

Dungarvin

2014 ANCOR Direct Support Professional of the Year Nomination



Michael Suggs – Dungarvin Wisconsin

nomination submitted by Keith Jones, Program Services Coordinator

Mike works with an individual, A.F., who has intellectual disabilities and, due to his aggressive history, has had limited community access. Mike recognized the progress that A.F. has made over the past couple of years and advocated for A.F. to have more access to the community. As a result of advocacy efforts, A.F. had a successful trip into the community to a recording studio to record a CD/DVD, which was a lifelong dream of his - being a rock star. A.F. has also started taking guitar lessons and is currently being considered for a volunteer job with a local non-profit organization, which is giving him a sense of pride and accomplishment. These activities have enriched A.F.'s life and Mike was a force in advocating for A.F. to start engaging in these experiences that have improved his quality of life.

A.F. has commented repeatedly that Mike talks to him in a very kind manner. He has also stated that he feels a connection to Mike. Mike was off work for a period of time and A.F. would ask daily where he was and was concerned for his well being. For A.F. to feel that level of empathy for another speaks volumes about the rapport he and Mike have established. Mike has made it a point not to automatically put up boundaries or barriers in their relationship based on A.F.'s past; rather, Mike treats him with regard, kindness and respect. Mike goes to great lengths to make A.F. feel comfortable talking to him and he has built a trusting relationship with him. A.F. learned to garden a couple of years ago, which is something in which he takes great pride. Mike gets involved with A.F. in his gardening because he knows it means so much to A.F. Mike also takes the time to listen to A.F. play the guitar and talks to him about music, which A.F. feels gives them a connection over something he is passionate about— his love of music.

Mike was an integral part of A.F.'s team in advocating for him to have increased access to the community. A.F. participated in a project in which a state Developmental Disabilities network created a DVD, showcasing how individuals with challenging behaviors can be successfully supported and integrated into the community. A.F. was sought out to participate in this video because of his successes. The commitment of staff, including Mike, has been a key component of A.F.'s success. The video made by the

DD network focuses on “sticking” with individuals who may present challenges. Mike is one of those staff who “sticks”.

Mike has the work history and experience to be in a management level position; however, he enjoys providing direct care and has elected to stay in a DSP position because it is where his true passion lies. Mike’s wife is experiencing significant health issues. Mike has sacrificed time with her to continue to support A.F. because of he recognizes the importance of stability and consistency for him. Mike travels a significant distance to work. Even though it is a lot of “windshield time” in the car, he makes the long commute every day because he enjoys working with A.F., even though the travel time is time he could be spending with his wife. Mike has always been willing to come in extra hours when an additional DSP is needed to accompany A.F. on a community outing. He can always be counted on to do whatever is needed for A.F.

One area in which A.F. struggled was sorting laundry. He frequently would try to wash his whites and colors together because he felt it was too difficult to sort the clothes first. Mike suggested getting a white laundry basket for A.F.’s white clothes and a colored laundry basket for his colors, making it easier for him to sort as he goes on a daily basis. This creative thinking has helped A.F. be successful in his daily routine. It is a simple, but effective, system that works for A.F.

Mike has over 19 years of experience in the human services arena and is a shining example of what it is to be a DSP. He is a natural leader and has taken it upon himself to help other staff when they are struggling with how to interact effectively with A.F. He has reliable follow through, is extremely detailed in his documentation, demonstrates a level of professionalism that is second to none, accepts feedback openly and constantly strives to improve. He is an excellent role model for A.F. and his co-workers alike.