
*The Arc of Schuyler
Celebrates
National Direct Support
Professionals Recognition Week*

SEPTEMBER 14-19, 2009



National Direct Support Professionals Recognition Week

The system that provides supports to people with developmental disabilities has changed a great deal over the last 40 years. Across New York and the nation, it has evolved from a network of large, impersonal institutions to community-based solutions focused on individualized care. Families of people with intellectual and other disabilities have gone from having very little choice but to institutionalize their loved ones to opportunities to, with support, care for them at home or be near them at community residences.

This evolution would not have been possible without the skills and dedication of a special kind of worker, the direct support professional. While parents, advocates and policymakers set out the roadmap for change, it is the hard work and compassion of direct support workers who laid the foundation the system is built upon.

Today, these human services professionals form the backbone of The Arc of Schuyler. Their hands-on support of individuals with disabilities is at the core of The Arc's mission:

The Arc of Schuyler is committed to securing for all people with developmental disabilities the opportunity to choose and realize their goals: where and how they learn, live, work and play. This is accomplished by creating an environment of independence, productivity and integration through individualized services...

Direct support professionals do so in many ways. They are the job coaches who prepare people for employment, the service coordinators who see they get access to the help they need and the transportation workers who get them where they need to be. In our community residences, day programs and in individual's homes, direct support professionals assist with personal care, help with medical needs, assist with recreation and community inclusion and teach everyday living skills.

In short, direct support professionals have the primary responsibility of the

health, welfare and safety of the people we support.

It is difficult work. It requires a special set of physical, emotional and intellectual tools. It deserves recognition for what it is, a critical profession.

The United States Senate, in order to foster a greater community appreciation for the work of these key workers, has set aside the week of Sept. 14-19 as National Direct Support Professionals Week. The New York State Assembly has also designated the week as a time to thank and draw attention to the service of the more than 65,000 direct support professionals in the state.

The Arc of Schuyler joins the New York State Association of Community and Residential Agencies in thanking its direct support professionals for the care, advocacy and compassion they provide to the people in its programs, and calls on the community to recognize these human services professionals for their dedication and service.



The Arc Celebrates Direct Support Professionals Recognition Week

As part of its observation of Direct Support Professionals Recognition Week, the Board of Directors of The Arc of Schuyler approved the following resolution at its Sept. 15, 2009, board meeting:

RESOLUTION

Recognizing the week beginning September 14, 2009, as 'National Direct Support Professionals Recognition Week'

Whereas direct support professionals are the primary providers of publicly funded long term support and services for millions of individuals in our country;

Whereas a direct support professional must build a close, trusted relationship with an individual with disabilities;

Whereas a direct support professional assists an individual with disabilities with the most intimate needs, on a daily basis and provide a broad range of support, including--

- (1) preparation of meals;
- (2) helping with medications;
- (3) bathing;
- (4) dressing;
- (5) mobility;
- (6) getting to school, work, religious, and recreational activities; and
- (7) general daily affairs;

Whereas a direct support professional provides essential support to help keep an individual with disabilities connected to the family and community of the individual;

Whereas direct support professionals enable individuals with disabilities to live meaningful, productive lives;

Whereas direct support professionals are the key to allowing an individual with disabilities to live successfully in the community of the individual, and to avoid more costly institutional care;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Board of Directors of The Arc of Schuyler,

Recognizes and supports the week beginning September 14, 2009, as 'National Direct Support Professionals Recognition Week';

recognizes the dedication and vital role of direct support professionals in enhancing the lives of individuals with disabilities of all ages;

appreciates the contribution of direct support professionals in supporting the needs that reach beyond the capacities of hundreds of families in Schuyler County and surrounding community;

commends direct support professionals as integral in supporting the long-term support and services system of New York State; and

finds that the successful implementation of the public policies of our county depends on the dedication of direct support professionals.

National Alliance Sets Ethical Standards

The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals has established a code of ethics for people who provide this important work.

The code focuses on nine key points of a direct support worker's responsibilities. It calls on them to:

- Provide person-centered supports based on the needs and wishes of the person supported.
- Promote physical and emotional well-being, encouraging growth while reducing risk of harm.
- Act with integrity and responsibility

- Safeguard and respect confidentiality
- Promote justice, fairness and equity for the people supported, affirming their human and civil rights.

- Respect the human dignity and uniqueness of people supported.
- Assist the people supported in developing and maintaining relationships.
- Assist the people supported in directing the course of their own lives.

Advocate with the people supported



for justice, inclusion and community participation.

Learning the National Alliance's Code of Ethics is the first step in the organiza-

tion's credentialing program. By becoming credentials, direct support professionals demonstrate they have met a nationally established set of standards for direct support care.

For more information on the nationwide effort to raise the status of direct support professionals, visit www.nadsp.org.

Shawna Leonard, Direct Support Professional

Shawna Leonard already had lots of hands-on, helping experience when she came to The Arc of Schuylter more than two years ago as a direct support professional.

She had worked as a medication supervisor at a nursing home, assisted in the physical therapy department of a hospital and worked as a certified nurse's aide at another facility.

"This is the job I've loved best," she said of her work as a direct support professional in The Arc's day habilitation program.

It's the best job, she said, because of the one-on-one, personal nature of her work. She said she gets to know the individuals she provides supports to and enjoys helping them.

At the hospital, patients would come and go and it would be hard to make any real connection with them, she said. At The Arc, Leonard enjoys working with the same individuals every day.

"It's a lot different than caring for 24 patients by yourself or with a

What is most surprising about your work as a direct support professional?

Shawna Leonard said the most surprising thing about her work with people with disabilities is realizing nothing is off limits to the people she assists

"There isn't anything they can't do," she said. "They just need some assistance sometimes doing what they want."

Assistance might mean a piece of adaptive equipment, like a wheelchair, or modifying an activity to make it more accessible. But most often, Leonard said, the only thing a person with a disability needs is just a little extra time.

"Patience is the biggest thing," she said.

With patience and a little advance planning, she said, there is nothing a person with a disability can't participate in.

partner," she said. "We get to spend a lot more time with each individual, a lot of one-on-one interaction and attention. We get to know them real well."

Chad Mathews, who manages The Arc's Take-A-Break Café, suggested Leonard apply for a job at The Arc. She's happy she did. She has worked at The Arc's Canal Street residence and has filled in at each of the other residences, but said she really found her niche

when she moved to day habilitation two years ago.

Her coworkers say she has a special ability to connect, person to person, with the individuals in her program.

"Shawna goes above and beyond herself to make sure the people we serve have a chance to be part of the community," wrote her supervisor, Brenda Arcangeli. "Shawna always lets the people do as much as they can before assisting them. Shawna also manages to give everyone one-to-one attention throughout the day.

"I would consider her a role model because she sets an excellent example, not only for other staff but also for the people we serve," Arcangeli wrote.

Leonard said she's happy her career in human services has brought her to the work she does at The Arc, and said she hopes to do it as long as she is able.

"These guys need us," she said. "We care about them just like they're family. It is a rewarding job."



Liz Covert, Shift Leader

Liz Covert said there is a basic question she asks herself when thinking about how to do her job: How would I like someone to help me with this if I were the one needing supports?

It is a simple but powerful tool. By considering how she would like to be treated, and then acting that way, Liz is assured she is preserving the dignity, health and safety of the individuals she works with.

“I think it is very important,” said Covert, a shift leader at The Arc of Schuyler’s Canal Street residence in Montour Falls. “I know that, at any moment, it could be someone I love or even myself in their position.”

Covert has worked for The Arc for four years as a direct support professional in the residential program. She applied to The Arc on the recommendation of a friend who worked with the agency. That friend tried to describe to Covert the kind of work she’d be doing, but it wasn’t until she was on the job Covert realized all that direct support involved.

“There were lots of surprises, I have to say,” she said.

One of the biggest was learning just how rewarding the work could be.

“I have always worked,” she said. “I have worked since I was 16. I worked in food service, where you basically could get paid about the same (as in direct support). But it is so different. It is very rewarding to do things for people, to know you are able to help them.”

In other jobs she’s had, she focused on getting her work done and getting paid. In food service, she says, it never really mattered how

hard she worked. You have this many orders to fill, she said, and you fill them.

As a direct support professional, Covert said she gets to focus on how to do the job the best way and how to make sure the individuals she

supports receive the best possible care.

Her favorite aspect of working with the residents at Canal Street is recreation and community inclusion. She said she gets excited finding new opportunities for the residents and works hard at getting to know what they’re interested in and enjoy.



Covert studied at Corning Community College for two years and would like to continue her education someday. She’s looking into nursing programs. Her work as a direct support professional has given her valuable experience she can apply in a medical career.

“I am very interested in nursing, and I would love to be able to do it in this field,” she said.

What is most surprising about your work as a direct support professional?

Liz Covert said the most surprising thing about her work as a direct support professional is the individualized nature of the services she helps provide.

“I thought it would be more like a big institution,” she said of her first visit to the Route 79 residence, her first placement with The Arc. “But it wasn’t. It was just like an ordinary home. I loved seeing their rooms and seeing they all had their own things. I loved getting to know their individual likes and dislikes.”

One lesson she quickly learned, she says, is it is the individual who is in control.

“They are our bosses,” she says. “It’s not everyone else deciding for them. They decide what they want, and we help them make it happen.”

Pat Pritchard, Direct Support Professional

Pat Pritchard had worked for many years at a direct mail manufacturer in Elmira when he realized he wanted to do something new.

"I just decided one day I was at the end of my factory road," said Pritchard, who had also supervised a pizza restaurant for 13 years.

Pritchard has a family friend with developmental disabilities. He said he had always enjoyed spending time with the man, but had never considered direct support work as a career. With his days at the factory winding down, Pritchard's son suggested he give direct support work a try.

So he came to The Arc of Schuyler and has never looked back. He has worked the overnight shift at The Arc's residences, mostly the Cedar Street residence in Watkins Glen, for more than five years.

"I would say this is much, much more fulfilling than factory work,"

he said. "In a factory, you don't get a lot of self-satisfaction. The gratitude you get is different. A 'Thank you' means a lot more to you here than at a factory or a pizza joint."

Another big advantage of his job with The Arc is the time he gets to spend with his family. Long days in the factory and pizza place had him missing his family. Now, working overnights, Pritchard said he is home more.

"For me, it's worked out great," he said. "I worked a ton of hours in my other jobs. It's nice knowing I



can have my time at work and time with my family again. This job gives you plenty of time for both."

On an overnight shift, Pritchard starts about 11 p.m. Most of the residents are already in bed by then, he said. During the night, he does laundry and work around the house while making hourly checks on the residents. If someone needs assistance, he's ready to help.

The busy morning routine begins at 5 a.m. Pritchard helps the residents get ready for their day. Along with the regular responsibilities of bathing, dressing and breakfast, Pritchard tries to get all the residents off to a happy start. It might mean taking the time to throw a ball around or to share some jokes, but Pritchard says it's worth it.

"I try to get them in a real good frame of mind so, when they leave, they're happy," he said.

What is most surprising about your work as a direct support professional?

Pat Pritchard said two things surprised him the most about a direct support professional's work. He was surprised how much personal care – bathing, toileting and so on – some people with developmental disabilities require, and even more surprised he was able to provide that care.

Initially, he found assisting individuals with personal needs very difficult.

"Four hours into my first day, I was looking for the door. I was that taken aback," he said.

Then he made a personal connection with one of the residents. Mutual trust built up, and Pritchard found he was able to assist the man with personal care. He credits the man with saving his career.

"I thought, if I can work with him, I can work with the other individuals," he said.

"My first month here was tough, but now it's second nature," he said. "Once you get to relate with someone, it's really no different than taking care of a family member."

Sherwood nominated for NYSARC direct support professional award

Karen Petrie, The Arc of Schuyler's director of nursing services, put it bluntly when describing Teresa Sherwood.

"When I think of what it means to be a true advocate, and a true supporter, I think of Teresa," Petrie said in announcing Sherwood's nomination for the Thomas A. Maul Direct Support Professional Excellence Award.

Sherwood, who joined The Arc in 2001, seems a perfect candidate

for the award, which recognizes direct support professionals who demonstrate excellence, creativity and commitment in providing supports to people with intellectual and other disabilities. It was established by NYSARC, Inc., the statewide organization of which The Arc of Schuyler is a chapter, to honor Thomas A. Maul, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities from 1993 to 2006.

When it comes to providing supports to people with disabilities, Sherwood has done it all. She has worked as a direct support professional, a cook and as a medical support professional. She has worked at each of The Arc's residences, assisted in the day habilitation program and has even taken her skills on the road, accompanying people supported by The Arc on trips and vacations.

Sherwood has been active in developing her professional skills, recently becoming a CPR instructor and participating in the Disabilities Studies Certificate Program, which provides opportunities for direct

support professionals to pursue a college degree.

"But what really sets Teresa apart is her selfless compassion for the people she supports," Petrie said.

She cited Sherwood's advocacy and care for a woman she supports as an example of her compassion. When the woman began showing declines in her functional abilities, Sherwood accompanied the woman through many tests and consultations and, when surgery out of town became necessary, provided an important link between the woman and her new medical team. She supported the woman and her family through the complicated surgery and recovery.

NYSARC presents the Maul Award, which includes a \$2,500 prize, to a direct support professional in each of its four regional divisions at its annual convention, planned for Oct. 22 to 24 in Albany. This year, NYSARC, Inc. is celebrating 60 years of advocacy for families and individuals with developmental disabilities throughout New York State.



Stephanie Magura, Program Coordinator

When Stephanie Magura graduated from the State University of New York at Cortland last December, she wasn't sure how she would put her degree in psychology to work. Then she landed a position with The Arc of Schuyler.

Now, as a residential program coordinator, Magura uses what she has learned in school to help people with developmental disabilities while gaining valuable experience for her future.

Magura joined The Arc in March. She never planned to begin her career providing direct support to people with disabilities, she says.

"I never even thought about it," she said. "It is a new thing for me."

She swiftly found she enjoyed the work.

"It's the individuals, first and foremost," she said. "I enjoy helping them be all they can be."

Magura said the job is giving her valuable hands-on experience for

wherever her career may lead her. One of the things she's learning to focus on, she said, is an appreciation for small improvements.

"It is exciting to see progress," she said. "You can see improvement being made in little steps."

The thing that has surprised her the most, she said, is how different the individuals she works with are from the stereotypes.

"I don't think (the public) knows how capable they are," she said.

The Arc of Schuyler

203 Twelfth Street
Watkins Glen, NY 14891
607-535-6934
www.arcofschuyler.org

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 8
Watkins Glen, NY
14891

Board of Directors

June 2009—May 2010

Harold J. Hoffmeier, Jr., P.A., *President*

G. Thomas Harrison, *Vice President*

Michael Stamp, *Treasurer*

Shirley Kohena, *Secretary*

David Bartone
Michael DeNardo
Barbara Frank
Matthew Hayden, Esq.
Marcia Kasprzyk
Louis Leach
Jeffrey Schultz, DDS
Nancy Thomas

Our Mission

The Arc of Schuyler is committed to securing for all people with developmental disabilities the opportunity to choose and realize their goals: where and how they learn, live, work and play. This is accomplished by creating an environment of independence, productivity and integration through individualized services.

The Arc is further committed to reducing the incidence and limiting the consequence of developmental disabilities through education, research and advocacy, and the support of families, friends and community.

Through the successful pursuit of quality and justice, The Arc provides leadership in the field of disabilities and develops the necessary human and financial resources to attain its goals.

The Arc also provides community leadership by participation in a wide variety of activities that make our region a better place to live for all citizens.