

DSP Awards



2020

**AGENCY
WORKFORCE
MANAGEMENT**

Celebrating those who have gone above and beyond the call-of-duty during the 2020 pandemic.

What is the 2020 MITC Direct Support Professional Awards?

MITC awarded \$10,000 to Direct Support Professionals (DSP) who stood up and went above and beyond to provide exemplary service during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

- » **31 prizes total have been awarded**
 - » One grand prize of \$1,000 - includes personal recognition and lunch with MITC CEO, John Graham
 - » 30 prizes of \$300.00 (one for each year of MITC history!)
- » The 1st batch of prizes (1 Grand Prize Winner + 13 other winners) were awarded during DSP Week 2020
- » The 2nd batch (17 winners) will be awarded in December 2020



Checks & Prizes were sent to the winners' agencies!

Our Winners!

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Tammy Thurston - \$300 Prize Winner

John F. Murphy Homes, Inc.

- » **Years in Business:** Nearly 40 years
- » **Located:** Auburn, Maine
- » **Individuals Served:** Approximately 500 annually
- » **Programs Offered:** Long-term residential services, community support day programs, work supports, shared living, case management, ICF Group, ICF Nursing, special purpose private schools
- » **Affiliated Associations:** Members of the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) and the Maine Association for Community Service Providers (MACSP)

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

Tammy was a DSP in our group homes for several years. Because of her fantastic organizational skills and bubbly personality, she decided to become our face of John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. - the receptionist/administrative assistant. She is the smiling face you see when you enter the building. When the pandemic hit, our agency put in place a site that folks we support with COVID 19 could recuperate. It is fully equipped to care for the people we support in a quarantine-type setting. We were prepared. We waited...and then in early April 2020 the first person we support contracted COVID 19. Our plan was that staff who worked with the individual would follow them to the quarantine house. Unfortunately for all, some of the staff had contracted the virus and were not available to staff the quarantine house. Tammy Thurston stepped up to the plate, being DSP certified and a CNA - volunteering to spend as much time as needed at the quarantine house assisting the person supported who had contracted the virus. Tammy went there and spent over 300 hours straight, with another staff person, providing support to the ill individual. During that 2 week period another person we support also got ill and went to the house. Tammy dropped everything in her own home to answer the call. True dedication certainly.

How did the nominee champion the individual(s) they support and assist them in meeting goals during the emergency?

As previously stated, Tammy is an amazing individual with such a wonderful personality - she exudes joy and brightness. With the first individual that was diagnosed, Tammy did everything to supply her with the things she liked - foods, activities, Facetime with friends - to give her the support she needed to tolerate the quarantine. The person was hit fairly hard with exhaustion and weakness, lack of appetite and taste. So Tammy, a wonderful cook, prepared meals that the individual would request, trying to get her to eat and find some joy in all this pandemic madness.

There were other individuals that Tammy supported in the quarantine house - a young man who was asymptomatic for whom Tammy arranged the delivery of a basketball hoop so he could get outside to shoot hoops when he was so bored and anxious about being there when he felt well. Each evening Tammy would take him for a walk to get some energy out and tire him a bit. He was so appreciative of this and happy he did not have to stay inside.

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

Tammy took responsibility for the quarantine house like it was her own home. She created grocery lists and PPE needs lists as they arose. She made sure that any in house activities the people requested were provided. She assured that all the needs of the individuals were met. After contracting the virus herself, she returned to the quarantine house to make sure the needs of the individuals who were there were met and their lives were full and happy. Tammy did this all while she was doing the work of the DSP which is so massive. She was showering folks, assisting folks with eating, cooking, doing activities with folks, unimaginable cleaning duties - all with that amazing smile and bright eyes! Truly, incredible.

Include a description of the effect of their activities on the lives of the individual(s) being served.

Through this ordeal, Tammy developed relationships with some of the folks who were at the quarantine house. She regularly calls and Facetimes one of the ladies and a true friendship has ensued. Once they are able to spend time together in the community, I have no doubt that this relationship will grow and grow. For the other individuals who were there with Tammy, despite the communication barriers, we know that they appreciated all Tammy's work, but more than that, I am sure they appreciated the caring, compassion and cheer she spread at the quarantine house. Her shining personality, happiness and upbeat attitude shone through and she gave them a reason to look forward to getting up each day. Her great breakfasts, dancing around the commons area, jokes and funny faces, gave each person at the quarantine house a smile, a laugh, some love.



Amber Massingo - \$300 Prize Winner

Community Alliance - "We take care of the people, that take care of the people."

- » **Years in Business:** Since 1986
- » **Located:** Ypsilanti, Michigan
- » **Individuals Served:** 23 direct care services, 580 self determination all with developmental disabilities
- » **Programs Offered:** Supported Living Program direct care services in the clients home. Fiscal Intermediary Services, providing payroll support for the person with disabilities to be their own employer of record.
- » **Affiliated Associations:** Michigan Assisted Living Association; Arc of Michigan; Arc of United States; PHI.

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

Amber demonstrated outstanding commitment during the Covid -19 emergency by opening her home to a consumer to ensure proper care would be given. Amber without hesitation allowed a consumer that receives 40hrs a week to stay with her, remain safe, and cared for.

How did the nominee champion the individual(s) they support and assist them in meeting goals during the emergency?

Amber has worked with this particular consumer for at least five years. She understands her disability and allows the consumer to be her natural self. With the change in environment, Amber was able to ease the consumer into a new way of life while supporting all her goals in the individualized plan of service.

How did the nominee support the individual in creating and maintaining friendships and relationships during the emergency?

Amber created a supportive environment. The consumer had a chance to see a different side of her worker by being at her home for at least 6 weeks. During this time the consumer was able to do activities that aren't apart her normal life as Amber lives on a farm. They created memories that will last a lifetime and new skills of farming were taught.

If the nominee has done something else that does not quite fit into these categories, let us know

Amber did not complain but understood the severity of the pandemic and the consumers disability. Amber knew the consumers immediate family does not live in Michigan and it was safer to have the consumer in a stable environment with limited access to different people and possible infections.

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

There is not one other person I could think of that would open their homes to one of Community Alliances consumers for an extended period of time. Amber has taken the phrase, "Come in and make yourself at home!" to a new level. She embodies the Community Alliance mission, value, and vision statements.

Include a description of the effect of their activities on the lives of the individual(s) being served.

Amber has taught the consumer how to live a life off the grid. They have revamped daily activities of going to various restaurants and shopping malls with tending to a farm. The consumer enjoys feeding the animals, assisting with yard work to the best of their capabilities and has learned to appreciate home-cooked meals.



Kim Bumgardner-Bergman - \$300 Prize Winner

Exceptional Persons, Inc.

- » **Years in Business:** Since 1957
- » **Located:** Waterloo, Iowa
- » **Individuals Served:** 461 people throughout the organization
- » **Programs Offered:** Services for all stages of life: employment services, support in home and in the community around the clock or hourly, day habilitation services, payee services, and resources for child care needs – like our Hawkeye Child Development Center - ALC.
- » **Affiliated Associations:** ANCOR, The Arc of the Cedar Valley

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

On the morning of April 23, Kim, who has been with the EPI family for nearly 20 years, was informed an individual she had grown close with had passed away, hours before receiving his positive COVID-19 test result. His other roommates were still awaiting their results. Kim felt her heart and mind move her to reach out to the supervisor of the home and volunteer herself to stay within the COVID-19 positive home. Though this wasn't her usual site, she shared she felt these men deserved someone who could put the fear of the virus aside and take care of them at possibly one of the hardest times of their lives. She stayed in the home from Thursday, April 23 until Monday, May 11, caring for the men in the home without leaving, providing assistance day and night.

How did the nominee champion the individual(s) they support and assist them in meeting goals during the emergency?

Along with the emotional support these three gentlemen needed, Kim made sure their lives stayed as normal as they could. She made sure they ate balanced, healthy meals, as well as keeping them hydrated and getting them outside often to enjoy fresh air and sunlight. We are happy to report that in Kim's care, the three men recovered from their experience with COVID-19.

How did the nominee support the individual in creating and maintaining friendships and relationships during the emergency?

On day 16 of Kim's quarantine within the home, an individual that had been battling the virus in the hospital was finally able to come home. When he arrived home, they all sat down to watch the memorial service of their friend who had passed away. As they cried, Kim comforted them and engaged in sharing many memories with the individual. Kim says she felt honored to be the one there with them as they celebrated his life.

If the nominee has done something else that does not quite fit into these categories, let us know.

We asked Kim to provide us with a quote, she told us, "Every DSP has a purpose, a calling to do something to make a difference in the world, but some of us go through times that redefine our lives and our abilities to go much further than we ever thought possible and come out on the other side stronger for it. I would do it all over again if needed."

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

When asked why she volunteered to quarantine at the home Kim explained she felt like the right person to go in and give the care they needed. She shared thinking about how these men not only just lost their decades old friend, but could be sick as well, gave her determination to go in with nothing but compassion and care, fully ready to be the support they needed.

Include a description of the effect of their activities on the lives of the individual(s) being served.

The men living in this home had not only just lost their decades old friend, but were sick and at high risk for complications themselves. Each individual was quarantined to their rooms, if they needed to leave their room or if Kim entered the room, they wore a mask. It took days before they could be in the same room as each other which was hard after losing their best friend. On a normal day, they would be attending community based day habilitation and spending time volunteering, or working in the community.



Carol Schmitz - \$300 Prize Winner

Mothers & Sons Caregiving

- » **Years in Business:** Since 2013
- » **Located:** Lebanon, Ohio
- » **Individuals Served:** 40 individuals
- » **Programs Offered:** HPC, non medical and nursing. We provide assistance with house cleaning, meals, supervision, socializing with clients and much more.

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

Carol services 2 ladies that live together. These 2 ladies were used to getting out everyday before the virus. One of the ladies is diabetic, so Carol has had to be very careful so that neither of the girls would be exposed to the virus.

How did the nominee champion the individual(s) they support and assist them in meeting goals during the emergency?

1. Before the virus the girls liked to go to church every Sunday, that was even one of the services in their ISP. So Carol was creative and had the girls listen to services online.
2. Before the virus the girls were involved in a choir, so Carol would have the girls dance and sing in their homes. The girls loved this and this kept them active.
3. Before the virus the girls would do floor hockey, rec night and other activities. So Carol would walk with the girls each day that she worked and made sure they kept social distancing.
4. Carol made sure the girls had crafts to keep them busy and happy. She would even buy crafts with her own money for this to happen. The girls decorated their front door to show support for the first responders, nurses, truck drivers, grocery worker, pharmacies, etc. Carol had the girls make wreaths for Mother's Day even though the girls were not able to see their moms. This made the girls feel so much better knowing that they were showing love for their mothers.
5. Carol takes the girls on drives in the car, just so that they can see their surroundings without getting out and being safe.
6. Carol would do their grocery shopping early in the morning without the girls, before her shift would even start. That way Carol had less contact with people and the girls would have no contact with people. Also, Carol would wear a mask out in public to again protect herself and the girls from getting the virus.

How did the nominee support the individual in creating and maintaining friendships and relationships during the emergency?

Carol would make sure that the girls were able to talk and face time with their family and friends each day that she worked with them. She knew how important family and friends are to make sure the girls felt safe and happy during these difficult days. One of the girls friends had a birthday and Carol called up the friend and had the girls sing Happy Birthday. They were so excited as well as the individual that they called.

If the nominee has done something else that does not quite fit into these categories, let us know.

Carol was the first one to work if someone called off at the home. She wanted to make sure the girls had consistent staff that knew them and loved them like she does. Carol brought movies and games from home, so that the ladies would have variety to do different things that would keep them engaged and happy. Carol will also work in other homes when we need help. Everyone loves her! Before the virus she would substitute in other homes and others homes would always want her to come back. However, with the virus Carol knew how important it was to stay with her regular two ladies, so that they would have less contact with others in trying to keep them safe.

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

Carol thinks of herself last and puts others first. I can't give her enough praise! She sacrifices so much for the individuals that she serves on a daily bases.

Include a description of the effect of their activities on the lives of the individual(s) being served.

The two ladies that she serves were able to keep positive and happy. The individual with diabetes was able to keep her sugars under control because of substituting dancing at home and walking outside with them. Carol is well deserving of an award. She loves the ladies that she serves and they love her.



Marilyn Nyanyo - \$300 Prize Winner

Aspire Living and Learning

- » **Years in Business:** Almost 40 years
- » **Located:** MD, MA, VT, NH, CT
- » **Individuals Served:** 900 across the corporation
- » **Programs Offered:** Shared living, residential group homes, supported employment, community based day supports, foster care, in-home clinical services
- » **Affiliated Associations:** ADDP, ANCOR

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

Four supported women were diagnosed with COVID-19; the staff who support that home, in their entirety, refused to work in a COVID-19 positive situation. Marilyn worked with other agency leaders, in her primary role as program manager, to assemble a team of four women to support this home 24/7. Marilyn then began working tirelessly to assure that all supports were in place. Marilyn did this by being PRESENT, each and every day during this isolation situation. Marilyn slept on a mat (in the program garage!) refusing to go home to take respite, even when shifts were well staffed.

At the 14 day mark, retesting occurred for all; two women were negative and two remained positive; it was determined that the four gals should be separated and a recovery center that IPPI had put together (physical building used is our now vacant congregant day program site), would be where the two negative women would be moved. Staffing again became an extreme challenge. Marilyn worked three 24 hour shifts, sleeping onsite, to assure the recovery center team, who were new to these women, were well supported, trained in the care of these two complex supported people and that all safety (CDC driven) guidelines regarding infection control were also in place. Marilyn also maintained a stellar relationship with families, calling each and every parent/guardian two times each day to reassure, buoy their capacity to retain their hope and to assure them their loved one was being well taken care of. When the group was retested on the 14 day mark and two remained positive, the original team needed to be given respite and sent home for their own 10 day post exposure quarantine; this left Marilyn needing a new team... part of that effort was successful and supports to building that team came from across the agency; when gaps appeared and two sites needed staffing, once again, Marilyn used herself to fill those gaps! Marilyn had requested from the team assembling bedrooms at the recovery site that that they set up a bed for her!!! She never intended to go home, as the other 4 staff were... she remained and worked until all four supported women tested negative!

If the nominee has done something else that does not quite fit into these categories, let us know.

Countless hours of onsite work... managing not just the day to day, but engaging with families and the medical care professionals to assure these women were restored to good health. There was an individual who developed respiratory symptoms a few days after their 66th birthday, and Marilyn accompanied her to the ER. She was admitted and was "very scared". Marilyn stayed with her for the 48 hours while she was in the hospital, after being diagnosed with pneumonia. It was realized on the second day of the hospital stay that Marilyn had not eaten since she arrived at the hospital and "didn't want to bother the nurses...". Meals were then delivered to Marilyn! So unassuming and never, ever wanting the spotlight... it deserves to be shown on MARILYN! Marilyn says she didn't do this alone and that the team she assembled, the women who volunteered to charter this ship and fell into a groove of seamless work, also deserve recognition: IPPI teaches, in our managerial philosophy, that TEAM is everything... Marilyn's team allowed Marilyn to feel the support and carry on during this crisis that lasted 23 days! These five women never faltered: Marilyn, Heaven Griffin, Michelle Stokes, Amayra Davila, Kaitlyn Roberts! Heroes, working tireless hours!

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

In every way; the instances here are from a three week period of time, but this is reflective of the Marilyn we see each and every day! She is ALWAYS this person, not just in a crisis. That is why she must be recognized and exalted for her work, it is timeless and transends this moment in our work with adults with I/DD. Marilyn provided constant direct service to individuals, maintained her duties as a manager (scheduling and following up on COVID-19 testing, maintained and worked on post COVID-19 staff scheduling, managed her anger and affect regarding those on her primary team who were unwilling to work in a COVID-19 + environment.) Marilyn was highly professional, never uttered a single word about her disappointment in her primary team and welcomed them all back, after the 4 women were tested negative and reunited within their home. Modeling is vital in leadership and Marilyn modeled the emblem "we are health care professionals and we support those we care for, regardless of the circumstances... they come first!"



Darrien Smith - \$300 Prize Winner

Ability Beyond

- » **Years in Business:** Since 1953
- » **Located:** CT & NY
- » **Individuals Served:** Over 3,000 individuals
- » **Programs Offered:** Residential alternatives, employment training, career counseling, job placement services, cognitive and life skills instruction, and clinical and therapeutic support.
- » **Affiliated Associations:** NYSACRA, NYSID, ANCOR, Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

Before COVID hit, Darrien assisted the manager with making sure that we were prepared and had enough food and cleaning supplies. Once our individuals and staff started getting sick, Darrien really stepped up. He provided excellent care including taking multiple people for testing. A lot of the staff were scared and took a step back when our individuals were diagnosed with COVID and Darrien and the manager really did the majority of the direct care with the infected individuals. Darrien is so committed that he gave up seeing his kids for about 2 months so he could work in a positive location and he was used to being with his kids every day.

How did the nominee champion the individual(s) they support and assist them in meeting goals during the emergency?

Darrien lead the staff in making sure that all formal goals that could be done at the home were completed. He also rolled out the handwashing assessments and programs. Darrien did a great job keeping the individuals busy while on quarantine with games, arts and crafts, DJ's dance parties, walks outside, and virtual activities. He was able to get DVD players, radios, and a recliner for the individuals that were in isolation due to being sick and stuck in their rooms.

How did the nominee support the individual in creating and maintaining friendships and relationships during the emergency?

Darrien was eager to keep the individuals in contact with their families and friends. He used both Zoom and FaceTime frequently to make sure they we're able to visit as much as they could. Darrien actually set it up so one of our individuals was able to see her brother propose to his girlfriend over Zoom! Once we were able to do outdoor visits, Darrien made sure to get the families on board with our procedures and personally make sure that he was present and everything went smoothly. We already have 4 families that are successfully visiting outside. One of the family members even gave Darrien a shout out for how creative he was with keeping the family safe with allowing them to see each other. He also encouraged the individuals to participate in some of the online day program activities to see their friends. Darrien had 3 individuals that were staying at our agency's Recovery Hub for a few days due to COVID and he made sure to FaceTime with them at least once a day so they could see their housemates and staff.

If the nominee has done something else that does not quite fit into these categories, let us know.

Darrien was an excellent advocate for our individuals and made sure that the group home nurses, EMT's, and doctors were doing everything they could for the individuals and appropriately pushed back when he thought they could do better.

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

When the house manager got sick, Darrien stepped up and ran the house. Our Medical Support Staff was also out, so Darrien was also doing all necessary medical appointments, virtual visits, and making sure that we had needed medications and correct orders. We had quite a few staff out sick and he worked almost daily to make sure that we had sufficient staffing to take care of our individuals safely. Darrien was doing the job of 3 people and worked so hard to make sure that the program was running smoothly and our individuals had the best possible care.

Include a description of the effect of their activities on the lives of the individual(s) being served.

The smiles! When Darrien walks into the group home every single one of the individuals get extremely excited. He takes the time to greet each one of them individually and spends time with them. He jokes around with them and has formed such special personalized relationships with each of them. You can just see it on their face how happy they are to see him. During a time where a lot of people are having a hard time with the change and uncertainty, Darrien has been able to create an atmosphere where the individuals have remained happily unaware to our COVID crisis and impact it has on our country at this time.



Marguerite Heyward - \$300 Prize Winner

Ability Beyond

- » **Years in Business:** Since 1953
- » **Located:** CT & NY
- » **Individuals Served:** Over 3,000 individuals
- » **Programs Offered:** Residential alternatives, employment training, career counseling, job placement services, cognitive and life skills instruction, and clinical and therapeutic support.
- » **Affiliated Associations:** NYSACRA, NYSID, ANCOR, Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

When Covid-19 pandemic started and our Agency immediately began implementing guidelines and protocols, Marguerite was actually nervous about wearing a mask. She was never able to wear one before, she has had this fear for a while. But when she realized she would not be able to support our individuals and work, she stepped up and overcame. Marguerite wears her mask correctly and is very diligent about it. Marguerite follows the agency's protocols very strictly, as we want the whole team to be safe and healthy. She immediately started teaching the individuals we serve how to wash their hands longer- she sang, showed videos, modeled the behavior, and made it fun. Not for just one, but all 13 individuals we serve in 10 different locations. She showed proper sanitizing and cleaning and keeps the individuals served involved – she makes it fun while teaching. She even helped implement our individuals to wear a mask when they go outside so mask wearing becomes easier for them when they return to work and need to wear a mask. Every guideline our agency set forth (and there was a lot and they were ever changing due to the nature of the pandemic), Marguerite followed and taught to the individuals we serve when appropriate. Marguerite worked her shift throughout the pandemic and gave back her requested time off. She said she would rather be off when our team was through the thick of it and she knew our individuals were ok. Marguerite's first vacation in 7 months was in August.

How did the nominee support the individual in creating and maintaining friendships and relationships during the emergency?

Since the individuals we serve mostly live alone, keeping them engaged and maintaining friendships was very important. Marguerite set up face-time/google duo video calls with their families, used her work phone if the individual did not have technology to support a video call, and then continued to support and train how to use the technology that was acquired for them during this pandemic. Marguerite practiced with all of the individuals we serve, and had them call each other and video each other often. For the individuals that live near each other, Marguerite would set up walk bys and literally have one individual stand inside at their front door, and have the other individual stand back outside and say hello from a distance. Marguerite was very creative in supporting these goals. On 5/7, Marguerite set up and supported a video chat for one of our individuals to see and chat with his old roommate and best friend. They usually visited each other, but could not during the pandemic. So they got to see and chat with each other. Unfortunately, our individual lost his best friend just 2 weeks later. It was so sad and hard for all of us, but especially for the individual we served. Marguerite supported him throughout it, still does, and has done several things as a memorial for him to be able to say good bye to his best buddy. As hard as it was for Marguerite, she was able to put her personal sadness aside and be able to help our individual express himself, and feel safe and loved and supported. Marguerite bought flowers and put up a few pictures and then set up video calls so he could tell people in his life that he lost his best friend. She then set up a virtual breakfast where he got to see some familiar faces and do a toast to his best friend. Not only did Marguerite support him, but she came around with the program manager and sat with each individual to tell them that they lost a friend. It was very sad and hard, as he was a longtime resident in our program before he had to go to a group home for more supports. Marguerite's support, sincerity, and grace was appreciated and felt in each conversation we had with our individuals. Marguerite also hustles and gets 3 different individuals served onto Zoom for a 10 am daily Zoom session with their coworkers. Marguerite literally goes to each apartment, to get them set up and then goes back and forth to ensure they are on and working. All the while wearing a mask and washing her hands between every single visit. She does this a few days a week.

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

Marguerite is just a natural leader and continues to always lead by example. She posted videos, met with staff individually, and models how things should be done. Marguerite does not hesitate to step in and step up. She is always at the forefront of whatever we are doing to ensure the needs of the individuals we serve are met. She strives to put smiles on all of their faces every day, and she does it!



Azeez Bada - \$300 Prize Winner

Emmaus Homes

- » **Years in Business:** Since 1893
- » **Located:** St. Louis, Missouri
- » **Individuals Served:** Over 250 adults annually
- » **Programs Offered:** Supported Living, Shared Living and EmmausLink
- » **Affiliated Associations:** ANCOR, MARF

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

During the pandemic and shelter-in-place, the clients he supports were not able to continue with their regular routines like going to program, barbershop, church services, bible study, visiting friends and families and socializing. Azeez knew they missed doing all this, so he came up with other activities while adhering to the agency policies on no visitors (at the time). Azeez planned so many fun activities with them like painting, cutting coupons, and decorating for July 4th. He would take them on rides, play music for them, organize game nights and barbeque for them while they sat on the porch enjoying the weather, dancing and clapping as he cooked and played their favorite tunes. He became their barber and cut their hair and shaved them as needed.

During the pandemic many staff called out of shifts or were out due to exhibiting symptoms, so Azeez not only came to work for his shifts but picked up extra shifts to make sure that ratio at the house was maintained and the clients had adequate supervision. During the time, he also advocated for one of the clients to get a tv in his room as he was always trying to watch tv in another client's room. When the TV was purchased, Azeez installed it and mounted it on the wall by himself. We did not have to use another person from outside, which limited the amount of foot traffic in the house. During the pandemic and shortage of food, Azeez would shop online and get all the things needed for his clients. He followed up with staff members and ensured they all wore masks and kept the house safe and clean and continues to do this daily. Azeez made it a priority to call guardians and have clients speak to them or hear their voices to ensure they kept in touch with their families who were unable to visit.

If the nominee has done something else that does not quite fit into these categories, let us know.

Azeez has a gift for building relationships to ensure clients' physical and emotional well-being. This has been evident on numerous occasions, as he has been the one staff member who can successfully de-escalate a client when others have been unable to. A specific example of this was when a client was in the process of being admitted to a psychiatric unit. He was having an incredibly difficult time and started to attack nurses, doctors, and security guards, began running around the unit, and disrobed in the middle of the floor. No one was able to calm him, but when Azeez asked if he could come back to the area and assist; his impact was undeniable. Azeez sat down next to the client; began speaking to him in a calm and soothing voice; addressed his fears; encouraged him to drape a gown over himself; and then volunteered to stay and assist the hospital staff while they did lab work, x-rays, and the assessment. Although his shift had long ended, Azeez remained until the situation was stable. Later, when it was time for the client to be discharged, Azeez volunteered to pick him up, so he was greeted with a familiar face.

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

Azeez has built strong relationships with his clients, guardians, and co-workers. He routinely mentors and trains both new and current staff. They all speak very highly of him, are very responsive to his feedback and suggestions, and look to him for guidance and support with challenging situations or times of crisis. Azeez works across multiple homes and has been a role model in each one. The staff respect him, and he is always able to rally the team when new directives are put in place. He will come in early or stay late to ensure proper training is provided and has the courage to address others when they aren't following proper protocol or when he feels changes could be made to improve the lives of the individuals supported. He took the initiative to request a meeting about concerns related to meaningful outings, organization of the house, and monitoring of client funds/supplies; and was able to drive home the importance of holding each other accountable. He advocates for his clients and needed and ensure compliance with agency's core values.

Include a description of the effect of their activities on the lives of the individual(s) being served.

Since joining Emmaus Homes as a direct support professional, Azeez's work ethic and dedication are worthy of note. His attention to clients' needs are commendable. He makes it a priority to understand what the clients want and require and responds accordingly in all situations but seems to thrive in crisis ones, as his calm demeanor has a soothing effect on all. Azeez ensures that his clients are well taken care of even during the most challenging of times, as he consistently demonstrates values that are not only noted by his co-workers but by others as well. Emmaus Homes receives countless phone calls by members of the community, families, hospitals, and co-workers recognizing Azeez's dedication and commitment to the clients he works with. Azeez's compassion for those he supports is evident in all his interactions, and he continuously advocates for his clients in all settings.



Winnie Ndarua - \$300 Prize Winner

Emmaus Homes

- » **Years in Business:** Since 1893
- » **Located:** St. Louis, Missouri
- » **Individuals Served:** Over 250 adults annually
- » **Programs Offered:** Supported Living, Shared Living and EmmausLink
- » **Affiliated Associations:** ANCOR, MARF

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

Winnie is one of our DSP's who only worked part time. Right at the beginning of the pandemic one of our clients was admitted to the hospital. Due to the pandemic the hospital did not permit a team member to come into the hospital with the client. The team advocated and explained due to communication barriers and behavioral support needs, staff advocacy would be needed. The hospital declined, but within 12 hours called back and asked for assistance. Winnie immediately volunteered to go and stay with the client. Winnie put her client's needs before her own and began "sheltering in place" with our client while she was at the hospital. Winnie slept at the hospital and ran home to shower and change clothes. She remained at the hospital with the client for 2 weeks advocating for treatment for the client, while the hospital focused on pain management.

How did the nominee champion the individual(s) they support and assist them in meeting goals during the emergency?

With the new regulation of staying 6 feet apart we believed it would be a struggle for the client to grasp this new concept considering the client loves to shake hands and hug people upon greeting them. Winnie worked diligently with the client to remind her to social distance, and smile and greet people versus making physical contact.

How did the nominee support the individual in creating and maintaining friendships and relationships during the emergency?

Winnie assisted the client with phone calls and virtual meetings with team members. Winnie takes her time to speak with the client, and put the phone on speaker so the client can hear family, friends and supports. Winnie advocated for an opportunity for the client to move in with 2 friends, in order to have more companionship and interaction during the pandemic. Prior to this, the client was living alone and due to the state and local "stay at home" orders, this prevented the client from socializing with very many people. A few weeks ago, the client moved in with 2 friends, and Winnie and one staff have temporarily moved in with them to provide companionship and consistent support. They are having a great time together with their quarantine activities. They are trying new recipes, playing games, making masks for community outings, and even got a small swimming pool for the back yard!

If the nominee has done something else that does not quite fit into these categories, let us know.

Winnie tirelessly advocated for the client's health and wellness. The client was admitted, discharged and readmitted 3 times within 2 weeks. The hospital was medicating instead of trying to find the root of the problem. Because the client could not verbally communicate with the medical providers, she was not receiving treatments with the intent of healing; she was only receiving pain management. The hospital was hesitant to perform any surgical procedures for the client. The hospital actually recommended hospice! Winnie advocated for the client and indicated the client was still in pain and discomfort and hospice was not appropriate as other treatments had not been tried! Upon discharge Winnie assisted in following up with a specialist and ultimately the client had a surgical procedure which has since relieved pain, discomfort, and other symptoms. Also, during the pandemic, Winnie temporarily moved in with the client to provide companionship and consistent support. This reduced opportunities for exposure for the client and ensured all her needs would be met. Winnie went above and beyond and still is.

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

Winnie stands out from everyone else because she ALWAYS takes the initiative to do whatever is needed for the well-being of our clients. During state and local "stay at home orders", Winnie stayed at the hospital for 2 weeks with a client and then "sheltered in place" with the client. Winnie moved into the home with the client and provided companionship support to her. This provided the consistent support and familiarity the client needed and reduced opportunities for exposure to corona-virus. Also on several occasions over the past 5 months, Winnie has volunteered to come in and deep clean the homes to maintain the health and safety of not only our clients, but our staff during this pandemic. Winnie supports all clients with the same love and care. Winnie's team has shared that they have never seen someone with the compassion that Winnie carries with her every second, minute, hour of the day.

Include a description of the effect of their activities on the lives of the individual(s) being served.

The client is now well and happy. The client finally had a surgical procedure which relieved illness, pain and discomfort. This in turn, reduced the aggressive behaviors as the client was no longer in pain! Winnie has provided companionship as well as endless activities for the client to participate in during quarantine. The client's health and wellness is due to Winnie being a phenomenal DSP and always putting the clients dignity and quality of life first.



Michelle Smith - \$300 Prize Winner

Delta Community Supports, Inc.

- » **Years in Business:** Since 1997
- » **Located:** PA, NJ
- » **Individuals Served:** More than 2,000 individuals annually
- » **Programs Offered:** Community Living, Family Supports, Respite Services, Community Center (currently closed due to pandemic), Supported Living and Supported Employment Services.
- » **Affiliated Associations:** FSCNJ, NJACP, PAR, ANCOR, SHA, KAPE, MAX, PCCYFS, SHRM, Eagle Health Trust

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

Michelle Smith displayed extraordinary courage and commitment during the COVID-19 pandemic by continuing to work in Delta's residential homes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities after some residents tested positive for the virus. Residents with complex medical issues needed to keep taking their medications throughout the pandemic. She had to visit residents in three homes in New Jersey at the height of the pandemic. When Direct Service Personnel in these homes also contracted COVID-19, Michelle then took on their duties as well as her own, to make sure residents stayed safe. Because New Jersey had a huge volume of cases early in the pandemic and the state was under a stay-at-home order issued by the Governor, drivers like Michelle were frequently stopped and asked for identification to prove that they were essential employees. This did not deter Michelle from fulfilling her duties. Two of the people in one of our homes tested positive for the virus and were able to recover without complications. However, they transmitted it to the other residents and eventually Michelle tested positive, too. Knowing she could not work in any other homes, she continued to drive to their residence and cook food for them because so many other staff members had gotten sick or called out. She was determined that she would care for them until she actually developed symptoms that grounded her, too. All of the individuals she served recovered and, largely because of her efforts, there was no loss of life on her watch.

How did the nominee champion the individual(s) they support and assist them in meeting goals during the emergency?

Michelle was a fervent champion for the COVID-positive individuals as she insisted on personally delivering the care they needed, despite their illness and regardless of the fact that the duties she performed went way beyond her job description. She delivered and administered essential medications and ensured that each individual maintained some social connections by visiting them each day during the pandemic. When there was no staff available she cooked meals for them, kept the household running and maintained a family atmosphere. She made sure that individuals who had tested positive could follow the Tylenol protocol until they recovered. But well beyond medical care, Michelle provided them with a life line to the community and worked with them to help them understand what the pandemic was all about and why they needed to follow certain rules in order to protect their health. She helped them continue to meet their nutrition and wellness goals and used her time with them to address behavioral health goals.

If the nominee has done something else that does not quite fit into these categories, let us know

One of the most important aspects of Michelle's contribution is that she basically took on other people's job responsibilities while still fulfilling her own. She did this due to staff shortages and because of her deep commitment to providing continuous care to individuals who could not care for themselves.

Include a description of the effect of their activities on the lives of the individual(s) being served.

Michelle literally saved the lives of the people she served. She delivered and administered essential medications when other staff got sick or called out. She ensured that there was always an adequate supply of food for all residents. Although it was not her job duty, she cooked for and -- when needed -- fed the residents. While all of these things are necessary for survival, Michelle also supplied essential ingredients that all people need to maintain equilibrium in chaotic times. She brought them HOPE and GOOD CHEER. Even when her family wanted her to stop having contact with COVID positive residents, she persisted. In her words, "What are you supposed to do? You can't leave them. They're my family and I can't leave them." The individuals she served knew that Michelle would not abandon them and her compassion helped them summon the will to follow COVID prevention protocols and protect their own health even when they didn't fully understand the nature of the pandemic. This helped them to limit their exposure to others and reduce the possibility of transmitting the disease to more people, perhaps helping them save lives as well. She is a true hero and a relentless champion for people with developmental disabilities.



Ilesha Cottle - \$300 Prize Winner

Delta Community Supports, Inc.

- » **Years in Business:** Since 1997
- » **Located:** PA, NJ
- » **Individuals Served:** More than 2,000 individuals annually
- » **Programs Offered:** Community Living, Family Supports, Respite Services, Community Center (currently closed due to pandemic), Supported Living and Supported Employment Services.
- » **Affiliated Associations:** FSCNJ, NJACP, PAR, ANCOR, SHA, KAPE, MAX, PCCYFS, SHRM, Eagle Health Trust

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

Many members of our staff demonstrated outstanding commitment throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. But Ilesha Cottle served as one of the most inspiring examples by not only helping others but by doing it in a very selfless way. Ilesha has been a Direct Support Professional (DSP) with Delta for less than a year but she quickly developed deep relationships with people in her care. The individuals she works with have complex physical and developmental disabilities. They are adults but have very limited physical mobility and must crawl on the floor to move about when they aren't in their wheel chairs. They don't possess the manual dexterity to make their own meals or eat without assistance. Because she is so tuned in to their daily state of health, she noticed right away when two individuals she was working with seemed to be getting sick. COVID-19 testing revealed that someone in the residence was positive for COVID and Ilesha became very worried. She didn't know if she would get the virus too and she has three young children. Her biggest worry was about transmitting the virus to her 12-year old twin boys and 5-year old daughter. As she considered the situation, she realized that, "If it's gonna happen it's going to and it's outside my control."

When Ilesha was asked if she wanted to work in the home after the individuals tested positive, she sat in her car and considered what she would want for her own children if they were in a similar situation. Ilesha went to her house, packed up clothes for her children, and sent them to the home of another family member. As Ilesha puts it, she went "into the Mommy mode" and moved into the Delta residence full-time for a two-week period while she delivered care for two sick and very impaired individuals. She originally hoped that other staff support would arrive, but when no one could, she cared for the individuals completely on her own for the entire two weeks. Ilesha performed her duties to ensure the safety of those in her care even though she has asthma and a heart problem. As the days passed, she prayed for the strength to help her keep these children of other mothers safe.

Each night she talked with her children on Facetime. Her kids were scared and her sons were old enough to understand the lethal nature of the virus. She explained to them that she couldn't be around them, but reassured them saying, "Don't worry. I'm going to be okay. Every time I talked to my children they gave me more motivation to stay safe. My mother instinct said, 'I got this.' And she certainly did. Both COVID-positive individuals recovered and Ilesha did not get sick.

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

During the first week of residential quarantine, she felt a sense of panic, but she says that "as a mother, you can't really show that to others." Ilesha explains that after a few days the panic was replaced by a feeling of peace and she started to feel like she was in her own home. During daily calls, her children kept asking if she was okay and they became less fearful when they saw that she was not sick. After she finished her 14-day stay, Ilesha learned that individuals in another home tested positive. What makes Ilesha exceptional is that after she completed that first two week shift, she courageously agreed to do another 14-day shift in a different home with other COVID-positive individuals. Ilesha said that after seeing the results of her efforts at the first residence, "I felt so brave that I agreed to do the same thing again." At this point everyone is back in good health. Her willingness to perform this demanding quarantine duty twice in a row is a vivid illustration of her character and commitment. This commitment makes her truly outstanding among DSP's in our field.

Include a description of the effect of their activities on the lives of the individual(s) being served.

The individuals Ilesha cared for would not have the physical capacity to feed, clothe or clean themselves without the help of another person. Her commitment to their care literally saved their lives and nurtured them through their bout with COVID-19. After weeks of living in residential settings and remaining healthy, Ilesha has returned home with her children. Now she is completely bonded with the individuals she serves and with their family members who are incredibly grateful for the sacrifice she made to keep their children healthy. The pandemic was truly a life-changing experience for everyone involved.



Carol Murphy - \$300 Prize Winner

Maryhaven Center of Hope

- » **Years in Business:** Since 1961
- » **Located:** NY
- » **Individuals Served:** Approximately 1,500 individuals at 78 locations
- » **Programs Offered:** Residential & Day Programs

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

Carol was on vacation when the COVID virus required that all businesses close including day programs that the residents in one of our OMH residential facilities reside. When she learned that there was also a staff member on the unit who was out due to being positive for the virus and one of the residents as well was quarantined in their room due to being positive, she cut her vacation short by more than a week and jumped into managing and covering the required shifts of the residence. No questions asked and no complaints at all.

How did the nominee champion the individual(s) they support and assist them in meeting goals during the emergency?

All residents in an OMH residence require 4 restorative services in order for the agency to bill for the services. Many of these goals are related to community activities that the individuals participate in during the day. Considering the residents are unable to leave the residence, Carol took it upon herself to bring in the community to the residence. Carol set up various areas in the house where the residents could practice their goals, such as a banking station for cashing or depositing checks or getting cash; food shopping is a big item for many residents, so she took the various products in the residence and set up a grocery type store, where the residents could shop for the items they needed after making a menu for the week and she set up a small drug store setting, where residents could go and drop off prescriptions to be filled and then later retrieve them.

How did the nominee support the individual in creating and maintaining friendships and relationships during the emergency?

Carol provided various groups to discuss building and maintaining relationships during the most difficult times. The groups also provided an opportunity for the residents to practice with each other. She provided the residents the opportunity to have facetime with family members during this pandemic in a private area. In addition, Carol worked with the day programs that the residents normally attend, to set up Zoom Meetings for groups of their peers.

If the nominee has done something else that does not quite fit into these categories, let us know.

Carol went out of her way to pick up PPE supplies from other parts of the agency in order for the staff and the residents in this home were well protected during this pandemic.

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

Carol worked 7 days a week since the beginning of the shut down in mid March, without question or complaint. This was the only staff member in this residence that volunteered to work these hours when there were not enough staff to cover all the shifts due to illness and fear of contracting the virus.

Include a description of the effect of their activities on the lives of the individual(s) being served.

Carol has had a tremendous positive effect with all the residents in this home. Their fears of getting sick or not being able to go out in the community again, has been mostly alleviated. Residents are feeling more comfortable completing their goals and looking towards getting back to a "normal" lifestyle.



Mike Seguin - \$300 Prize Winner

Progressive Directions, Inc.

- » **Years in Business:** 44 years
- » **Located:** Middle & West Tennessee
- » **Individuals Served:** Approximately 1,200
- » **Programs Offered:** Supported Employment, Early Intervention, Supported Living, Personal Assistance, Employment and Community First, Medical Residential, Buddy Ball Special Needs Athletic League
- » **Affiliated Associations:** APSE, TNCO, CMRA, Centers for Non-Profit Management

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

Mike's first concern was for the two men he supports and keeping them safe. He immediately contacted both families with plans to continue services with the new guidelines. Both men are very schedule oriented. Mike made sure their schedules did not change only adapted the locations. Mike made sure both gentlemen understood about COVID-19. He began working with both on handwashing, social distancing, and learning a new way to greet others (elbow bump). Mike made this experience so fun for both men that they take delight in their new normal.

How did the nominee champion the individual(s) they support and assist them in meeting goals during the emergency?

Both Men he supports have Gym Memberships. Both Gyms were closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Mike worked to adapt both men's workout routine with items located in their homes. The men have been enjoying their workouts but are very ready to get back in the gym.

How did the nominee support the individual in creating and maintaining friendships and relationships during the emergency?

Both men have worked to gain many relationships in the community. They have lived their best life through breaking the mold to let people in their lives that do not have a disability. Before both men had experienced discrimination due to their disability, so making the right friends was a heartfelt delight. They are having a difficult time not getting to get out and about, but Mike has remained a staple in their lives during this time. Both families see the delight in their loved one's eyes when Mike arrives. Mike has assisted both men in calling and Face Timing friends to stay connected. The men look at Mike as a friend and not a staff. Mike also feels the same. Mike has been heard saying, "They have taught me a new way of living. They are never stressed and look at life with such wonder and amazement. They have given me the greatest gift...JOY."

If the nominee has done something else that does not quite fit into these categories, let us know.

Beyond the call of emergency, Mike demonstrated that high-quality care would combat COVID-19 isolation. In addition to his regular schedule, Mike jumped at the opportunity to provide better experiences for the people he supported. He offered the greatest resource he had...quality time. He led card games, entertained with stories, went on small fishing trips, and asked his individuals about their lives. Mike also mentored other staff and aided when needed.

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

Mike brings a sense of joy to a room. He loves his job as a DSP. Mike offers truly inspiring stories to all staff but takes great care to speak with new staff of his experiences of being a DSP. He has become a great ambassador of assisting others in living their best life!

Include a description of the effect of their activities on the lives of the individual(s) being served.

One gentleman Mike supports loves to go fishing. Mike found a private pond owned by a friend and gained permission to use the pond for the person he supports. The gentleman was very delighted to get to keep this part of his routine intact and got to catch a new type of fish! Mike shared this experience with the other man he supports and now has taught that man to fish! This gentleman caught a Catfish on his first try!



Ruth Pierre

GRAND PRIZE WINNER

UCP of Greater Suffolk, Inc.

- » **Years in Business:** 70 years
- » **Located:** NY
- » **Individuals Served:** Approximately 550
- » **Programs Offered:** Residential, Adult Day, Education & Employment Services
- » **Affiliated Associations:** United Cerebral Palsy Network

How did the nominee demonstrate outstanding commitment during the emergency?

Ruth has shown exemplary care of our individuals during this time of crisis. She came to work when we were short-handed, even while her own family suffered medical concerns of their own. Over the past few weeks, Ruth's husband and her 27 year old daughter were both hospitalized (for separate issues); tragically, both contracted the COVID virus in the hospital, and both passed away without ever returning home. Even in the face of such devastating loss, Ruth has shown up for work daily and continues to demonstrate a level of care for our individuals that is beyond comprehension.

How did the nominee champion the individual(s) they support and assist them in meeting goals during the emergency?

Ruth works with severely medically compromised, low functioning individuals in our 31-bed ICF. During this pandemic emergency, when several individuals in her care became COVID positive, she did not shy away from rolling up her sleeves, donning PPE and taking care of all their physical needs.

How did the nominee support the individual in creating and maintaining friendships and relationships during the emergency?

As stated previously, Ruth works with severely medically compromised, low functioning individuals, several of whom became COVID positive during this crisis. To ensure the individuals health and safety during this time, the individuals were quarantining separately within the residence and there was not much opportunity for them to engage with anyone besides their roommates. But Ruth fostered conversations with those who could converse with each other as well as created a warm and loving environment by speaking and engaging with them herself.

If the nominee has done something else that does not quite fit into these categories, let us know.

Ruth's current personal losses are extreme and unusual, and the fact that she shows up to work daily and continues to care for her individuals lovingly in the face of such an usually devastating personal tragedy is a testament to her high value as a DSP in our facility.

How does your DSP stand out from everyone else?

We are lucky to have her. It is easy to be a good employee when life is easy; but when life is difficult a person's true qualities are exposed. Ruth has demonstrated genuine courage, strength and compassion to all the individuals she's taken care of during this crisis. That is who she is. Please consider her for your award. She truly deserves it.

Include a description of the effect of their activities on the lives of the individual(s) being served.

Ruth's care and concern for the individuals she serves is evident in the happy demeanor of the individuals in her care. During this crisis, Ruth's house has seen a decrease in behavioral problems, and it is my opinion that the dedication and care they are receiving during this time has had a positive impact on behavior.

THANK YOU TO OUR DSPs!

THANK YOU to the Agencies who participated in the 2020 DSP Awards and recognized the individuals within your community for their hard work and determination during this time.

An even bigger **THANK YOU** to all DSPs who have stepped up to the plate during this pandemic, and continue to provide services and support to those who need it most. Your efforts are noted and are greatly appreciated.

Join us in December as we award the remaining 17 prizes to the DSPs who have gone above and beyond the call of duty.

