.

Amanda is always willing to assist others and to help out where she can. Based on her outstanding job performance, she has been identified as a “mentor” and teaches new staff as is appropriate. Amanda is an asset to the agency and to the individuals that she serves. Thank you Amanda for everything that you do!
James Morris
*Cerebral Palsy of North Jersey*

James Morris has only been with CPNJ for a short duration. In this short duration, James has went way and beyond his call of duty with the care of the consumers at the Pleasant Valley way group home. He started out as a part time overnight. He was able to fill in most shifts and worked very well with one of our most difficult consumers. As time went on, this particular consumer required a 1:1. He stepped up to the plate and handled the behaviors like a veteran staff would. The consumer responds well to James and respects him as a staff member. James is always willing to step outside his 1:1 role. James will assist in medical appointments, house maintenance, and basically anything you need to do. He is always courteous and thoughtful. James has adapted to the Agency and group home standards as well as expectations.

Audrey Richardson
*The Arc of Monmouth County*

Audrey Richardson is a substitute direct care staff that has been working with The Arc of Monmouth for a couple years. While working as a substitute she has spent a lot of time at Marc Manor Group Home. The residents at Marc Manor look forward to seeing her on a weekly basis. She shares a special connection with each one of the residents and they enjoy spending time with her.

This past June a resident at Marc Manor was hospitalized and later moved to rehab. Knowing that this particular resident did not have family Audrey would take it upon herself on her free time to visit her daily. Audrey isn’t one to talk about how much time she was spending at the rehab center; and if it wasn’t for one of the nurses talking about how wonderful she was with our resident we wouldn’t have known she was there visiting as much as she was. The compassion that Audrey shows towards the residents that she works with is something that you do not find in very many people, and Marc Manor is very lucky to have her.
Evans Sarapong
*Cerebral Palsy of North Jersey (CPNJ)*

Evans Sarpong came to CPNJ with no knowledge of the field. Evans started off slowly; it was very hard for him to grasp the speed of the opening of the new home. I met with Evans and we addressed the issues he needed to work on. Soon enough, Evans put his hardest into learning the field and learning all about the consumers.

Evans worked with a very challenging consumer whom always had an issue with the staff. This consumer worked well with Evans and attended all his medical appointments from the beginning of his transition to the end of his stay where he moved to another state. It’s amazing how he took charge and had all his medical appointments under control. He developed great advocating and paper work skills. Evans has come a long way with counseling skills and is one of many of my staff that are great and do an outstanding job as a caregiver, advocate and DSP. It is an honor to work with a great team as well as a great staff member like Evans.
James Sarpong came to CPNJ with little knowledge of the field. James has adjusted to the job, the agency as well as the group home magnificently. During a transition period, James was able to grasp the policies and procedures of the agency as well as the group home swiftly. James has taken leadership roles when advocating for consumers needs. During medical visits for 2 of our most medically involved consumers he has shown great skill with keeping abreast of their testing, follow-ups, and related support needs.

James is very professional and handles all situations in a professional manner. He is very caring and thoughtful of the consumers and wholeheartedly a great staff to work with. The consumers enjoy working with her as well as all the staff. James fills any shift that is needed for fill in. James always ensures that the consumers are engaged. He independently will search for activities n the web and share them with his peers. There was a Sunday afternoon where he took the consumers to a meadow that was free of charge. The consumers were able to see many different animals and feed the birds. They played basketball in a nearby park and consumers came back very happy and excited. Consumers enjoy when James is on shift.
Cathy Setzer
 Abilities of NW Jersey, Inc.

Cathy Setzer has provided Abilities of NW Jersey, Inc. with 31 years of dedicated service. She has served in different roles over the years but currently holds a program supervisor position. Cathy has proven to be an excellent role model for staff, consumers and coworkers. She demonstrates superb interactions with others and treats people in a respectful and dignified manner regardless of the situation. Cathy has an excellent work ethic and is constantly striving to ensure that both the needs of the consumer and the program are being met.

Cathy is a strong advocate for consumers. She is willing to address both challenging and sensitive issues, especially if it means there will be an increased quality of life for a consumer. She supports and encourages consumers to attain the highest level of independence possible.

In her time at Abilities, Cathy has implemented many program options for the benefit of those we serve. Cathy is extremely creative and brings this creativity to the program. She offers excellent activities and ensures that all consumers can participate in some aspect of the activity. Some of the activities that Cathy has developed over the years include a Coffee Shop (which is operated by consumers), a greenhouse, and a gift shop (currently in the works!).

Cathy’s compassion and innovative thinking have definitely benefited not only the agency, but the consumers she has had the opportunity to work with over the years. Thank you Cathy for all of your outstanding work!
Emily Slemmer
Devereux New Jersey

Emily Slemmer is a Direct Care Professional at one of Devereux New Jersey’s group homes in Southern New Jersey. She has worked in her current role for over a year. Emily has been described by her Manager as someone who is always upbeat. She is very passionate about her work with the consumers she supports. She engages them continuously during her time with them in the home and fully integrates into their daily lives.

Sadly, this past year one of the consumers in her home passed away. She and the consumer were very close. During her day off she came in shared pictures of him and tried to cheer the other consumers and staff who were all very saddened by the consumer’s passing.

In Emily’s own words she states:
“To me, being a direct care professional means I am making a difference in someone’s life. I am building friendships that will last a lifetime and am making wonderful memories that I will cherish for years to come. Being a Direct Care Professional at Devereux has enriched my life. I have great satisfaction knowing that I am helping individual’s live a fulfilling, meaningful life.”
When I began working at NJID, seventeen years ago, I thought this would be a job I could do to earn a living. I didn’t think it would be one I would grow to love and that it would become a career for me, but it has.

When I think about being a DSP and the rewards, I think about the clients I am able to support. This begins with how I help them start their days and trying to be sure it always a good start for each of them. The consumers and being involved in their lives is the reward. I never expected that clients would become part of my extended family, but they have.

Spending time with the residents, getting to know them, learning about their likes and dislikes, answering their many questions, and sharing in sorrow together when we lost close friends has brought us together like a family and this brings each of us great joy.

I used to think this work would provide me with a paycheck, but it has given me much more and I am so happy to be a part of their lives. Working with this population has brought great enjoyment to me!
Irene Thomas has worked for The Arc Gloucester since 2002 in a variety of positions. She started as a relief technician and became known for her flexibility, willingness to go beyond the call of duty, ability to be a team player and her dedication and passion for ensuring the success of the consumers. In 2006, Irene was promoted to Respite Coordinator. Her overall responsibilities now included the overall management and supervision of the In-Home Respite Program and the Saturday Drop-Off Program.

Irene does an outstanding job and the families love the services they receive. She works very closely with the families to make sure the individual needs of the consumers are met and that the families feel comfortable leaving their loved ones in our care. She works closely with the staff to assure they have the knowledge and the tools they need to provide quality respite. Irene is a true team player and is always willing to help anywhere needed. Irene seeks opportunities for self development and has been working to be certified in American Sign Language. She is always on top of her responsibilities and works to keep up to date with information and resources to improve the quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Often, Irene is one of the first to volunteer for any special event or fundraiser including organizing the craft area at Halloween Adventure at Camp Sun ‘N Fun. Irene also encourages her consumers and families to participate in our activities including The Arc 5K Run & Walkathon, Yankee Candle Fundraiser and Saturday Drop-Off Yard Sale. Irene has been an outstanding employee, professional and strong advocate of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.
Donna has been a staff member for 3 years and has made it her mission to help individuals we support make the community connections they have always dreamed of. One individual she supports (Al) wanted to learn how to use his local library to research and order older DVDs and movies made into plays. They visited 3 different libraries until Al found a librarian he felt more connected to. It happens to be a library that is not closest to his home but the librarian has the same love of old movies. Al is going to see the play National Velvet that is about a horse, which happens to also be a movie and a book. Al was talking to the librarian about this play and he (the librarian) thought to introduce Al to another regular member that works on a horse farm. Now AL is interacting with other regular members and planning a trip to visit the horse farm. Donna could have just taken Al to the closest library but she realized there was no connection and kept looking until they found the right librarian.

Another individual Donna supports, Chris, loves Star Trek. His favorite character from Star Trek is Lavar Burton aka Geordi. Donna used her personal contact (a former co-worker) with Stephanie Burton, Lavar Burton’s wife, to get a personally autographed photograph for Chris. Chris was so excited to get the picture, as it was a surprise. Chris sent a thank you letter to the Burton’s and will be framing the picture to add to his collection of Star Trek memorabilia. Chris was very grateful to Donna for making this happen as it was one of his dreams to get a personal autographed photo from his favorite Star Trek character. The Burtons posted Chris’s thank you letter on their Facebook page and Donna helped Chris create his own, so now he is friends with one of his favorite characters on Facebook.
When Lonni Wallace, Jr. was 17, a teacher suggested that he work at a summer camp for children with developmental disabilities. It was a pivotal moment for Lonni and he never looked back. “I found my passion…I knew that this was the work I was meant to do.” After graduating high school, Lonni pursued a career as a Behavioral Assistant. Seventeen years later, his enthusiasm for helping children severely affected by autism and aggressive behaviors has not diminished.

Today, two families that he supports as a Behavioral Assistant for the YCS Sawtelle In-Home program cannot express their appreciation enough for his help.

“Lonni is like a member of our family,” says Connie Palumbo. He provides in-home care six days a week for Connie’s 15 year-old son Michael, and joins the family on outings into the community. “I can tell than Michael enjoys Lonni’s company and so do we,” adds Michael’s father.

Most importantly the Polumbos’ have someone that truly cares about them. On two occasions when Lonni was unable to drive to the Polumbos’ home because of treacherous weather, he walked 5 miles to get to their home. “We’ve never met anyone like him. He knows how much we need him and he gives us 100%,” says Connie.

Diana Timkins echoes the Polumbos’ sentiments. Before Lonni became the BA for her 16 year-old son, Daniel, simple daily tasks were a painful struggle. Her son forcibly resisted showering, or taking his medication. According to Diana, Lonni came in and immediately took charge. “He wakes Daniel up and gets him ready for the day.”

Daniel also has food issues and an uncontrollable appetite that made meal time and food preparation a big stressor for Diana. Lonni has been able to redirect Daniel’s attention while Diana cooks and when Lonni eats dinner with the family, he’s able to control his food impulses. “It means so much to me that we can have a relaxed family dinner,” says Diana.

When Lonni greets Diana he often says life is a blessing. Diana says, “Lonnie himself is a blessing. He’s made our lives live-able.”
Lakisha Alston
The Center for Family Support

Lakisha Alston is a hard working direct support professional. She goes above and beyond to make sure that the individuals she support is comfortable. She has been working in this field for several years. She is very involved with the individuals and shows a lot of respect to her co-workers and the individual families.

During hurricane Sandy, Lakisha was always at work even when she had to borrow her friend’s car because she wasn’t able to get gas. She is very dependable and she is an asset to our team and she is willing to work any shift required. Lakisha is willing to learn and she keeps us updated when she attend trainings. She is making a difference with the individuals we serve.
Grace Bender is one of the best DSP staff that The Center for Family Support has. She has worked for the agency for 12 years, at the same group home in Clifton, New Jersey. She has such a very special relationship with the individuals, that when she takes a day off, the individuals are asking for her. She always makes sure that all of the doctor’s appointments and subsequent follow up appointments are completed within the recommended timeframes. Grace completes her paperwork and any extra tasks she’s assigned to do without complaining. Grace is a very hard working staff, she is reliable and she carries out her job responsibilities with passion.

During Super Storm Sandy, Grace still made it to work. We lost power and evacuated the individuals to the hotel. Grace was there with them regardless of the situation, always reassuring the individuals that everything will be ok. She made sure that they were safe and feeling comfortable under a very stressful situation.

Learning is a continuous process. When we started Therap (Electronic Record Keeping), Grace was scared that she would not be able to perform her job duties because she has had no experience with computers at all. With encouragement, training, and her hard work, Grace started doing the T-Log and slowly by slowly, she has mastered her skills on the computer. She has really demonstrated a positive attitude towards work and willing to learn new things.
Loris Bradley  
*Center for Family Support*

Loris has been employed at the Center For Family Support’s Elmwood Park group home for seven years. Loris started as a part time employee and was eventually promoted to a full time Senior DSP. During her years as a DSP, she has covered all shifts when asked, and does so with a very positive attitude. Loris works well with her peers and they rely on her knowledge and expertise of the individuals we serve to ensure all of their needs and desires are met. She has excellent communication skills and is also a very big advocate for the individual she serves at the Elmwood Park Group Home. Loris’s compassion is demonstrated on a daily basis and is evidenced in her providing a comfortable and safe environment for the individuals in her care.

Loris is always on time for work and will stay late to assure that the program needs are met. During super storm Sandy, Loris worked an incredible number of hours, without complaint, and always tried to make the best of the situation. She never demonstrated a negative attitude and was willing to go to several sites to ensure the safety of our individuals.

Loris is very knowledgeable of her work responsibilities and through the years helped her supervisor to train new staff. In the absence of a supervisor, Loris can be counted on to ensure the group home runs smoothly. Loris is a great asset to the Center for Family Support and we are proud to have her on our team.
Lenora Broadway  
*Cerebral Palsy of North Jersey*

Lenora has always worked hard to embody CPNJ’s belief in providing the very best possible services to our consumers. In working for our In-Home Support program, she demonstrated her exemplary professional and personal commitment to helping a consumer named Rose. While others were hunkered down and still reeling from Hurricane Sandy, Lenora was traversing dangerous roadways to relocate Rose to a secure environment with power. As the after affects of the storm lingered on and Rose found herself back home when the power again went out, Lenora invited her into her own home to ensure her safety. Throughout that trying period, Lenora also assisted another consumer family by delivering gas and ice. Lenora views her consumers as her family- isn’t that what every family in need of help dreams of?

Randall Collins  
*New Concepts for Living*

In the wake of hurricane Sandy, a very special and dedicated direct support professional went above and beyond his role and made sure that our consumers were comfortable, calm, and entertained. Power was lost for almost a week and there were downed wires and trees all over the place. When the power went out Randall Collins worked long hours in the residential group homes emptying refrigerators into coolers to save food from going bad. He also helped the consumers stay warm and comfortable. He created card games by flashlight and brought in a radio with many CD’s so that the consumers could listen to music and dance. He let consumers use his personal cell phone to contact their families. Direct support professionals have a very important job and directly impact the well being of our consumers. Randall formed a bond with them that is very special.
Dasheane Miller came to work early during Super Storm Sandy DSP, and her manager noticed that she had a travel bag with her. Her manager asked Dasheane where she was going. She replied, “I came ready, I brought clothes change, hygiene personal items because I don’t know if I will be able to come back home today.” Her manager replied, “Very good and thank you for being positive.” We prepared the house making sure we had all necessary supplies: water, flashlight, safety kits, etc. Finally, the storm hit. Staff tried to keep the ladies we support calm and assure them all is well. She tried to show no fear so the consumers would not be afraid. The power finally went out. Time passed where we played games and tried to keep the consumers amused. Staff stayed calm and gave meals using flashlights, with the knowledge that we had to keep consumers regimented.

The wind and rain continued; the power still out, the house temperature was warm and we were prepared for the storm. Staff prepared to take one consumer to Group Home to maintain her safety since she needed to use a nebulizer for medical treatment. We continued with normal routine; preparing dinner. We stood there holding the flashlights for the consumers to eat. We sat on the living room and sang songs and told silly stories until each one was safely in for the night, keeping watch throughout the night with our flashlights just in case anything went wrong. Staff Dasheane Miller worked 20 hours the first day of Sandy Storm and is so appreciated for this.
Martha Pereira  
*UCP Of Hudson County*

In the aftermath of Super Storm Sandy, many families engaged in the difficult task of rebuilding their homes and neighborhoods. During this time, Ms. Pereira unfortunately also lost her means of transportation; which complicated the service to her families in this time of need. Without any transportation and impassible roads, she was still able to find alternative ways to reach her families on time. In several occasions, she found herself taking an extra bus and taxi, walking longer distances and asking for rides from her co-workers. Nonetheless, these difficulties did not interfere with providing quality work for each of her families.

Ms. Pereira has been an employee of UCP of Hudson County for five years. She has always shown extraordinary dedication while giving the best care and advocacy to each of her consumers. It has been and continues to be a pleasure to work with her.

Minerva Quinones  
*The Center for Family Support*

Minerva Quinones was a great inspiration when Super Storm Sandy hit us. She came to work at the hotels without a problem. She assisted everyone to the best of her ability even through her neighborhood was in an uproar. She helped the service recipients relocate to another hotel after the power went out. Always smiling and laughing, Minerva is a great inspiration.
Andrew Schwaber  
*The Arc of Monmouth County*

Andrew Schwaber has worked for The Arc of Monmouth since 2011 and for the past year has been a Vocational Counselor at Arc’s Work Opportunity Center (WOC). Andrew started at the WOC in September of 2012 when and opportunity arose at WOC where he would be able to utilize his counseling skills. From the outset, Andrew showed himself as a kind, caring, knowledgeable professional dedicated to helping individuals not only on his caseload but other individuals attending WOC. Shortly after working at WOC, Super Storm Sandy hit our area and our building was substantially damaged to the point where a massive rehabilitation was needed to use the building again. When staff returned to the building for the incredible difficult task of cleaning up, Andrew was instrumental in helping in this process. Andrew came to work every day, stayed all day, cleaning up, moving furniture and boxes, and clearing water from WOC. Andrew worked tirelessly and never once complained.

When WOC was displaced to 4 different locations another set of challenges faced everyone at WOC. Andrew proved his versatility by shuttling individuals to The Arc, covering other staff on very short notice, running production lines for the individuals he was overseeing, and running educational downtime activities. Under all of these very difficult circumstances and being a new staff to WOC, Andrew continued to perform his duties as a Vocational Counselor. He attended all required trainings, he ran all needed IHP meetings, and kept up with all paperwork without having a computer at his temporary displacement. Andrew took the time to go to Arc to work on paperwork and preparing files.

Andrew is a quick learner who interacts professionally with the served individuals, and completes his required work in a timely fashion. Andrew runs good discussion groups. He has a calm demeanor and is effective at diffusing potential conflicts that may arise. Andrew is an asset to WOC and can be depended on to help out in any way he can. It is a pleasure to have Andrew on the WOC team.
Irmelle St. Fort  
*Catholic Charities*

As a Direct Support Professional during Super Storm Sandy, I had to make sure all the consumers were protected and advocated for. Both of the DSPs working needed to find safe places for them during the storm. One prime example of a responsibility we had to deal with was related to the power being lost. We lost electricity and heat. We list a fire in the fire place and moved each of the consumers to into the room to stay warm. Although it was a stressful moment due to the story, helping the people be warm and seeing the gratitude in their faces made it a joyful experience.

Tamara Tompkins  
*Devereux New Jersey*

Making a difference in the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities is a challenge that I strive to meet on a daily basis. My name is Tamara Tompkins. I was hired to work at Devereux in August of 2012 as a Direct Support Professional (DSP). My experience working here thus far has been so valuable. What I have gained the most is patience and the understanding of how I can really impact people's lives.

Working with people who have developmental disabilities is not an easy task but it is definitely a valuable undertaking. The feeling of knowing that you can help someone and make a difference in their existence is one of the most wonderful feelings in the world. I will never forget when Hurricane Sandy occurred and the Devereux relocated their group homes, which were affected by this natural disaster, placing all individuals served in hotels and shelters for safety. During this difficult time which affected most of us in our personal lives, the clients made us come together, they reminded us of resilience because they stayed high spirited, they reminded us how significant our role is because they would have been lost without us. It was that day I realized what impact I had on their lives and how much I could learn from them.
Working at Devereux, there is not a day that goes by that I don’t learn something new. By having the knowledge and resources made available to us, we have been able to successfully care for our clients with confidence. I look forward to coming to work every day to help my clients achieve their goals, put a smile on their face, encourage them so they can do what they might not think they are capable of doing, and most importantly let them know they are loved.

**Levander Williams**

*New Concepts for Living*

Levander Williams is the backbone of services for the individuals he work with hands on daily. He provides the necessary health maintenance, personal care, and behavior development as well. He is of great assistance to the individuals by helping them achieve goals and encouraging them to participate in activities. He believes all are capable of something and we shouldn’t limit them to their disability. He strongly support their “right to choice”, guides, and coach our individuals when it come to completing duties leading them to live self directed lives and become more inclusive in the community. As an advocate for individuals he communicates their needs, goals, and self expression. In the midst of Super Storm Sandy, Levander displayed his hard work and dedication to this agency as a DSP. He arrived to his shift and stayed as needed without any excuse or complaints. He made sure our individuals were well taken care of and safe.
New Jersey’s Direct Support Professionals are:

If you have DSP success stories to share throughout the year, email them to CDSTA@rutgers.edu