



Dear Friends,

As the swell of divisive voices rises in our community, and the collective weariness of pandemic-related issues weighs us down, I have been anchored and buoyed by the quieter and yet more formidable voices of those who have chosen a life of service to others.

In neighborhoods across our state and nation there are amazingly dedicated people working to support, teach, and mentor people who experience disabilities. Several weeks ago, we took a moment to stop and deeply appreciate the humility, dedication, creativity, tenacity, and resilience of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). Throughout the pandemic the impact of those who choose this profession became a bright light during a dark time. In Alaska Direct Support Professionals have been heroic in their commitment to “show up” during unprecedented workforce shortages, helping to keep those they support engaged and safe. But the dedication I’ve witnessed has greater expanse than the past two years of the pandemic.

I recently attended a celebration of life for a wonderful man Hope was honored to support named Ted. Amid grief was an inspiring story of a *30-year* relationship between Ted and his primary live-in support staff Steve and his wife Dawn, and Sue who worked daily shifts for many years. As employers struggle to recruit and retain employees across Alaska, stopping to reflect on and appreciate the decades of a relationship that went far beyond “work responsibilities” was a breath of fresh air and a grounding in good. Ted’s parents and siblings were partners and trusted friends throughout these three decades, and “Team Ted” was formidable in breaking down barriers to accessibility and facilitating opportunities for a full and adventurous life. The tears, laughter, and wonderful stories validated the power of this long-lasting and powerful circle of love and support.

The beauty of this example is not unique to Steve, Dawn, and Sue. I continue to be humbled by the wholehearted enthusiasm and commitment expressed by many DSPs I am privileged to know and work alongside. At a time where many are walking away from professions understandably fatiguing, I know many Direct Support Professionals who have worked decades with the same people, providing security, continuity, and the type of respectful and loving relationships we all long for.

Rather than focusing on the self-centered narrative that so clamors for attention, I am so grateful to witness the selfless service of people like Steve, Dawn, Sue and their many colleagues, who daily reframe the lens to focus on what is truly important and give us all hope.

Regards,

Michele Girault
Executive Director

Additional Information:
www.hopealaska.org