

# DIRECTIONS

## IN INDEPENDENT LIVING

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE • FALL ISSUE 2023



Welding Class at JCC  
With the Transitions Program

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## Employee of the Quarter Theresa Klice

Theresa Klice, a dedicated and multi-faceted employee at Directions in Independent Living, has recently been nominated for Employee of the Quarter, a recognition highlighting her unwavering commitment and diverse contributions to the organization. With 13 years of service, Theresa has become an indispensable part of the Directions family, seamlessly juggling roles in mental health advocacy, benefit advisement, and housing advocacy.

Born and raised in Olean, Theresa holds the position of SAA (Supportive Administrative Assistant) at Directions. Her unique role, devoid of extensive project involvement due to her part-time status across three positions, showcases her adaptability and efficiency. Theresa's favorite aspect of her job is the dynamic nature of her work, allowing her to switch tasks and maintain enthusiasm, a testament to her love for her job.

Theresa's approach to teamwork is noteworthy. As the sole person in her specific role, she still considers her team 'great', highlighting the excellent collaboration within the benefit advisement team. This synergy is a cornerstone of their success, as they support each other through their professional journeys.

Leadership at Directions, as observed by Theresa, is seamlessly integrated with the staff, fostering an environment of mutual support and constructive feedback. This approach resonates with Theresa, who values teamwork above all. Her significant contribution to the team lies in her ability to blend personal experiences and educational background, enhancing the collective knowledge and capabilities of her colleagues.

Professionally, Theresa sees her growth not in positional change but in the expansion of her knowledge, skills, and the ability to make a difference.

Jeff Capitani and DJ Moore stand out as her mentors, guiding her through the nuances of benefit advisement and crisis assessments. Theresa's advice to anyone interested in her field is heartfelt and practical: have a good heart, maintain work-life balance, and be prepared for emotional challenges.

Outside work, Theresa's life is rich and full. From spending time with family, particularly her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, to enjoying volunteer work that gives her a sense of fulfillment and purpose. A fun fact about her is her close-knit relationship with her eight siblings, with whom she enjoys annual reunions, the next being in Orlando.

Her nomination by Cerrissa Lynch underscores Theresa's extraordinary dedication. Lynch applauds Theresa for her relentless work ethic, ability to juggle multiple roles without complaint, and her exceptional advocacy for Directions and its clients. Theresa is not just a team player; she is a role model, exemplifying professionalism and commitment every day.



## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: DWYER PEER TO PEER

### A Thanksgiving Feast

# Serving Those Who Served

The Dwyer Veteran's Peer to Peer Program, a cornerstone initiative for New York veterans, is designed to foster a supportive network among those who have served in the military. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by veterans, the program offers a platform for mutual understanding, camaraderie, and shared experiences.

The program aims to facilitate a smooth transition to civilian life, promote mental health, and encourage social engagement through various activities and peer-led support groups. By connecting veterans with peers who have undergone similar experiences, the Dwyer Program helps in cultivating a sense of belonging and understanding, crucial for their overall well-being.

The spirit of this program was vividly exemplified in the 1st annual Dwyer Thanksgiving Dinner, an event that brought together the essence of community and gratitude. Organized by Directions in Independent Living, Inc., Dwyer Veteran Peer to Peer Advisory Board, and enthusiastic school break volunteers, this event marked an extraordinary immersion of peer-to-peer productivity.

About 90 veterans and their family members were treated to a meticulously prepared and served Thanksgiving feast, reflecting the warmth and appreciation of the community towards its veterans. The involvement of dedicated individuals like Tammy, Tanika, and Carolyn from the Directions staff, along with numerous Peer Advisory Board members, showcased a true embodiment of the peer-to-peer spirit.

The dinner not only provided a delicious meal but also an opportunity for veterans to connect, share stories, and reinforce their bonds with each other and the community. This gathering was more than just a meal; it was a celebration of service, sacrifice, and the unbreakable spirit of those who have donned the uniform. As the community looks forward to the next year's Thanksgiving, the event remains a shining example of the significant impact and importance of the Dwyer Veteran's Peer to Peer Program in supporting and honoring New York's veterans.

Our hats are off to Larry McDonald and Liz Conner, our Dwyer Peer to Peer Program Coordinators for an as usual, job well done on an awesome event for our local vets! Thank you all for all you do.

## A Scenic Adventure

# Elk Spotting Journey

In a delightful excursion organized by Directions in Independent Living's Transportation Program, a group of excited consumers embarked on an adventure to Benezette, Pennsylvania, known for its majestic elk population. This outing was more than just a trip; it was an opportunity for these individuals to experience the freedom and flexibility that the Transportation Program so passionately advocates for.

The day was set for elk spotting – a thrilling prospect considering the successful reintroduction of elk in the region. This reintroduction, a conservation success story, happened between 1913 and 1926, leading to a thriving herd in north-central Pennsylvania, now numbering over 1,400. The areas of Elk and Cameron counties have since become a haven for these majestic creatures and a point of attraction for visitors.

However, nature has its own plans, and on this particular day, the elusive elk decided to play hide and seek. Despite this, the group, supported by Transportation Support Services, found joy in the journey itself. The beautiful weather and the picturesque scenery of Benezette offered a serene backdrop, turning the outing into an enjoyable experience.

Directions in Independent Living's Transportation Program is a cornerstone in providing essential services to people with disabilities and those with OPWDD eligibility, residing in Cattaraugus, Allegany, or Chautauqua counties. This vital service ensures access to necessary appointments, recreational activities, and community supports. It embodies the spirit of independence, allowing users to manage travel for various needs, be it medical appointments or simple errands. Additionally, the program extends its benefits through travel vouchers for local taxis and ridesharing companies, ensuring that appointments and plans are just a few days' notice away.

This trip to Benezette was not just an attempt to spot elk; it was a testament to the freedom and support that Directions in Independent Living's Transportation Program provides to its consumers, making every journey, regardless of its outcome, a memorable one.





## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: TRANSITIONS

# Empowerment Through Skillbuilding Welding Workshop

The Transitions program, a beacon of hope and progress for youth and young adults with developmental disabilities, recently took an inspiring step forward by organizing an outing to a welding classroom and shop. This outing, funded by OPWDD and Family Support Services, is a testament to the program's commitment to providing comprehensive and hands-on life skills training. The program, facilitated by Directions in Independent Living, operates in Allegany and Cattaraugus counties, and has continually demonstrated its dedication to empowering young individuals aged 14-25.

On October 20th, Alyshia Chandler from the Transitions team, in collaboration with Olean High School, led an educational field trip to JCC (Jamestown Community College). Here, participants, including Jacob and Avi, delved into the practical world of welding. They learned fundamental welding techniques, achieving the skill of making welds resemble "stacked pennies," a mark of proficiency in the craft. The experience was enriched by a comprehensive tour of JCC, providing a glimpse into potential educational pathways post-high school.

The significance of such technical and trade school experiences cannot be overstated. Technical and trade schools play a pivotal role in our country's educational landscape, addressing a critical need for skilled labor in various industries. By offering specialized training in fields like welding, these institutions equip young adults with practical skills that are in high demand. This not only enhances job prospects but also contributes to the nation's economic growth and stability.

Furthermore, the inclusion of youth with developmental disabilities in such programs breaks barriers, fostering inclusivity and proving that with the right support, everyone can contribute meaningfully to society. It's an empowering message: that each individual, regardless of their challenges, can acquire valuable skills and achieve independence.

The Transitions program's focus on college and career readiness, independent living skills, IEP and CSE advocacy, youth activity groups, self-sufficiency, community linkage, and employment readiness is commendable. It highlights the importance of a well-rounded approach to education and skill development. By integrating academic support with practical skill-building, the program ensures that these young adults are not just prepared for the workforce but are also equipped to lead fulfilling, independent lives.

As we celebrate the success of this outing and the skills acquired by Jacob, Avi, and their peers, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to OPWDD, Family Support Services, and Directions in Independent Living. Their unwavering support and funding make such transformative experiences possible, paving the way for a more inclusive and skilled future generation.



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: COMHAB

## Pumpkinville Outing

# A Day of Fall Fun

The Community Habilitation (COMHAB) program, operating in Cattaraugus and Allegany counties, focuses on nurturing independence in individuals through personalized goals. Each participant works closely with a dedicated Com Hab Specialist (CHS), meeting 2-3 times a week for 2-15 hours, depending on OPWDD approval. The heart of this program lies in empowering individuals to achieve their personal objectives, enhancing their independence across various life aspects with the support and guidance of their CHS. Popular goal areas include socialization, overall health and wellness, and money skills.

A testament to its commitment to socialization and community engagement was the program's outing on October 18th to Pumpkinville. This excursion provided a perfect blend of social interaction and enjoyment of the autumn season. The following day, participants indulged in a pumpkin painting craft session, an activity that not only celebrated creativity but also strengthened bonds and teamwork.

These events, more than just fun outings, play a crucial role in the COMHAB program. They exemplify the program's dedication to creating opportunities for participants to practice and enhance their social skills, foster a sense of community, and enjoy enriching experiences that contribute to their overall well-being and independence. Such initiatives make the COMHAB program a beacon of personal growth and community integration.



# A Day of Fun and Food Fall Staff Advance

For our Fall Staff Advance we enjoyed a fun filled day at the Christ United Methodist Church here in Olean

On September 20, 2023, Directions in Independent Living took a significant step towards fostering team cohesion and professional growth with their Staff Advance meeting. The day commenced at 9am with an insightful presentation by Dom Lyons from M&T Bank, as he shared some of the benefits and services available to our staff through his bank. This was followed by a staff meeting at 9:30am, rich in content and connection. New staff members were introduced, creating a welcoming atmosphere, while anniversaries were acknowledged, celebrating the dedication and commitment within the team.

Updates from Kate and Keith provided valuable insights into ongoing projects, and a program presentation on Facilitated Enrollers for Health Care emphasized the organization's commitment to aiding the Aged, Blind, and Disabled. The presentation of the Employee of the Quarter Award, to Theresa Klice, underscored the value of recognizing exceptional contributions to our mission. At 10am, Kate led a crucial staff training session on Professionalism & Boundaries, enhancing the team's skillset. The open forum at 10:30am encouraged open communication, fostering an environment where every voice could be heard.

The highlight of the day was the team-building session at 11am, featuring engaging activities like Paper Football and a Trivia Challenge, which not only entertained but also strategically built rapport among colleagues. The potluck lunch at noon provided an opportunity for informal interaction, strengthening bonds over shared meals. An innovative approach throughout the day involved distributing five cards to each staff member, enabling them to honor their teammates. This gesture of appreciation, managed by Kate and Krissy, not only boosted morale but also promoted a culture of recognition and gratitude.

The September Staff Advance meeting the Directions in Independent Living crew was not just a day of meetings and presentations; it was a celebration of teamwork, a reinforcement of professional boundaries, and a step forward in building a cohesive, supportive work environment. We would also like to extend a huge thank you to the Christ United Methodist Church for always allowing us the use of their facilities for our larger events and meetings.





## Featured Consumer for September

# Darnise Cain

### Directions in Independent Living Celebrates Our Consumer of the Month for September: Meet Darnise Cain

September's Consumer of the Month, Darnise Cain, affectionately known as Aunt DD, is a shining example of strength and resilience. Residing in Wellsville with her boyfriend and their children, Darnise has created a loving, blended family, comprising a son and a daughter.

From a young age, Darnise dreamt of becoming a psychologist, a testament to her innate desire to understand and help others. Today, she expresses her creativity and love for nature through her hobbies, which include diamond painting and nurturing an impressive collection of plants, rivaling the greenery of the Amazon jungle.

Darnise's favorite travel destination is Texas, where she reconnects with family. At home, her life is brightened by the presence of her cat, Ollie. While not a sports enthusiast, Darnise is deeply passionate about Autism Awareness and Invisible Illness Awareness, causes close to her heart.

One of the most influential figures in her life is her Uncle Chuck, who has been a significant father figure to her. Her life goals are centered around being the best mother she can be, a role she cherishes and excels in. If granted a wish, Darnise would choose to live pain-free, free from the health challenges she has bravely faced.

Darnise's academic journey led her to graduate from Hallmark College in San Antonio in 2008 with an Associate's degree in Computer Science. Her engagement with Directions in Independent Living's HHUNY Program stemmed from a desire to improve her assertiveness and follow-through skills. The support from Directions has been instrumental, helping her in these areas and enhancing her social interactions, which she deeply enjoys.

Looking ahead, Darnise envisions a future of greater independence, embracing her 40s with the same positivity and determination that have defined her journey so far. Amanda Aldrich, Darnise's HHUNY Care Coordinator, sums it up perfectly: "Darnise is amazing, and I love working with her! Despite life's challenges, she remains upbeat, is an exceptional mother, and has an incredible green thumb. Her home, adorned with beautiful plants, mirrors her vibrant spirit. She's truly an all-around wonderful person, and I'm fortunate to have her on my caseload."

Darnise Cain's story is one of unwavering optimism, a deep commitment to family, and a relentless pursuit of personal growth. Her journey with Directions in Independent Living exemplifies the transformative power of support and self-determination. As we celebrate her this September, we are reminded of the extraordinary potential within each of us to overcome, thrive, and inspire.



## Featured Consumer for October

# Josh Gagliardo

### Josh brings a spirit of enthusiasm and dedication to everything he does...

Meet Josh Gagliardo, our October Consumer of the Month, who brings a spirit of enthusiasm and dedication to everything he does. At 39, Josh's life in Olean is filled with activities that showcase his diverse interests and commitment to his community.

Living with his parents and two dogs, Rosie and Lucy, Josh values family time, including the unique experience of hosting a foreign exchange student. His hobbies, ranging from working on computers to exploring dance and music on YouTube for the Stepping Out Dance Program, reveal a blend of tech-savviness and artistic inclination. Josh's love for swimming and his memorable trip to the Florida beaches reflect his adventurous side, while his support for the Buffalo Bills shows his sportsmanship.

Josh's involvement in sports is further highlighted by his participation in a bowling team, where he proudly achieved 4th place in the Special Olympics. This accomplishment speaks volumes about his determination and competitive spirit. His aspiration to visit Houston, Texas, to meet a friend underlines his desire for travel and exploration.

At work, Josh's role at Intandem, involving tasks like folding boxes and working with sponges, is more than just a job; it's a place where he enjoys the camaraderie of friends. His volunteer work, both at a food pantry and Saint Bonaventure, demonstrates his commitment to giving back and making a difference in the lives of others.

When it comes to food, Josh's preferences are simple yet delightful. He loves his mom's homemade pizza and has a special fondness for Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwiches, a daily treat for him.

Dance holds a special place in Josh's heart. He enjoys various dance forms, from the Wobble dance to the shuffle, and cherishes slow dancing with his girlfriend. Their surprise performance at the August 19 dance recital was a heartfelt display of their shared love for dance.

Winter, Josh's favorite season, brings him joy through activities like shoveling snow and sled riding, reflecting his love for the outdoors and active lifestyle.

Josh Gagliardo's story is one of passion, dedication, and joy. From his work and volunteer engagements to his hobbies and personal achievements, he embodies a spirit of positivity and determination. We congratulate Josh on being our October Consumer of the Month and wish him continued happiness and success in all his future endeavors, including his dream visit to Houston.



## Featured Consumer for November

# Nancy Yehl



**For our November spotlight, we are thrilled to highlight veteran Nancy Yehl, for our Consumer of the Month.**

November's Consumer of the Month, Nancy Yehl, stands as a remarkable testament to the strength and spirit of our community's veterans. Residing in Allegany, NY, Nancy leads an independent life enriched by a diverse array of hobbies, including horse riding, sewing, cooking, embroidery, knitting, and crocheting. Her favorite travel destination is Ireland, and she enjoys the companionship of her cat, Iggy.

Coming from a family deeply rooted in farming, with a strong tradition of service - her father and three brothers served in the Navy - Nancy always aspired to be an accountant. A fan of the Buffalo Bills, her life goals are profoundly simple yet impactful: to help people and enjoy the rest of her life.

Nancy's involvement with Directions in Independent Living's Dwyer Peer to Peer Veteran's Program reflects her enduring passion for helping others, particularly those who have served in the military. The Dwyer Program, crucial in our community, offers veterans a unique and essential service: the opportunity to connect, share experiences, and find mutual understanding and support among those who have faced similar challenges. Nancy's participation in this program and her volunteer work at her local church are extensions of her unwavering commitment to service and community.

The support from Directions has been transformative for Nancy, enabling her to meet and interact with other veterans, fostering a sense of camaraderie and understanding often absent in civilian life. It's a reminder of how critical such programs are in addressing the unique needs of our veterans, providing them with a safe space to express themselves and share their experiences.

Influenced greatly by her parents, Nancy embodies the values of resilience and compassion. Looking ahead, she hopes to continue her active, fulfilling lifestyle. Her story is not just one of personal triumph but also highlights the importance of the Dwyer Program in supporting our local veterans. Nancy's journey with Directions and her contributions to the veteran community symbolize the remarkable potential of peer support in fostering understanding, healing, and growth.

As we celebrate Nancy Yehl this November, we are reminded of the enduring strength and spirit of our veterans and the vital role programs like Dwyer play in honoring and supporting these heroes of our nation.

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## About our Agency

Directions in Independent Living is a non profit organization with locations in Olean and Wellsville New York. Directions helps people with disabilities live more independent lives. We have over 20 individual programs that specialize in many different areas or needs that these individuals may struggle with in their daily lives. The Directions organization has been described by its consumers as "understanding, supportive, accommodating, and family oriented."

Every year, more than 1 in 5 New Yorkers has symptoms of a mental disorder, are stricken with poverty, or on the verge of homelessness. Moreover, in any year, 1 in 10 adults and children experience mental health challenges serious enough to affect functioning in work, family and school life. Also, nearly a quarter of veterans (22 percent) in New York state, were found to have a probable diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder and/or major depression. Compared to similar individuals in the general population, the veterans studied were at an eight-fold greater risk of probable PTSD and a two- to four-fold greater risk of major depression.

While many services are available to those in need, more than 40 percent of those in need of services or help report being unaware of what help is available or uncertain about how to navigate the systems that provide assistance. Outreach to connect these individuals with services and better coordination among government and community agencies is needed. We need a more combined effort put into connecting consumers with care coordinators who can provide personalized assistance across a range of service sectors. The existing system often misses those people most in need of outreach or those who have not yet connected with any assistance organizations.

That is why Directions in Independent Living was founded over 30 years ago. It is only through the generosity of people like you, that we are able to continue to serve, assist, and help our friends, neighbors, and veterans that are in need.

If you would, please consider making a donation, referring someone that might be in need of our services, or even volunteer yourself as a helper for one of our programs.



# Directions

In Independent Living, Inc.

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