



Dear Friends,

Today, as many of us pause in reflection to honor those who gave their lives in the service of others on 9/11, I am compelled to share with you an incredible story that unfolded over the summer involving one of our staff who also chose to run toward danger to help others.

John Riek has worked as a Direct Support Professional for Hope Community Resources since October 2015. He is a Resident Manager in one of Hope's Assisted Living Homes, providing support for adult men with disabilities. John is a gentle and humble man who consistently looks for the good in others.

John grew up in Sudan and has been witness to the horrors of war – in ways I will never be able to fathom. When armed conflict between two military factions broke out in April, the fighting concentrated around the capital city of Khartoum where members of John's family live. As the fighting became more aggressive, John came to my office indicating he had to go to Sudan. I attempted to discourage him, knowing the effort would put him in extreme danger, but I also understood he was compelled to take action to help others who were in harm's way. John was thorough in his planning and had a clear response to every "what if" question I asked him.

This story is far richer than what I can share with you today, but it is a story of the power of one person's investment in the good of others and the impact that commitment can have.



John is a man of deep faith, and his church community supported him with funds that he used to arrange for trucks and buses to take community members from North Sudan to South Sudan, which was a journey fraught with danger. More than 4,000 people were assisted in evacuating because of John's persistence and love. He continued the journey helping family and others to find safer housing and refugee services in South Sudan and Ethiopia. Once he felt his family members were stable, John returned home to Anchorage last week.

While this story is extraordinary, the quality of character to execute such a momentous undertaking is something I see day after day in the Direct Support Professionals we and others employ. Like the first responders on 9/11, these staff consistently show an exemplary level of commitment to the welfare of others.

John's choice to run toward danger saved the lives of thousands, and I am humbled and inspired by his act of selfless courage. As we reach out this week to thank all Direct Support Professionals for their service to those with disabilities, mental health challenges, and to elders, a special thanks goes to John for demonstrating the qualities we so appreciate in DSPs in a way that will never be forgotten.

Sincerely,

Michele Girault

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Executive Director

