

WINTER 2024

inspirations



**EMPOWERING
ABILITIES**

Creating Opportunities.
Changing Lives.

THE PEOPLE POWERING OUR PROGRESS

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OUR MISSION

As a premier service provider, we passionately advocate on behalf of individuals with disabilities by creating opportunities for them to succeed, to achieve, to grow, and to be happy.



Leslie Appel and
Claire Tibbets
celebrate the new
name on the day
it was announced to
everyone.



The Climate Has Changed

Before anyone wants to start an ideological debate as to whether the planet is warming, cooling, or is just right; I'm talking about a different type of climate change. Maybe you noticed that right before Thanksgiving we made a small change to our identity. All right, it wasn't a small change, in fact, it was seismic. We changed our name, our logo, and our entire brand identity to **Empowering Abilities.**

You may have wondered about the reasoning behind the new brand, maybe you are still getting used to it, or you 'get it', but would like more context. The reason is simple. Our name was outdated and focused more on what participants cannot do as opposed to what they can do.

For many, the word 'handicapped' was not offensive as much as it was simply dated. Whatever the reasoning, we had to consider an overhaul. This decision was not out of political correctness, but rather was out of the necessity to have the agency be identified as who we are today, instead of who we were 50 years ago. We continue to respect and honor our history, and the new brand respects that history while honoring who we have become, and who we will be in the future.

It's important for all our stakeholders to understand that we didn't make this decision in a vacuum and then dream up potential names on our own. We spent months researching our stakeholders' perception of our strengths and challenges. Once that process was done, we looked at the descriptive language those stakeholders shared to help us determine how best to describe our services and mission with a contemporary name.

The name may have changed, but the mission has not. We continue to advocate for people with special needs by creating for them opportunities to succeed, to achieve, to grow and to be happy. When making the decision to change the name, it was imperative that our mission remain intact, and that the new brand accurately reflects that mission.

We all know that change can be uncomfortable, and at the same time, we know that to grow and stretch - change is inevitable. In our case, the climate had already changed, and it was time to rise to the moment, and because of that we have a new name and a new identity that is fresh and forward, while our mission remains resolute.

Did we meet that moment? Without question. Simply put...it was time.

Jeff Ashcraft

Empowering Abilities President/CEO





A Quarterly Snapshot: Employment Services

"If someone is interested in working, they have a lot of options," says Laura Jardine, Assistant Program Director for Employment Services. Rosemary McShane took advantage of one of those options a few years ago and she could not be happier about it. Starting out in the Prevocational program, Rosemary spent time learning some basic job readiness skills, like the importance of quality work, appropriate social skills, and having good attendance and punctuality.

When she felt she was ready, Rosemary received pointers on how to apply and interview for jobs. Within a short time, she landed a McDonald's lobby attendant position, and she has been cheerfully employed there for nearly five years. For a while, a job coach helped her learn the job duties, as well as how to get to and from her job. Rosemary is independent enough now to no longer need a job coach, but last year, 37 other individuals in the Community Employment program received the support they needed from job coaches to obtain a job or increase their independence at a job site. Fourteen people participated in the Prevocational program.

Rosemary loves her job, especially earning a paycheck and being part of a team. She often encourages other job seekers and shares the many benefits of employment with them.

Although Marie Miller had a different employment journey, she also loves her job and is happy to share her feelings with others. As one of the 30 Associates in Enterprise, Marie works on assembling, labeling, packaging, and scanning jobs for local and regional companies. She is a regular Empowering Abilities

Left: Marie Miller works in Enterprise packaging car fresheners for Little Trees.

Right: Rosemary McShane delivers orders to cars as part of her job duties at McDonald's.



Cleaning Crew Associate Tom Kulcsar helps keep the KWQC studios neat and clean.

employee, enjoying the benefits of any other employee of her part time status. Prior to this position, Marie had a part-time job in the community, but the hours were inconsistent and there was very little structure. "I appreciate the structure and how the supervisors and managers support us and are always there to help us when needed. The move to this job worked out very well," says Miller.

The Enterprise operation, which now includes the Screen Print and Embroidery Department, has continuously grown in its six years, not only in number of units produced, but in revenue. These trends have provided consistent employment for the Associates, as well as operating revenue for the organization.

Yet another employment opportunity is the Housekeeping Associates. This crew consists of eleven people who are also Empowering Abilities employees. They go to eight different sites, including KWQC studios, some churches, and other area businesses to clean, sanitize, and tidy up the space.

Jardine says, "We can assist a person from the time they decide they want to work all the way through to after they land a job and beyond. Like I said, they have a lot of options, and we're here to help them through it all."



Celebrating Achievements & Excellence

The 2023 Empowering Abilities Recognition Dinner was a time of celebration and appreciation.

Friends, supporters, staff, and participants gathered and enjoyed the festive evening. The event was filled with gratitude for what participants achieved throughout the year and for what staff accomplished in their roles. The evening was also an opportunity to show supporters what they have made possible and to thank them in person.

The following participants and staff received awards at the Recognition Dinner.



Annette Grimm
Daily Discovery Achievement Award

Since retiring from her job nearly 3 years ago, Annette has attended the Daily Discovery program, starting each day by making rounds to say hello to everyone.

When the day's planned activities start, Annette joins in, never one to turn down the opportunity to try something new. She might be found doing boot camp exercises, hitting balls at the Red Hawk driving range or sitting down for a discussion of the latest read for book club.

During this past year, Annette has made great progress and excelled at achieving her Daily Discovery goals, all the while maintaining a good attitude and witty personality.



Randy Parkhurst
Residential Center Achievement Award

Randy's great sense of humor and contagious laugh has followed him throughout the 35 years he has lived at the Residential Center. Over those years, he has made many friends by roaming

around the building visiting staff, hanging out with the receptionist to greet visitors, parking at the kitchen window to see what's for dinner, and sitting outside enjoying the fresh air and sun.

Throughout the last couple of years, Randy has experienced some significant and challenging health concerns that have affected him in numerous ways. Despite these serious issues, he has persevered and endured the challenges. Randy's ability to take pleasure in everyday experiences is inspiring to everyone around him.



Gail Geiger
Endeavor Living Services Achievement Award

Gail started receiving residential services as a young girl and has worked hard to become the woman she is today. The skills she's learned have helped her in so many ways, from making healthy lifestyle choices for herself to working in Enterprises. Gail is continuously motivated to pursue her personal growth.

As Gail has continued to grow, she has ventured out beyond the Quad Cities and taken trips to experience new adventures. Sometimes just for pleasure and other times to compete in Special Olympics, these experiences are now something Gail looks forward to, as she enjoys them with her friends. Gail has developed a wonderful social circle that includes deep friendships, and she is an inspiration to everyone around her.



Charles Coleman
Employment Services Achievement Award

Charles' passion for cleaning is always apparent. If there is a spill or mess, Charles will jump up to clean it without being asked. It was obvious from the start of his cleaning crew assignment that with a few simple directions, Charles was on his way to being a pro with a vacuum and mop. At one job site, the employer asked Charles to stop doing such a good job because to clean as thoroughly as Charles would like, he would pull out machinery that had to be digitally reset.

As a member of the cleaning crew, Charles has taken on very early morning jobs, which means he is up and out the door before the sun rises. Regardless of the early hour, Charles is always ready and waiting to be transported to the assigned job site. Charles is not all business though. Often when leaving a job, Charles will quietly make the crew chuckle by turning a calendar or picture upside down. Charles shows great respect for fellow crew members and has an innate understanding of how important it is to always do his best at his job.



April Houessou
*Residential Center/Group
Home Staff Excellence Award*

April is relentless in her efforts to improve the lives of the participants, the staff, and her own personal performance. She is an expert trainer and a vital part of welcoming new staff, and her efforts are evident through the retention of her trainees. She provides guidance and expertise to ensure successful, productive and passionate resident aides.

April makes suggestions for creative goals that contribute to the participants leading successful, fulfilling, and happy lives. As an advocate for recreation and its benefits, April assists in the planning and logistics of community activities. During the Mississippi Valley Fair week, April personally brought groups to the fair every night. This dedication to participant satisfaction doesn't stop there, as April is constantly seen working additional hours at the group homes or staying late at the Residential Center.



Sheila Shelton
*Community Residential/
Endeavor Living Staff
Excellence Award*

Over her 20 years of employment, Sheila has worked with many participants in many different settings, always understanding the importance of providing a stable home life and a positive environment. She has a wonderful rapport with the participants. When encountering unique challenges, Sheila handles them with grace and positivity. She takes the time needed to assist people through difficulties by providing a listening ear and giving thoughtful advice.

Recently, Sheila has experienced some transition; adjusting to a new schedule that she adapted to with ease and assisting several participants with moving into a new home. She did an amazing job ensuring their belongings were packed and then unpacked, so they quickly recognized that their new environment was their new home.

Sheila also has worked hard to build rapport with families and guardians. She works well with her co-workers, approaching situations with a calm and open demeanor.



Amber Williams
*Gary Ashcraft Memorial
Award*

Amber's compassion and sense of commitment to the participants knows no boundaries. Without regard to who is on her caseload or who is making the request, when Amber recognizes a need, she responds. Her primary focus is always ensuring needs are addressed, whether the person involved is an Enterprise Associate who she no longer works with or someone she assists every day. She tackles all issues with patience, dignity, and respect.

Staff at all levels, and even in departments outside of her own, know Amber will respond without hesitation and will see things through until there's a resolution.

Amber lives the Empowering Abilities' foundation principles, which are to always think team, step up and be kind.



Essential

Innovative Projects You Have Made Possible

Empowering Abilities is continuously creating new ways to support people with special needs through innovation, and many individuals and organizations have made gifts or provided grants to make this innovation come alive.

The “Dayhab Re-imagined” project is in progress and is more than you can imagine. Participants in the Daily Discovery West program on Hickory Grove Road can now enjoy their breaktime in a jungle-themed room, complete with a canteen for the kitchen window and various animal faces waiting to be discovered behind trees. Thanks to many generous donors, including the **TJX Foundation**, who supported this project, each room is taking on a theme that will keep the environment visually interesting for everyone. Special tables and chairs, like mushroom tables in the “Oz” area were made possible from a **Regional Development Authority** grant. An interactive virtual reality space was partially equipped with VR sets and an interactive projector from a **Scott County Regional Authority** grant. While there is still much work to be done, the *reimagined* project is well on its way to becoming something special.

While all that work was in progress on the inside, the “Support the Court” project created opportu-



Daily Discovery Casemanager Leslie Appel leads a Book Club meeting in the new “Oz” space.

nities for individuals to enjoy the outside. A multi-purpose court has now been completed at both the Hickory Grove Road and Brady Street buildings thanks to many generous contributions, including the **Boosters’** annual gift. These accessible spaces offer everyone a place to be outside and enjoy places that were previously not usable.

With those outdoor courts as an inspiration, plans are underway for a courtyard at the Residential Center. The courtyard brings a peaceful and safe outdoor space to the residents’ home. Many donors chose to make their year-end gift to this project and the **HANDS Auxiliary** directed their annual gift to the courtyard as well, so work will begin as soon as weather permits. In addition, the **Rotary Clubs of Bettendorf and North Scott** granted funds to assist with the completion of different aspects of this project.

So many great projects. So many wonderful supporters. So many participants benefiting.

Welcome Aboard

At their annual meeting in October, the Board of Directors voted in two new members that will join a talented, dedicated group who share their time and expertise to enhance the lives of people with disabilities at Empowering Abilities.



Lauri Flanagan

With an extensive background in human resources, Lauri Flanagan will share her expertise and insight in the areas of employment policies, procedures, and trends. She also brings experience with volunteering in the community and serving on other boards of directors.



Nathan Kessler

Nathan Kessler has worked in the banking industry for nearly 20 years. Currently, he holds the position of Vice President, Commercial Banking at Quad City Bank & Trust. Nathan will share his years of experience and knowledge of banking with the Empowering Abilities board.

Hall of Fame Honoree

Established 29 years ago to recognize and honor those who have supported people with disabilities in this community, the Hall of Fame offers inspiration to others. At the Hickory Grove Road building, the Hall of Fame hallway is designed to help everyone understand and remember the important contributions these people have made to enhancing the lives of people with disabilities. **Northwest Bank and Trust** is the newest organization to enter the Hall of Fame.

It is fitting that “trust” is in their name, because Northwest Bank and Trust is a bank that has not only supported Empowering Abilities for many years but has become a trusted partner and friend to the organization.

The relationship started with the Investment Management Group, which has looked after the interests of the organization and has provided sound financial advice for many years. They have carried out the desires and directions of the finance committee and helped secure funds for the health of the organization. The Investment Management Group also has assisted in facilitating gifts to Empowering Abilities through trusts, wills, and stock transfers.

The bank provides support in many other ways as well. Their sponsorships and participation in the HANDS golf outing, and more

recently, the inaugural year of the Scavenger Hunt, have raised the profile and revenue of those events. Northwest Bank and Trust’s contributions have come in various forms, but perhaps their most valuable contribution is providing one of their team to be a part of the board of directors. Cody Allen has been on the board for only three years, but his participation has been valued and appreciated.



Our Thanks Goes To



A new bathroom floor at one of the group homes provides a nonslip surface, so Thelma Kiwala can safely help Cappy Beckenbaugh brush her teeth.

Quad Cities Housing Council provided funds from a collaborative grant through the Scott County Regional Authority to replace the bathroom flooring in each of the three group homes. The new flooring is more visually pleasing but also offers residents a safer environment.



Volunteers did some landscaping that created an inviting atmosphere at the Residential Center.

Thanks to Christ Church Davenport, the Residential Center received a new welcoming look, and the residents were provided with some fun activities on a Sunday afternoon.

Leah Foster left a legacy gift to Empowering Abilities Endowment Fund through her trust. By making this generous arrangement, Leah was able to continue to support Empowering Abilities, an organization she cherished during her lifetime.



Quad City Bank & Trust donated proceeds from their own Trivia Night. Their staff came together for some teambuilding at the Empowering Abilities Brady Street location. The result was fun, camaraderie, and a donation to Empowering Abilities.



This team stopped at the Modern Woodmen office as part of the Scavenger Hunt.

Through the Employee's Charity Pledge Plan Committee, Modern Woodmen of America donated funds to Empowering Abilities. These funds included donations from employees and a match from Modern Woodmen, which made an even bigger impact.





35 Years of Making a Difference

During Linda Gill's tenure at Empowering Abilities, she witnessed and experienced many changes. Staff came and went, programs grew, and most recently, the name of the place she worked for nearly 40 years changed its name. But one thing that remained consistent in all that time is Linda's dedication to the people she was hired to serve 35 years ago. Making life better for people with special needs was the work of Linda's life, and her dedication to them never wavered.

Starting out at the Residential Center, Linda began her career not knowing that many years later she would be the administrator of that facility. In December, Linda wrapped up her career overseeing the operations of the Residential Center as well as the other residential and day service programs. With each position she held, Linda gained experience and knowledge, eventually making her the "go-to" person for many topics concerning the agency or to get a historical perspective for issues or decisions.

Linda left her mark on the organization, the people she worked with, and the participants she

Helping celebrate her retirement and Hall of Fame induction, Linda Gill was joined at the recognition dinner by (from left) her daughter Dr. Christine Gill Huber, husband Brad, (Linda), daughter Melissa Gill and Melissa's fiancé Josh Filson.

worked for. She empowered those she supervised to become leaders. She ingratiated herself with families, staff, and others with her sense of humor and unscripted commentaries. Most importantly, in everything she did, the problems she tried to resolve, and the sometimes-challenging circumstances she encountered, her primary concern was always the care and well-being of the participants. Her continuous advocacy and dedication are rare traits and something that will be missed as Linda retires and leaves the place she helped mold.

To honor her work and commitment, Linda was entered into the Empowering Abilities Hall of Fame as the 2023 individual award recipient.

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225/Golfer or \$900/Foursome

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Saturday, August 24th, 2024

More details to come!

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