



**Nebraska Association of Service Providers
Direct Support Professional Recognition Week 2021
Top 10 Talent**

1. Kodjo Nami was essential when an individual had to be removed due to an emergency from an SLP to a residential group home. He has personally trained all new staff on how to work with the individual at both the day site and the residence. It was his flexibility in changing his entire schedule that allowed this person to remain in our day and residential services. Kodjo owns his own personal business in addition to being a DSP and was still able to do what it takes to help us keep this person safe and happy. When it comes to filling in and taking shifts, Kodjo is always more than happy to help if he is not already scheduled. This individual is currently thriving, he is the healthiest he has been in 2 years, he is participating in the community, he is actively involved his day-to-day routine more than ever, and this person's parents are extremely satisfied with their son's progress.

While at the day site Kodjo has been essential with supporting his manager during crisis situations. When staff (including the manager) are overwhelmed, Kodjo steps in and assists with ease. There is not a task too large or too small for Kodjo, nor a problem brought to him by the individuals he supports that he cannot tackle with them while making them feel important and involved.

Kodjo looks out for his fellow teammates. He is consistently observing and willing to switch out with peers when their person has been too stressful to support. He can sense when his peers need a break and does not hesitate to switch staffing. Kodjo cancelled his holiday plans to work at a house due to other staff not wanting to pick it up. Kodjo has done this on 3 separate occasions in the past year.

Kodjo models all of our agency's values. He is never seen without a pleasant thing to say and a smile on his face. His peers look up to him and find him to be a fantastic role model. He offers to help staff with any situation. His patience and calm demeanor translate into successful when supporting more difficult individuals and can de-escalate any situation immediately.

When you ask Kodjo about his job, he is here for the people. He is here because he wants to provide equal opportunity for those we serve. He never boasts, he will never accept tokens of appreciation because he is here for them and for them only. To top it off Kodjo has not been late to a shift...ever! (Kodjo was nominated unanimously by his Area Director, all 5 area coordinators, and the entire management team of the most deserving person to be recognized and worthy of this honor - ILC)

2. Christie Dennis takes our core values very seriously and strives to help people build meaningful relationships with those around them! The ladies she works with love people and being involved in life around them. Christie is always looking for opportunities to help them gather with friends. She comes up with creative ways to get them connected with people so that they can have authentic relationships. One week it may be a painting party, another smore's and boardgames. Planned or impromptu, it doesn't matter! She doesn't shy away from the extra work that it takes to help the ladies host gatherings or plan trips to see the cranes, go to the zoo, check out a pumpkin patch, the list continues to go on and on.

Christie is selfless. She steps up willingly when she is needed in locations/shifts that are not her regular one. She has trained with numerous other people so that if needed she can step in. Previously she worked one-on-one with a person many others were not able to work with; patiently, respectfully assisting this person to live the best life she possible...letting the flowery names that she was called -- sometimes multiple times a day--- roll off her back...often defusing her through humor or just letting her know she understood. And when she came to me and talked about this lady, it was with a smile and fondness or maybe some sadness that she couldn't fix things for her. Not once do I remember it being with sheer exasperation or frustration! She is respectful to others whether they are people we support, staff, family, or just others in the community.

Christie assisted the ladies in planning a vacation with friends to Branson, MO. (This was the 1st time any of the ladies went on a vacation with more than family, just their roommates and/or just staff. And she was excited to help them make this happen! Even though 2 of the ladies use wheelchairs, it didn't limit her vision of what could be done on this trip. Even people she doesn't work with directly get so excited to go places with her because she always finds something they enjoy and visits with them about it.

Christie is a problem solver, and provides an environment filled with positivity and security. And no matter what's going on in her personal life, she puts her all into making sure that the ladies she works with feel safe and relaxed in their home! (Nominated by Anni Schaldecker - **Region V**)

3. Jenifer Phinney is one of the most amazing people I know. She has the heart of Jesus and the actions of Captain Marvel. Every day she gets up to help people. She works endless hours. She never says no. I realize that is not healthy, but she wants to help everyone! She is our medical DSP and works the floor every day. She picks up hours constantly to work with emergency shared living placements, in-home hours, taking people to appointments, and constantly communicating with stakeholders and families. She helps individuals get groceries, get their medicine, and learn to communicate with their devices. She always wants them to be as independent as possible. The picture I sent is just one unbelievable example of her taking an individual who ALWAYS utilizes a wheelchair. Yet, that day she took her swimming and got her into a flotation tube instead of her wheelchair! That is just superhero quality! Everyday Jenifer does these amazing things for our individuals. Last week she worked her regular day hours and then worked another 30 hours to care for an emergency shared living placement for an individual with significant behavioral needs. She always steps up to help when needed. A few weeks ago, she worked an extra twenty hours getting an individual admitted into the hospital so she could get the care she needed for her medical and mental health when no one else would care for her needs. There is nothing she wouldn't do to help those we serve. (Nominated by Danelle Hayes – **Goodwill**, photo included)
4. Zach Johnson puts everything he has into the shifts that he works. He has never missed the documentation after his shifts, runs programming properly, never had a medication error, he is always on time, and never calls off. He follows all of our policies and procedures and carries himself with integrity.

Now for the real reason that Zach deserves recognition! Zach interacts with the people that we support as peers, treating them with as much respect and altruism as he does his co-workers and supervisors. He makes the shifts fun for any individual that he is supporting, gets them involved in activities, and creates person centered plans for outings. After he works, the person supported always asks when he will be back. Zach is a role model and mentor for his coworkers. His overall positive and laid-back attitude is unmatched during high stress situations. He remains calm, follows plans, and diffuses situations.

Zach's dedication is unsurpassed. Throughout the course of the pandemic, Zach has helped anywhere needed. Ranging from picking up a variety of different shifts (there isn't one he won't do), coming up with new creative ways to continue engagement, and making life easier for everyone around him. Zach always has an upbeat attitude and smile on his face, which inspires all of us who have the privilege to work with him. (Nominated by Tinara Rust - **ILC**)

5. Lisa Hutchins has been with Region V Services for 25 years! She has been a part of many changes throughout her time with us. She has been extremely influential in our contract with Source America and has helped dozens of individuals with disabilities learn how to work and earn their own money. These skills have also assisted individuals in attaining work in the community. Lisa demonstrates our core values on a daily basis. She has pride in her work, displays excellence in the day-to-day requirements, shows enthusiasm and creativity, and maintains a level of integrity that leaves no doubt she is here for the right reasons. She has been a member of the Public Education and Information (PEI) committee for the last 7 years and has been a wonderful representation of

Region V Services in this capacity. She gets excited about new ideas, loves to help individuals as well as co-workers learn new skills to make their days and lives more meaningful, and her work truly reflects her loyalty and commitment to those we serve. She is an advocate in every sense of the word and her sincerity is hard to match. She has tremendous work ethic and is always willing to help whenever and wherever she is needed, even if it isn't within her "job description." When asked why she keeps coming to work, she says "I love working with the people we serve. I love helping others and seeing excitement when people learn new things and realize they can be successful in many ways. This is a very rewarding job, and I really love it." (Nominated by Kristen Easley - **Region V**)

6. Danielle Alferink is the epitome of what a DSP should be: motivated, compassionate, and empowering. Danielle has been a DSP just over 5 years. During those 5 years Danielle has graduated college, decided she wants to continue her education, and is pursuing a degree at Bryan (which she wants to use to become a psychiatric Nurse Practitioner), and continues to be the matriarch of her family. As if that wasn't enough, Danielle was diagnosed with breast cancer in March of this year. But she does not let that stop her! She manages to still hold a full-time schedule with us where she encourages and empowers her individuals to make strides toward their goals. (Nominated by Hannah Otte - **CSN**)
7. Rhonda Roberts & Tracy Niederklein work as a team at a residential group home with three ladies. During June not only did the three ladies in the home come down with COVID, but Rhonda and Tracy did as well. They took it upon themselves to cover the shifts night and day 24/7 with these ladies while sick themselves in order to save other staff from being exposed. They went above and beyond to protect their fellow co-workers and during that time made the ladies feel comfortable, well cared for, and demonstrated the teamwork that exists between co-workers to provide care and support daily. The reliability, accomplishment, dedication and caring attitude is what drives these ladies when working with those they support. (Nominated by Lisa Meyer - **Region V**)
8. Dawn Swoboda is a longstanding DSP at ILC. Dawn was the only DSP who has stayed with us at Magnum South throughout the pandemic. She has a "go-getter" attitude and is always willing to help at the day site with whatever task is needed to be completed. She also goes above and beyond by completing tasks that can often go unnoticed without direction from the VM or VC to do so.

Organization and cleanliness is a priority. She does a great job at ensuring the day site location is clean and orderly and the environment is top notch. She has proven herself to be competent in job responsibilities by promoting to an Assistant Vocational Manager. Since then, she has been completing billing, data checks, van maintenance checklists, and any other task the VM as assigned to her to do.

Dawn knows programs of the people she supports and does a great job at following them. She offers suggestions and ask questions as well to continuously look for ways to better someone's life. She has been recognized a DSP of the Month within the last year, has been nominated numerous times, and has received several impressions on Paylocity that includes being a team player, help, leadership, get it done, and mentor. She takes feedback well from her supervisors and you can see she genuinely wants to be the best at her job and lead her team of fellow DSPs. Dawn has gone on several trips with a person she supports to Sydney Ne. She understands how much this person misses their family and will take time away from her own family to ensure he gets to visit his. This is going above and beyond required job expectations and is what ILC's Promise is about: helping people we support live fulfilling lives. (Nominated by Denise Kraus - **ILC**)

9. Rob Koel cares deeply about the individuals in his care. He makes sure they are groomed, engages his individuals in activities outside of the group home. He routinely on his own time will take individuals out in the community for events. He makes sure the home is clean and safe. He assists with grocery shopping and makes sure to include the individuals in the home in choosing the meals. He encourages them to try new things and introduces new

foods. He also trains new staff and continues to offer them help and advice. Parents and guardians rave about how helpful he is to them. We are very lucky to have him on our staff. (Nominated by Melissa Hynes - **Vital**)

10. Lori Persson has worked with my brother Seth at NorthStar Services in West Point, NE for many years now. That alone is part of his success. We can't thank Lori enough for all the things that she has taught my brother to do. He has had success in tasks and activities that amaze us! Simple things like waiting his turn in line, being part of the group advocating at the legislature, or participating in Special Olympics. And then more complicated things like packaging gauze at a medical clinic. All of the activities and social situations that Seth can struggle with, Lori has been able to teach Seth how to navigate his anxiety and sensory issues. I am always impressed with Lori's advocacy on behalf of my brother! Her acceptance for who my brother is and can be are everything to our family. Thank you, Lori, for all of the wonderful things you have done that we never expected Seth to be able to do. His life is better with you in it! (Nominated by Amanda Anderson - **NorthStar**, photo included)