



**Citizens Options
Unlimited**

Direct Support Professional

RECOGNITION WEEK





At Citizens Options Unlimited, we rely on Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) to empower people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to live their chosen lives.

From Sept. 8-14, we heard many unique stories from DSPs throughout our agency. The stories differ in how DSPs came to the agency, how long they've been here, and what experience they brought into the role.

What unifies all the DSPs we spoke to is not just the care they have for the people they support, but also the significant personal growth they've experienced during their time here.

We are continually thankful for every DSP, and we hope you enjoy the stories we've compiled in this book.

“As the parent of a resident at House C at the Helen Kaplan Center, I must give a huge shout out for DSPs Jennifer and Channa.

They are incredibly caring and competent with my daughter and ALL the residents. JJ is non-verbal and they are tuned in to her body language and subtle changes in her behavior. When they speak to her it is with respect and positive energy.

This week is a great time to say Thank You to all the staff, but we are grateful every day.”

-Sandra Bolbrock, Parent of Person Supported

"I've been working with the residents at the Shoreham ICF since 2017 and have made some of the closest relationships between staff and the people I support. Being able to provide a voice for people who can't speak for themselves has always been a passion of mine stemming back to having my own siblings with high support needs. I wouldn't trade this job or the relationships I've made for the world. The job isn't for everyone and it is mentally and physically exhausting at times but seeing the smiles on the individuals faces makes it all worth it."

-Allie LaGala, Staff Member



“I would like to recognize all the DSPs that show up every day to care for our loved ones with compassion and dedication. We have many people that have come in and out of my sister's lives and there are those that stand out as exceptional in their compassion, empathy and selfless nature.”

**-Tina Castiello,
Sibling of Person Supported**



“Heartbroken and grateful to have had Patty Catalano caring for my daughter over the years at Shoreham. So fortunate were the individuals whose lives she touched during the many, many years she worked there. Patty passed away recently.

She will be remembered for her energy, her caring nature, and most of all her love. The love she showed to every individual that was under her care. She took care of everyone like they were a member of her family. As a parent I so appreciate her dedication to her job and the dedication to the individuals she cared for on a daily basis. We both enjoyed sharing stories of our grandchildren, which I will surely miss.

Patty will be missed beyond words and always thought of with love and fondness.”

-Elizabeth Hennessy, Parent of Person Supported



Thanking Helen Kaplan DSPs

Helen Kaplan Residents thanked their DSPs with a tropical beach party!



Your Work Changes Lives!



Get to know our DSPs!

Guerdy Pierre

Guerdy Pierre supports the men and women living at Red Spring Lane in Glen Cove.

Guerdy has been a DSP for six years, kickstarting his career caring for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities through Citizens Options Unlimited. Over his six years here, Guerdy has developed a bond with the people living at Red Spring Lane. What stands out to him is the care and support he receives in return.

“When you go on vacation and you come back, they open they door and jump out to come see you,” Guerdy said. “They give you a hug. That’s the reason I’m here.”

At Red Spring Lane, Guerdy, a passionate chef, cooks at the house every day, following recipes and demonstrating cooking skills to the men and women who will get to enjoy the food.

We appreciate you Guerdy!

Ibukunoluwa Ajiborisha

Ibukunoluwa Ajiborisha supports the men and women living at Red Spring Lane in Glen Cove.

Ibukunoluwa has been a DSP for almost nine years, and she enjoys it.

“I love taking care of people,” Ibukunoluwa said. “I love to care for them and assist them.”

Over the past nine years, Ibukunoluwa has learned so much: including patience, perseverance and self-control as she assists the men and women residing at Red Spring Lane in living their daily lives.

Thank you for your compassion and dedication, Ibukunoluwa!



Guerdy's Cooking!



Suzette Martinez

Suzette Martinez supports the young women living at Saxon Avenue in Bay Shore.

Suzette, who also works at a nursing home, was inspired to apply to become a DSP because of her passion for helping people.

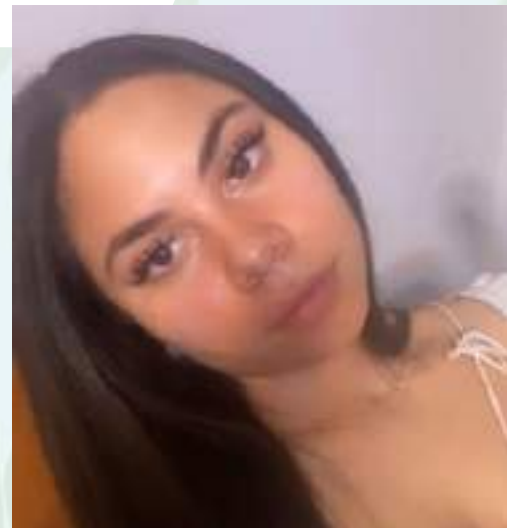
“I wanted to work with people who have developmental disabilities,” Suzette said. “So, it just kind of went hand in hand for me.”

Since joining Citizens Options Unlimited a little over a year ago, Suzette also provides support to other residences that support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

When asked what Suzette likes most about the role, she said it's making a difference every single day.

“The more time I spend with the young women, and the more you get to know them, you get to a point where you're in sync with them,” Suzette said. “You know what they're going to do before they do it. You know what they want.”
“I love the girls,” Suzette added.

Thank you, Suzette! You certainly are making a difference.



Neverhalie Saintune

Neverhalie Saintune supports the young women living at Saxon Avenue in Bay Shore. Neverhalie was inspired to become a DSP by her mom, who was also a DSP.

“It ended up being perfect for me,” Neverhalie said. Neverhalie has been a DSP for about a year. Throughout this time, Neverhalie said she’s learned a new perspective in a new environment.

“It taught me to not only be more patient, but to make things more fun,” she said. “I enjoy being able to bond with the young women we support. I feel like I connect with them because they’re very sweet, and very fun to hang out with. They do teach me a lot. They teach me a new perspective. They teach me to think outside of the box.”

When asked what people should know about being a DSP, Neverhalie said the hard work is rewarding.

“You’ll get something out of it,” she said. “One way or another, you’ll receive benefits from it.”



Kia Wright

Kia Wright supports the young women living at Saxon Avenue in Bay Shore.

Kia was inspired to become a DSP because she comes from a family of caregivers. Growing up, her grandmother hosted people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in her home.

“As a young girl, I would see what it took to take care of people who weren’t always able to take care of themselves,” Kia said. “It’s just in my blood. It’s in my purpose to give back and be a supportive person overall.”

Kia has been a DSP for Citizens for a year and four months, bringing a background of care from other local agencies. With an already busy schedule of supporting the young women she supports live full and enriching lives, Kia, a former division one collegiate basketball player, is a basketball coach, inspiring people through her business Wright Way Performance and her nonprofit Kwiet Storm Youth Development.

“Everyone needs support,” Kia said. “Everyone needs that help, and I just wanted to be that to the world.”

Some may wonder how Kia can balance being a DSP and a basketball coach. Kia said it’s simply proper sleep and time management.

“When you enjoy what you’re doing, it’s not like it’s work for you,” Kia said. “It’s a passion, it’s a calling, and it’s a gift.”

Whether on the basketball court or in the Bay Shore residence providing leadership and support, Kia is a champion!



Lavern Bedward

Lavern Bedward supports the people living at Port Washington Boulevard in Manhasset.

Lavern was inspired to apply for the role of DSP because of her cousin back home in Jamaica, who is on the autism spectrum. When she heard that she could apply the same care and compassion that she has for her cousin professionally, she was filled with joy.

“I’m so protective of my cousin,” Lavern said, adding that she is reminded of her love for him when working with the people who live at the Manhasset residence.

Lavern has been a DSP with Citizens Options Unlimited for over two years.

“I’ve learned what their likes and their dislikes are, and how to respond to them if they’re asking a question, and if they’re upset, how to treat the situation and how to calm them,” Lavern said when asked what she’s learned over her two years here. “I’ve learned how to be patient and know that they can’t express themselves like how we express ourselves. Patience is the key, overall, to be with the people living at the Manhasset residence, and how to treat them and how to understand.”

Being a DSP, Lavern said, requires love, care, passion and respect. “Even though they’re not your family, you have to treat them like how you would want someone to take care of you,” Lavern said. “Being a DSP is a good job, and I love it.”

Lavern, the love and compassion you have for your family and the people living at the Manhasset residence does not go unnoticed.



Alana Duggan

Alana Duggan supports the people living at Ontario Avenue in Plainview.

Alana had been working in the hospitality industry when she decided she wanted to give back to the community. After scrolling on Indeed, she saw the listing for DSP and applied. She was excited when she got a call back.

Since Alana started in July, she's learned so much from the men she supports at Ontario, including patience, which Alana said allows the men to improve quickly.

"I've been liking it," Alana said. "I really enjoy hanging out with the men and getting to work on their life skills and seeing them progress."

Alana said she's been impressed with the way the men have bonded with one another as roommates, forming their own family together.

"They're able to resolve issues they have with each other," Alana said. "I really admire that about them. They're adventurous. Most of them are down to try different things. We went to the Ducks game. We went to Round1, the arcade. I like how adventurous they are."

When asked what people should know about DSPs, Alana said that anybody can make a difference and help their community, no matter what their experience or formal education is.

Thank you, Alana! In just this summer, you've already made an incredible difference in the lives of the men living at Ontario! We can't wait to see what you'll do throughout the rest of your time here.



Gerard Muro

Gerard Muro is a Direct Support Professional at the Helen Kaplan Center ICF in Plainview.

Gerard was inspired to become a DSP through his work at an x-ray company that was providing services to Helen Kaplan Center.

“I got to know the wants and needs of the people residing at Helen Kaplan Center, and how they come first,” Gerard said. “I started to be more active, instead of working behind a desk. During the day, I just wanted to be more hands on, and it becomes second nature.”

Experiencing the kindness and joy the men and women living at Helen Kaplan Center have to offer, Gerard has now been a DSP at Helen Kaplan Center for four years.

“It’s been pretty steady,” Gerard said of his four years here. “The people living here have different needs, and it’s fun getting to know them.”

Thank you, Gerard! We are so glad that you were inspired to work with us, and now you’re inspiring others!



Andrea Sparks

Andrea Sparks supports the men who reside at Ontario Avenue in Plainview.

Andrea has been serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) with the agency's network for over 25 years, spending 12 of those years at Ontario.

"I chose this role because of my passion to help people with I/DD," Andrea said. "When I became a DSP about 25 years ago, I was inspired by the positive I know I would make in the lives of the people I support."

Through her work as a DSP, Andrea has found fulfillment and growth. "I love my job, and I am thankful for the opportunity to be able to make a difference in their lives," Andrea said.



Claire Fontaine

Claire Fontaine supports people living at the Village Drive residence in Medford.

Claire consistently demonstrates exceptional dedication and professionalism in her role.

Her positive attitude and collaborative spirit foster a supportive work environment, inspiring her colleagues to excel. Claire's attention to detail and strong problem-solving skills makes her a valuable asset to the team.

Thank you for bringing everyone together, Claire!





*Thank You
For All
You Do!*