

# Dungarvin

2014 ANCOR Direct Support Professional of the Year Nomination



**Dennis Okindo – Dungarvin Minnesota**

*nomination submitted by Tricia Bender, Program Director*

Dennis excels at helping people through stressful and challenging situations. When a person served was anxious and nervous about an upcoming court hearing, Dennis prepared her by saying he would be with her the whole time and telling her to just be herself and be honest. Dennis did a wonderful job explaining the purpose of the hearing and helping the individual understand why she needed to attend. The hearing lasted for hours but Dennis succeeded in helping the person remain calm, sometimes with an encouraging comment but most often with simple gesture and warm smile.

When T.P. was experiencing declining health, Dennis was proactive with identifying the need to transport him to urgent care, and then to the emergency room, but remained calm and didn't overreact. Dennis sang T.P.'s favorite songs with him during transport and found animal magazines in the waiting room (T.P. has a soft spot for cute animals), which helped keep T.P. calm and take his mind off of the medical emergency. Dennis' quick thinking and calm approach minimized stress to T.P. and helped to prevent a bad situation from becoming worse. Dennis stayed with the person well after his guardians arrived at the hospital and didn't leave until the person said he was comfortable having Dennis depart.

Dennis has developed strong bonds with the people he supports, which are displayed by the way these persons interact with him and talk about him. When asked about what they are looking forward to doing on the weekend, L.B. says she can't wait to work on puzzles with Dennis. Dennis goes out of his way to make sure he spends one-on-one time with each person he supports, no matter how busy his shifts become. J.S. often communicates that he wants Dennis to take him to the bank and will wait for Dennis to work before going to the bank. Some behaviors J.S. exhibits are his way of communicating his wants and needs, and J.S. only exhibits positive behavior when Dennis is working.

Dennis' bond with L.B. was displayed when he helped her through a court hearing. After Dennis talked with her about the hearing process, L.B. specifically asked, on multiple occasions, if Dennis would be

there with her and was comforted to know he would be.

Dennis is a great advocate for the people he supports. Dennis participates in organized lobbying days each year and educates his friends and family. Dennis' greatest impact is directly with the people he supports, though, by continually looking for ways to promote choice and maximize independence.

As T.P.'s health has declined over the past year he has expressed an interest in retiring. T.P.'s team was resistant to the idea, but T.P. continued to express this desire, both verbally and through aggressive behaviors. Dennis spoke with T.P.'s team on multiple occasions and would not give up on advocating for T.P. Dennis addressed the team's concerns by communicating specifically why T.P. would benefit from retirement and how we could design programming to keep him engaged throughout the day. In September of this year T.P. started full retirement, on a trial basis, and it has been a success, largely due to the efforts and input from Dennis!

Dennis strongly believes in providing consistency and has made great sacrifices in his personal life in order to provide consistency to the people he supports. Like many people in our industry, Dennis works for more than one company and works every weekend, which mean less time with his family. Dennis works long shifts on the weekend to avoid the need for his shift to be split into two positions, with one being a shorter shift, and to help provide consistent staffing for the people he supports. Dennis has seen high turnover with employees working short shifts and wants to do everything he can to maximize consistency.

Dennis is continually seeking ways to improve supports. L.B. needs to stay busy and thrives when receiving attention, so a goal was developed for her to spend one-on-one time with staff working on puzzles or other activities. Dennis identified the need to specify the other activities in the written plan and prompt L.B. to choose from the listed activities. Also, Dennis discovered that increasing the amount of one-on-one time by just a little bit corresponded with a large decrease in target behaviors exhibited by L.B. at other times of the day. Although Dennis did not design this goal, his creative input improved the effectiveness of the goal.

Although he does not have a formal leadership role, Dennis is a leader among his peers. When L.B. moved into the home Dennis quickly learned how to best implement her goals and modeled her programming for his coworkers. When a coworker failed to adequately follow up on a healthcare log, Dennis implemented the needed follow up and provided coaching to the coworker. Dennis has a special talent for positively providing feedback to coworkers, which always appropriate and well received.