

# Greetings from IR2's Direct Support Professionals (DSP's)



**A note from the Director's chair!**

**It is with great pleasure that we bring you our first ever newsletter published exclusively by our Direct Support Professionals. We hope you enjoy this and we are planning another edition to be published in the fall!**



## Working in Group Residential Settings

Working in a residential home is both educational and rewarding, for both the individuals we support and the staff. Each day is an opportunity to learn the dynamics of what it takes for individuals with disabilities to thrive and grow. Many of them strive to learn what it takes to become the best person that they can be and to establish independence. As a DSP, it is just as educational, challenging, and rewarding for us as we support them in living the life they choose.

Individuals in group residential settings are roommates. As they each assume different roles and build relationships with each other, you can see that it goes much deeper than JUST roommates. In a sense each of the residential homes are built up like a family. Each individual assumes a different role, while one may be task oriented, another steps up as a peacemaker. Each unique personality helps shape an amazing system that works like a well-oiled machine and allows them to come together in their different ways.

The individuals we support work on a daily basis to build a life, to work through conflicts, and keep up with their daily routines. Yet they do it with a fierceness and determination that a lot of people strive for. There may be conflict, but at the end of the day, each of them have each other's backs through day to day life and have built life lasting relationships. I am blessed to work with such amazing individuals and be a part of their day to day lives.

**~Katie Fitzgerald, DSP**



*DSP Jenna having a spa day with Kara*



*Kris enjoying a healthy lunch at the Ralph Ballard Academy*

## Encouraging Healthy Lifestyles

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is an important part of daily living for all of us. To live a well-balanced life we strive to achieve and maintain mental and physical wellness. We do this through exercise, eating healthy and participating in activities/hobbies that allow us to socialize with others and that make us feel fulfilled. As DSP's we are responsible for educating and supporting our individuals in engaging in these activities.

We support our individuals by helping them to maintain a healthy diet and exercise. We provide them with informal education in healthy food choices, counting calories, and portion control. This process requires team work between staff and consistency. It starts with meal planning for each week, and executing/maintaining that plan throughout the week. When promoting exercise we assist individuals in going to the gym to participate in classes, or to utilize the equipment. We also assist individuals in accessing activities, such as, snow shoeing, bowling and other community organized activities.

**~Kat Brungardt, DSP**

## Creating Meaningful Opportunities

About a year ago, we had to start to modify the way we support individuals in our community Supports program at the Ralph Ballard Academy (RBA). It was a challenge, but then lightbulbs started to go off, and we came up with a variety of exciting online activities. The ideas of keeping our individuals connected online opened the door to classes that are engaging and that provide informal opportunities to work on a variety of skills for the individuals we support.

The zoom classes provide a variety of opportunities for informal education in; health and wellness, social skills, motor skills, writing skills, etc. When involved in classes such as Better Together, individuals have the opportunity to work on social skills. In Yoga class, our individuals have the opportunity to participate in a physical activity in a fun and supportive environment. In Creative Writing our individuals are asked to think outside of the box to come up with either short stories or poems as a group, giving them the opportunity to use their creative skills.

These classes have helped to support individuals that are not able to come to RBA due to COVID and other reasons, and also fuel the development of meaningful activities throughout the program. Individuals have been given the opportunity to grow, and build and keep relationships. The use of these zoom classes has had a positive impact on both staff and the individuals we support.

**-Marcos Gurrola, DSP II**



*Painting Class via Zoom*



*Marc & Liz enjoying a game of hangman with friends via Zoom*

## Night to Shine

Night to Shine is an exciting event that the individuals we support look forward to each year. I-REACH was thrilled to make the night as special as possible this year even with the unique challenges of COVID. Highland Park Community Church worked to create magic for everyone and to uphold as many traditions as possible, while also taking appropriate safety precautions due to COVID.

Highland Park had a drive thru (Shine-Thru) event where we were able to pick up snack boxes and swag bags. This event was meant to represent the tradition of walking down the red carpet. It was made special by volunteers being outside the car with pom poms cheering. A few of the volunteers came onto our bus wearing masks to greet our individuals, and to crown them like they would have at a traditional Night to Shine event.

After the Highland Park special treatment we all met back at the Ralph Ballard Academy for pizza, drinks, and the Night to Shine virtual event. Our individuals spent that time socializing, dancing to music. The night was a major success that our individuals enjoyed thoroughly. It was also very refreshing for I-REACH DSP's to have the opportunity to facilitate a social event amongst the craziness that is COVID. It was extremely rewarding to see the excitement and happiness radiating from the individuals we support.

**-BreAnn Holden, DSP**



*The greeting at the "Shine-Thru" 2020 Night to Shine*



*Sheryl & Whitney excited about Night to Shine*

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