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Helping Alaskans with Differing Abilities Experience Hope Since 1968

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Dear Friends, Family, and Stakeholders,

After I graduated from college, a friend invited me to move across the country to work in a small institution supporting children and adults with disabilities. This opportunity did not fulfill a life goal, nor was it even on a list of possibilities, but it was close to the beach and I felt impelled to say yes.

Rolling into the parking lot of my new job and seeing the residents of the institution coming down the walkway, my brother who had accompanied me on the drive from Colorado asked, "Are you going to stay here?" My reluctant reply, "Yes..." changed my life and the trajectory of my career.

Long before the job had a title, I began my career as a Direct Support Professional (DSP), and a passion I had not been aware of blossomed as I was taught by those I supported to see ability rather than disability, to listen rather than to direct, and to advocate with people who became friends and family. Some of the friendships I made during this first job have literally lasted a lifetime. I consider myself fortunate to be a part of these friends' lives and be a witness and support to truly wonderful, full lives.

My story is not unique – the role of the Direct Support Professional does not rise to the top of highlighted career paths and many come to the profession via invitation by friends or family. However, in my career in non-profit leadership, I have been humbled by countless individuals who also answered "yes" when asked to consider the opportunity. Many of my colleagues have devoted their lives and careers to the service and support of others as Direct Support Professionals. Mother Teresa remarked that kind words are easy to speak, but their echoes are endless. The Direct Support Professional embodies this message through their daily small actions of kindness, often in the privacy of someone's home, without laurels or accolades.

This week, September 13-19, 2020, kicks off national recognition of Direct Support Professionals, honoring individuals across the country who provide daily gifts of care, support, teaching, and mentoring to elders, those with intellectual or physical disabilities, and those with mental health challenges.

Our Alaskan communities are enriched by diversity, and the skills and dedication of Direct Support Professionals enable so many Alaskans to be active participants in their community of choice. A rich tapestry of stories can be shared highlighting the impact of DSPs on individual lives, and I've been blessed to witness countless positive outcomes resulting from this commitment.

It's only fitting to take this moment to recognize these dedicated members of our community, to acknowledge the wonderful outcomes they help facilitate, the partnerships and relationships they commit to, and during this pandemic the creativity and resilience they have demonstrated. Please join me in saying a profound "Thank You!" to those who have chosen this field of service. Each of you are deeply appreciated!

Best,

Michele Girault, CEO
Hope Community Resources