

# Dungarvin

2014 ANCOR Direct Support Professional of the Year Nomination

--- **INDIANA STATE WINNER!** ---



**Shannon Abraham – Dungarvin Indiana**

*nomination submitted by Linda Lane, Area Director*

Kyle is not a 'typical' young man with a developmental disability. He is hearing impaired with severe articulation impairment. Because of this, he is self-conscious and reluctant to speak to others in the community. He lives on a farm and prefers to be in the fields on a tractor or in the barn rather than in the community learning skills and developing relationships. It has always been difficult to find staff who can work successfully with him because of his limited interests and reluctance to venture off the farm. Shannon has been able to get him into the community for social and recreational events and to speak up for himself in many new environments. While he is still most confident picking up parts at the farm machinery store, he can now order a meal at a restaurant, choose a movie and purchase a ticket, and socialize with peers at Special Olympics golf, due to Shannon's support and guidance.

Shannon was able to connect with Kyle by spending time with him in his world—on the farm—before encouraging him to spend time in 'our' world—his community. Where other staff quailed at the thought, she did not hesitate to go tramping through the mud in the barnyard among the dairy herd or to ride with Kyle on the 'gator' (an ATV) out in the cornfields to take supplies or parts for the combine to his dad. By showing an interest in his world, she was able to gain his trust when he ventured into the intimidating world of the community at large.

Shannon supports Kyle as he explores the community initially on-line from the safety of his living room or at the library before selecting events and activities in which to participate. She models a 'can do' approach in her advocacy, supporting his increasing exposure in the community. She smoothes the way for him by introducing his concerns to people he will encounter in each new environment, so that they are as prepared as possible to respond to Kyle in a positive way. Shannon knows that a positive experience for Kyle is likely to be just as positive for the people he meets in the community. That positive experience ripples out from each encounter, helping ensure the success of their next experience with a person with a disability.

In addition to Shannon's work with Kyle, she is a full time student pursuing a nursing degree with a minor in music (for which she has a scholarship). Between classes, study, and work, she says she rarely goes out with friends or spends time with her family. She is often willing to take on an extra shift if someone calls off.

In helping Kyle increase his involvement in the community, Shannon tried to build on Kyle's interest in farming. She searched on line for activities related to farming—FFA groups, farm tours, Soil and Water Conservation groups—for events and groups that Kyle might feel comfortable engaging in. While she encourages Kyle to come up with his own list of activities, she always comes prepared with her own ideas for him based on her research. She always tries to use what interests him about the farm to springboard his connection to an activity in the community, building on his comfort level and success.

While Shannon is young and still learning, she has demonstrated excellent work skills with regard to dependability and initiative. She learns quickly and is gaining confidence in her ability to model skills with peers.