

Dungarvin

2014 ANCOR Direct Support Professional of the Year Nomination

--- WISCONSIN STATE WINNER! ---



Ericka Huffman – Dungarvin Wisconsin

nomination submitted by Mandy Kluge, Program Director

DSP Ericka Huffman's activities/accomplishments are best seen in the positive impact she has made on the lives of the individuals with whom she works. One specific example involves C.H., an individual who struggles with maintaining natural supports as his family has never been a consistent part of his life. Ericka has helped C.H. fill that void by dedicating herself to ensuring he has friends in the community. Ericka facilitates regular contact between C.H. and his peers at both Special Olympics and church. Ericka also sought out volunteers so that C.H. could have his own "people" to look forward to seeing, giving him equal bragging rights with his housemates about important people in his life. C.H. has blossomed and, for the first time in numerous years, is excited when the phone rings as the person on the other line may be calling for him. When a housemate mentions going home to visit family, it does not immediately cause C.H. to become depressed, but rather he will ask to call one of his own friends - relationships he has established with the help of Ericka. C.H.'s life has been enriched through building these personal relationships.

All the individuals with whom Ericka works think the world of her - especially D.R., who considers Ericka part of her family. When Ericka was not feeling well, D.R. asked the staff who was covering if they could make chicken noodle soup for Ericka so that she would feel better and return to work. D.R. looks up to Ericka so much so that she dressed up as Ericka for Halloween this year! Another individual, C.H., has a smile on his face as soon as he sees Ericka walk in the door and, when Ericka isn't working, another individual (W.R.) will ask when she coming back. M.C. is calling Ericka's name as soon as she steps off the van that brings her home from day program each day and she is disappointed if Ericka is not there. Ericka's love for the individuals is only matched by their love for her—it's pure mutual admiration. While on vacation, Ericka called every night to talk to the individuals for a few minutes to check on them and ask about their days. This is one example of how being a DSP is more than just a job to Ericka.

This year was a special birthday for D.R. and she wanted to take a trip to Florida. D.R. has never flown in

a plane or been that far away from home before. D.R.'s guardian immediately rejected the idea. Ericka sat down with D.R. and helped her to formulate her thoughts about the trip. Together they created a list of points for the guardian to reconsider the decision. Ericka advocated and she helped D.R. advocate for herself, laying out all the reasons a trip to Florida would be beneficial and a good experience. D.R.'s case manager happened to be visiting the home while Ericka and D.R. were working on the list and, after hearing Ericka's reasons for advocating for D.R. to take the trip to Florida, also attempted to persuade the guardian. In the end, D.R. did not get to go to Florida. As an alternative, Ericka took her to a local beach where they spent the day swimming and basking in the sun, along with a picnic lunch. It was as close to a Florida experience as one can have in Wisconsin. D.R. was happy to get her special day, and a Florida trip is now one of her life goals.

Ericka has devoted herself to the individuals she supports. She does not make her own family's holiday plans until she knows what the needs of the individuals are. Ericka is especially sensitive to C.H. All of C.H.'s housemates go for overnight visits with families on holidays. As an alternative, Ericka takes C.H. to a hotel to spend holiday nights, giving up her evening with her own family. Ericka does this because C.H.'s housemates stay overnight, and she wants to ensure that C.H. has equal experiences to his peers. C.H. thinks a night in a hotel is a fun and special experience. Ericka also attends all Special Olympic events in which the individuals participate, which covers almost every sport. She often sacrifices her own weekends to go to the Special Olympics events because she wants to make sure each individual has their own personal cheerleader. If you ask Ericka, though, she does not view what she does for the individuals as a sacrifice. She loves being able to share these memories with them and being a positive part of their lives.

The individuals that live in the Crittenden program are very active in their daily living skills. To better assist them with being as independent as possible, Ericka is always making minor modifications within the home. For example, she created a sign for the front of the dishwasher. When happy face is out, the dishes are clean and when sad face is out, the dishes are dirty. While this is very minor, it is the cue the individuals need to allow them the independence with completing the task of using the dishwasher. While still dependent upon staff to change the sign accordingly, it provides them the confidence needed to complete the task without needing to seek out staff. In addition, there are multiple modifications within the home to assist D.R. and W.R. to be as independent as possible with their visual impairments.

Ericka's skills in working with the supported individuals and their teams, along with her ability to facilitate teamwork within the home, make her an asset to the organization. Ericka is a role model for others, and has assisted with the training of new staff. Ericka is often recruited to train at other sites because she not only trains on the fundamentals of the job, she exemplifies core values that we want in all staff: compassion, genuine positive regard, and respect. Even as a fill-in staff, Ericka strives for excellence. She will stay late to ensure any issues found are either taken care of or a plan is in place for resolution. Ericka consistently receives high marks from her co-workers and she has been recognized by outside entities for her excellence as well. On more than one occasion, case managers have taken the time to send an acknowledgement to upper management because they wish to ensure Ericka is properly recognized for the excellent work that she does. The strongest testimony, however, comes directly from the individuals we support. The care and love they feel from Ericka makes their lives richer, happier and provides a basic sense of security so important for all us.