

DIRECTIONS IN INDEPENDENT LIVING

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE • SPRING-2023 ISSUE



**2nd Annual
Wine Walk**

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Staff Advance Springtime Fun

For our Spring Staff Advance we enjoyed a fun filled day at the Cuba Grange

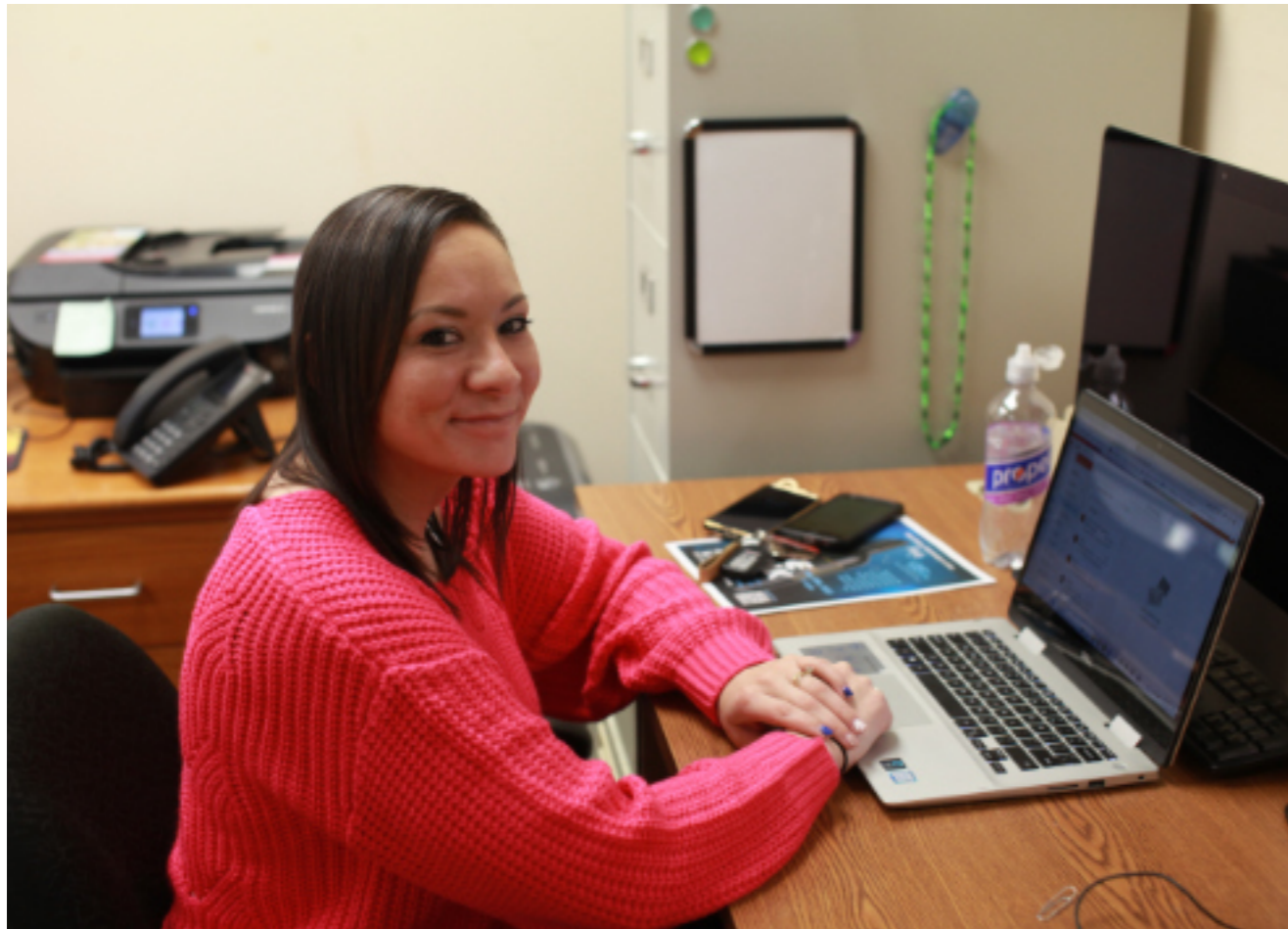
On March 15th, 2023, Directions in Independent Living brought our staff together for their Springtime Staff Advance at the Cuba Grange in Cuba NY. The event was filled with food, fun, and lots of games, creating a cheerful atmosphere that was enjoyed by all.

This Staff Advance featured a variety of activities, including potato bowling and Family Feud which had everyone rolling in laughter. Attendees also participated in a St. Patty's Day best costume contest, which showcased the creativity and spirit of the staff. The amazing brunch served at the event was a highlight, with a delicious spread of breakfast pizza, donuts, coffee and fresh fruit trays that satisfied everyone's taste buds. It was a great opportunity to mingle with co-workers, share stories, and create new memories.

One of the special moments of the event was when Tanika Marrone was awarded her Employee of the Quarter trophy. It was a well-deserved recognition of her hard work and dedication to Directions in Independent Living.

The Springtime Staff Advance was a huge success and Directions in Independent Living was proud to host such a fun and meaningful event and we look forward to many more in the future. Thank you to everyone who attended and contributed to the gathering.





Employee of the Quarter Tanika Marrone

We are pleased to announce that Tanika Marrone has been named Employee of the Quarter at Directions in Independent Living. Since joining our team in September 2021 as a Children's Health Home Care Manager for the CHHUNY program, Tanika has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to helping children 18 and under on Medicaid with chronic conditions to access medical appointments for overall health and wellness.

Tanika addresses barriers that prevent children from attending appointments, including social and economic obstacles. She creates personalized plans of care

for each child and family, empowering them to take control of the child's conditions, treatment, and overall wellness.

Tanika's dedication to her work is evident in her use of to-do lists to stay on task and timely. Her motivation also comes from her team, which she describes as the best it has ever been. She appreciates their support and hard work and credits the leadership team's direction and support as a major factor in her success at Directions.

Tanika's contributions to the team include helping new team members learn the position/program and checking on

them to make sure they are doing okay and have no questions. Her knowledge base has increased tremendously, and she has used local community-based resources for consumers to advance professionally.

In her free time, Tanika enjoys playing board games with her husband and four daughters, and few people know that she is a military wife. Tanika's commitment to helping others and her passion for empowering children and families make her a valuable member of our team. Congratulations, Tanika, on being named Employee of the Quarter!



Dr. Lyle F. Renodin Foundation Transitions Program Grant

We at Directions are immensely grateful to have received a generous grant from The Dr. Lyle F. Renodin Foundation, an organization committed to social justice, love, healing, and compassion, in alignment with the religious tradition and pastoral mission of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, New York. The Franciscan Sisters serve people in Jamaica, Mozambique and the United States, in addition to Bolivia and Brazil, in South America. This grant will significantly benefit our Transitions Program, enabling us to continue making a meaningful difference in the lives of youth and young adults with developmental disabilities in Allegany and Cattaraugus counties.

A Shared Vision of Social Justice and Compassion, the Dr. Lyle F. Renodin Foundation is devoted to improving the quality of life for our neighbors experiencing poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, disabilities, vulnerability, and injustice. Focusing primarily on Cattaraugus/Allegany Cos. in NY and McKean Co. in PA, the Foundation's dedication to social justice aligns with the mission of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, who also work tirelessly to make a significant difference in the lives of the people they serve in South America.

Our Transitions Program, now in its ninth year, serves youth and young adults aged 14-25 with developmental disabilities in Allegany and Cattaraugus counties. Through one-on-one and group sessions, participants develop vital skills in higher education opportunities, independent living, and employment readiness. With a current weekly attendance of 45 individuals, the program fosters self-esteem, confidence, and independence, allowing participants to actively engage in their communities and uphold their dignity as human beings.

The Transitions Program supports participants in the following key areas:

Job coaching: Participants learn how to prepare for interviews and complete job applications effectively. **College:** Our team assists with the college application process, including financial aid applications. **Learner's Permit for driving:** We help participants study for and take the driving test. **Socialization Groups:** Through fun activities like kite flying and nature walks on the St. Bonaventure Trail and other local trails, participants develop social skills and connections. **Health Activities:** The program emphasizes healthy eating, meal planning, grocery shopping, cooking, and exercise. **Basic Budgeting:** Participants learn essential money management and budgeting skills. The Renodin Foundation's grant will enable us to continue our essential work through the Transitions Program, empowering young people with developmental disabilities to achieve their dreams and live fulfilling, independent lives. Our shared commitment to social justice, compassion, and healing creates a powerful partnership, and we are deeply grateful for their support.



2nd Annual Directions Wine Walk

Despite the intermittent rain on May 20th, 2023, the 2nd Annual Directions in Independent Living Wine Walk was a resounding success, bolstering the spirit of Olean, NY. Nearly 100 enthusiastic participants embarked on this journey, proving once again the power of community and a shared love for fine wines.

While the weather may have been less than optimal, it did little to dampen the spirits of our attendees who enjoyed wine tastings offered by a diverse group of vendors. We express our deep gratitude to SerenHippity Crafts, Merritt Winery, Ask Design Jewelers, Freedom Gypsies Winery, East State Wine & Liquor, Little Mountain Winery, Beef and Barrel, Fulkerson Winery, and Four Mile Brewing. Each of these businesses braved the weather and made this event possible, creating memorable tasting stations.

We also extend heartfelt thanks to each and every participant who purchased a ticket. Your support helps maintain and improve our programming. Each attendee made the best of the day and added to the event's convivial atmosphere.





Featured Consumer for March

Zach Howard

For our March spotlight, we are thrilled to highlight Zachary "Zach" Howard, our Consumer of the Month.

Residing in Olean, NY, with his grandmother, Zach's journey is a testament to determination, compassion, and a love for animals that shines through his every endeavor. Born into a large blended family, Zach is one of eight siblings. While his family members may be scattered - some residing as far away as Texas, which he considers his favorite travel destination - their bond remains strong. It's not just human family that Zach longs for, but the canine kind as well. While he doesn't currently have pets, Zach dreams of one day owning a pit bull or a boxer.

As a child, Zach's dream was to become a police officer. However, his love for animals won out, and now he dreams of a career in the veterinary field. When he's not busy aspiring to help animals, Zach finds joy in video games and cheering for his favorite sports teams - the Lakers for the NBA and the Steelers for the NFL.

Zach's life goal is twofold - to secure a decent job in his chosen field and to have a place of his own. His passion for animal care and welfare extends beyond his

professional ambitions. He is an active volunteer at the Olean SPCA, where he enjoys interacting with and caring for animals - a task he is naturally good at, even upon first meeting them.

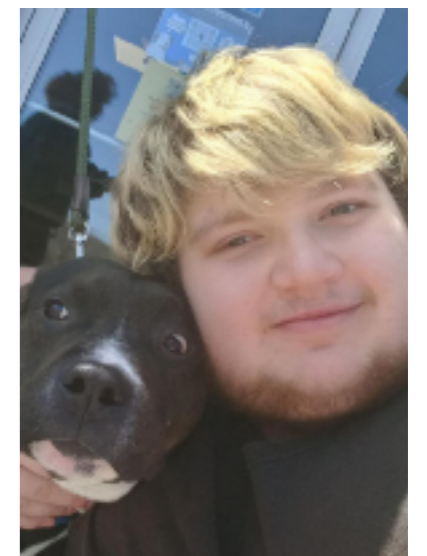
The most influential person in Zach's life was his grandpa, who sadly passed away three years ago. If granted one wish, Zach would choose to see his grandpa one last time, a heartfelt desire shaped by his time in a group home when his grandpa passed away.

Zach's interest in pursuing higher education is fueled by his love for animals. His intention is to major in Veterinary Technician studies. The motivation to work with Directions came from his care managers, who introduced him to the organization. With their help, Zach has been able to expand his social circles, engage in activities outside his comfort zone, and importantly, gain the support to concentrate on his academic pursuits better.

When asked about what he enjoys most when working with his Community Habilitation and Transitions Specialists, Zach spoke highly of the personal growth and experiences he has gained.

They've created an environment where he can be his authentic self, and they've helped him evolve into a better version of that self while enabling him to access opportunities he wouldn't otherwise have.

In a decade, Zach sees himself living his dream - in his own home, with a thriving career in the veterinary field. His dedication to his goals, his love for animals, and his continual personal growth make Zach an ideal Consumer of the Month. We're excited to see his future unfold, as he builds a life filled with compassion, care, and fulfillment in doing what he loves.



Featured Consumer for April

Melinda Normandin

For our April spotlight, we are thrilled to highlight Melinda Normandin, for our Consumer of the Month.

Melinda Normandin, was affectionately known as Mindy during her school years. She lives with her boyfriend and two cherished cats, Jade and Pine. Melinda is an embodiment of determination, compassion, and a genuine love for life. As a child, Melinda dreamed of becoming a police officer, demonstrating her deep-rooted desire to serve and protect. Today, she enjoys a rich array of hobbies, from crafting to sports, emphasizing her multifaceted personality and zest for life.

While Melinda didn't share her favorite travel destination, her heart's wish would be to visit Ireland. This dream destination highlights her adventurous spirit and curiosity about the world. An ardent sports fan, Melinda passionately supports the Buffalo Bills. This commitment speaks volumes about her loyalty and enthusiastic support for her team.

In her personal life, Melinda is committed to achieving her goals, which include leading a healthier lifestyle and finding a church that aligns with her beliefs. Her causes of passion are close to home, too, with a

particular focus on animal welfare. This is no surprise considering her companions at home, Jade and Pine, and her weekly volunteer work at the local humane society.

An interesting aspect of Melinda's life is her love for word searches and journal writing. This interest not only sharpens her mind but also provides a creative outlet for self-expression. In terms of personal influences, Melinda looks up to her mother and brother. Their impact on her life is apparent in her resilience, compassion, and ongoing quest for personal growth.

Melinda's association with Directions has proved to be a fruitful one. She joined out of a desire to socialize and make friends, a goal that Directions COMPEER Program has undoubtedly helped her achieve.

Looking to the future, Melinda envisions herself in the working world ten years from now, suggesting her determination to continue growing and contributing to her community. Melinda Normandin's life is a testament to her resilience, kindness, and continuous quest for personal growth.

The Directions in Independent Living Compeer Program is a revolutionary initiative that focuses on enriching the lives of individuals with mental health challenges through fostering meaningful friendships.

By connecting our consumers with compassionate, trained volunteers, Compeer acts as the bridge towards community integration. These relationships become the catalyst for building self-esteem, reducing isolation, and improving mental health.

Moreover, Compeer extends beyond just friendships; it's a support network, offering various social activities and events, which are instrumental in skill-building and personal growth.

What sets Compeer apart is its dedication to tailor experiences to individual needs, understanding that one size doesn't fit all. Through this personalized approach, Compeer is not just a program, it's a lifeline for our consumers - offering them a sense of belonging, improved quality of life, and the tools to thrive independently.



Featured Consumer for May

Elise Firster

For our May spotlight, we are thrilled to highlight Elise Firster, for our Consumer of the Month.

M Elise Firster is an inspiring individual hailing from Panama, NY. Elise is currently studying at college and stands as an excellent example of determination and resilience for her peers. Elise, known to her close circle as 'Elise', is a stalwart pillar of her family, which consists of her mom and younger brother, Zayne. They share a home in Panama, NY, along with an array of pets - three cats named Amara, Cheebee, and Princessa, a dog named Bear, and three rabbits: Woodchuck, Yoda, and Whispy. Their familial bond is evident in Elise's loving recounting of their time spent together.

The young woman was aspirational from an early age, setting her sights on becoming a teacher or teacher's aide. Her passion for learning and imparting knowledge has shaped her journey, and today, she stands on the precipice of her dream, pursuing higher education with an unwavering resolve.

Elise's interest in writing and a fervent desire for beach travel colors her personal narrative. She is also a passionate fan of the Buffalo Bills, painting a picture of a woman as diverse

in her interests as she is in her ambitions.

Her drive towards achieving her goal of working in a school is complemented by her active engagement in causes close to her heart. Elise is passionate about cancer research and education, areas she feels can make significant societal impacts. While she does not currently volunteer, she plans on being a force for change and good in the future.

An interesting facet of Elise is her unique perspective, a trait she acknowledges and takes pride in. Elise's strength of character can largely be attributed to the profound influence of her mother, her biggest inspiration. Her heart's desire is to have enough funds to travel, a dream that encapsulates her spirit of adventure and learning.

Elise's journey to college was motivated by her unwavering dedication to achieving her goals and fulfilling her childhood dream of working in an educational setting. She acknowledged the valuable support she received from Directions, an organization she had learned about through her school. Elise appreciated Directions' approach to help her reach her goals and gain

greater independence, as well as providing transportation assistance, enabling her to experience new things and form new friendships.

According to Elise, working with her Transitions Specialists has been a joy, with learning new crafts and participating in offered events being a standout. The assistance she received from Directions has also allowed her to focus more effectively on her schoolwork.

Looking forward, Elise envisions herself ten years from now as having achieved her dream job, a testament to her steadfast ambition and resolve. As she strives towards her goals, Elise continues to be an embodiment of determination, making her a fitting choice as our Consumer of the Quarter. Her journey serves as an inspiration to many and stands as a testament to the power of resilience, determination, and the pursuit of dreams.



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.

Helping those with disabilities live more productive lives.

ACCEPT INCLUDE EMPOWER

OLEAN: 716-373-4602 | OLEAN HOLIDAY PARK: 716-379-8670 | WELLSVILLE: 585-296-3408

Serving Allegeny and Cattaraugus Counties in WNY, and limited areas of Chautauqua Cty as well as McKean and Potter Ctys in PA
