

DIRECTIONS IN INDEPENDENT LIVING

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE • SUMMER ISSUE 2023



Dwyer Veteran's Peer to Peer Program
Museum Muster in Eldred at the
WWII Museum



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Employee of the Quarter Nancy Kehl

In the heart of our dedicated team at Directions in Independent Living, we find gems that epitomize commitment, resilience, and leadership. This summer, we are thrilled to spotlight Nancy Kehl, our Employee of the Quarter, who has been serving diligently as the Allegany Co. Coordinator for nearly 7 years.

Nancy, who hailed from Wellsville and played a vital role in opening a DIL site there, has steadily climbed the ranks in her career here, evolving from a Care Manager to a revered Coordinator. When asked about what motivates her daily, Nancy was quick to attribute her drive to her team, whom she fondly refers to as her family. A team player to

The core, Nancy finds her inspiration from her colleagues Kate, Krissy, and Laura, and cherishes the backbone provided by the leadership team.

Her journey began with a fascination for the family-oriented ethos at Directions, and it was this sense of community and mutual respect that drew her to us initially. Since then, Nancy has embraced the challenges and uplifting aspirations that her role presents, always steering her team with an admirable blend of professionalism and understanding, qualities she admires in her mentor, Kate.

From her nominees, a constant note of appreciation echoed

about her unwavering commitment to her programs. "Nancy is the beating heart of our operations in Allegany Co. Her dedication is not just seen in her significant contributions but felt by everyone she works with. Her readiness to adapt and collaborate encapsulates the essence of a true team player."

Outside the office, Nancy enjoys spending time with her family and friends. A little-known fun fact about her is her prowess in pool leagues, where she bagged several trophies as a top female shooter. California holds a special place in her heart, a destination marked by beautiful landscapes and cherished family time.



DJ Moore At the Leadership Summit

At Directions in Independent Living (DIL), we are fortunate to have a dedicated team working diligently towards our vision. Among this remarkable team, one individual stands out for his recent extraordinary achievements: DJ Moore. We would like to take this opportunity to recognize DJ for a job well done and to shed light on what it takes to accomplish what he has achieved.

As you may or may not know, DJ was recently a panelist at the Leadership Summit hosted by Leadership Cattaraugus, Leadership Allegany, and Chautauqua Leadership Network. What started as just agreeing to participate as a panelist soon escalated into DJ taking on multiple roles during the event. Not only was he a panelist, but he also masterfully managed a breakout session and a networking event.

DJ's performance at the Summit was nothing short of spectacular. Those who witnessed his work were treated to a perfect blend of insight, dedication, and humor. He brought his unique personality to the forefront, representing DIL with dignity and grace. His ability to speak highly of our staff and infuse humor into serious discussions made him an audience favorite.

So, what does it take to accomplish what DJ has achieved? It goes beyond mere participation and delves into passion, commitment, and an unwavering belief in the cause. DJ's commitment to DIL's mission and his ability to articulate our vision is what set him apart. DJ's genuine passion for leadership and the mission of DIL shines through in everything he does. His love for what he does fuels his desire to do more and to do it exceptionally well.

Being a panelist, running a breakout session, and hosting a networking event requires immense dedication. DJ's unwavering commitment to his work made these tasks seem effortless. DJ's sense of humor is not just entertaining; it's a way to connect with people. His ability to infuse laughter into discussions humanizes complex topics and fosters a sense of community.

DJ, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for representing DIL as wonderfully as you did! Your hard work and dedication not only made us proud but inspired others in the room as well. You embody the spirit of DIL, and we are incredibly grateful to have you as part of our team.

2nd Annual Charity Golf Scramble at Allegany Hills GC

The event resonated with laughter, camaraderie, and the gratifying clinks of golf clubs meeting their mark...

In the glorious embrace of the Allegany Hills Golf Course, the community recently gathered for a day of sport and solidarity at the Directions in Independent Living's 2nd Annual, 2023 Charity Golf Scramble. Held on Friday, June 9th, the event resonated with laughter, camaraderie, and the gratifying clinks of golf clubs meeting their mark.

As the morning dawned, enthusiastic golfers congregated at the registration desks, their spirits undeterred by the rainy weather that day. Golfers spanning various skill levels came together, united in their zeal to support the incredible range of programs facilitated by Directions in Independent Living.

The event was elevated to grand heights, courtesy of our distinguished sponsors who generously supported this noble initiative. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to our Platinum Sponsors: Community Bank, Spragues, SBU Veteran Services, and Univera Healthcare; Gold Sponsors: Ashley Furniture, Parkwood, and Raymour and Flanigan; Silver Sponsors: Black, Lyle and Habberfield, Legion Riders, and FreemanKelley, Inc.; and our Bronze Sponsors: Tasta Pizza and Duggan & Duggan. Special mention goes to FreemanKelley, Inc., SBU Veteran Services, and Otis Minnesota Services for their dedicated Hole Sponsorships.

The post-tournament luncheon was graced with the captivating performance by the singer "Buckwheat", adding a musical charm to the atmosphere of joy and celebration. His melodies echoed the sentiments of unity and camaraderie that defined this special day. On behalf of Directions in Independent Living, we extend our deepest gratitude to every participant, sponsor, and well-wisher who stood with us. Your generosity and support fuel our mission to foster programs that resonate with empowerment and independence.

As the day reached its climax, the air buzzed with anticipation for the announcement of the winning team. Congratulations to the team comprised of Mike Austin, Dr. Robert Haas, Dr. Mark Hirst, and Chris Chase! Their synergy on the green was truly remarkable, showcasing both skill and camaraderie.

Looking forward to welcoming you again next year, for another round of golf and goodwill, uniting our efforts in making a tangible difference in our community. To continue being a beacon of support, contact Caitlin Metler at cmetler@oleanilc.org for inquiries or to register for future events. Thank you for being a vital stroke in our success story!





2nd Annual WWII Museum Muster

On Saturday, July 8th, the serene surroundings of the Eldred World War II Museum in Eldred, PA transformed into a bustling hub of camaraderie and shared stories during the annual Veterans Muster hosted by the Dwyer Peer to Peer Program. This remarkable event, provided the perfect backdrop for veterans and their families to connect, reflect, and delve deep into the pages of history.

Veterans and family members were greeted with a hearty welcome and a delectable Chicken BBQ meal, courtesy of 'Me and Him BBQ'. The day unfolded into a vibrant gathering where attendees could immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of history preserved within the museum's walls, featuring over 15,000 square feet of meticulously arranged models, historic artifacts, and touching personal narratives.

A constellation of veteran-supporting agencies graced the occasion, introducing the crowd to the invaluable programs they have on offer. The attendees had the chance to win big with 50/50 raffles and door prizes, adding a touch of excitement to an already splendid day.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our generous sponsors, including the Joseph P. Dwyer Peer to Peer Program, LEEK Hunting and Mountain Preserve, the Student Veterans of St. Bonaventure University, the VFW, the Veteran's Administration, and many more, who pooled their efforts to orchestrate this grand salute to our heroes.

To our brave veterans, your service to this great nation remains unparalleled. Thank you for safeguarding our freedom and shaping our proud legacy!



A Day of Unity and Learning Summer Staff Advance

For our Summer Staff Advance we enjoyed a fun filled day at the Allegany American Legion

On Wednesday, June 21st, the team at Directions in Independent Living gathered at the Allegany American Legion for a day infused with learning, unity, and fun. This vibrant event, running from 9 am to 1 pm, embodied the spirit of community that is a hallmark of our organization.

The day was particularly special because of the enriching presentation by our guest speaker, Della Moore, who illuminated the profound significance of the Juneteenth holiday for all attendees. Juneteenth, also known as Emancipation Day, commemorates the end of slavery in the United States. This day serves as a poignant reminder and celebration of the strides taken toward freedom and equality, echoing the importance of unity and respect in our society.

After this illuminating talk, the atmosphere became even more festive. The team indulged in a series of exciting activities such as Cornhole, Blind Leading Blind, and a riveting Water Relay, fostering camaraderie and teamwork among staff members. To further our commitment to fostering an inclusive environment, a crucial staff training session on LGBTQ+ issues was conducted, enhancing our team's awareness and understanding of diverse experiences and perspectives.

And what could be better to cap off an enriching day than a hearty BBQ feast catered by Me&Him BarBQ? The delightful spread allowed team members to bond over delicious food, wrapping up an unforgettable day of unity, learning, and celebration.



Thrilling Competition and Community Spirit Corporate Challenge

The city of Olean witnessed an exhilarating display of friendly rivalry and community spirit at the highly anticipated Corporate Challenge. Hosted at Jamestown Community College, this event brought together numerous businesses and community teams for a thrilling 5K Run and 2 Mile Walk. Participants and spectators alike reveled in the excitement and camaraderie that filled the air throughout the event.

The Corporate Challenge, which took place from 4:30 to 8:30 on June 22nd, showcased the spirit of healthy competition and teamwork as businesses went head-to-head in the running challenge. This unique event aimed to foster community engagement, promote physical activity, and create lasting connections among local businesses.

One of the standout teams that stole the spotlight was the incredible group from Directions in Independent Living. The Directions team showcased their dedication, perseverance, and team spirit throughout the race. Their impressive performance was a testament to their commitment to excellence and camaraderie. They truly embodied the spirit of the Corporate Challenge.

Apart from the exhilarating race, the event culminated in Olean's Largest Office Party. Participants and attendees were treated to a vibrant celebration, complete with delicious food, refreshing drinks, and an abundance of socializing. The party served as a platform for participants to relax, unwind, and forge new connections, creating an atmosphere of unity and togetherness.

"We are thrilled to have witnessed such an amazing turnout at this year's Corporate Challenge in Olean," said Kate Steigerwald, Directions Executive Director of Programs. "The event exceeded our expectations and showcased the true spirit of our community. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the participating teams and community members who made this event a resounding success."

The Corporate Challenge not only provided an opportunity for businesses to showcase their competitive spirit but also served as a platform for fostering community engagement and promoting a healthy lifestyle. Through events like this, Olean continues to demonstrate its commitment to creating a vibrant and united community.



Featured Consumer for June

Michael 'Taz' Guerra

For our June spotlight, we are thrilled to highlight Michael 'Taz' Guerra, our Consumer of the Month.

Directions is thrilled to present Michael Guerra, affectionately known as 'Taz', as our Consumer of the Month for June. Taz resides in Olean housing, carving out an independent life filled with humor, resilience, and courage.

Taz is known for his close bond with his family. Though his beloved mother recently passed away, her influence continues to shape his life. Taz also shares a strong connection with his brothers and enjoyed a recent trip to visit his father in Vegas.

As a child, Taz aspired to become a paramedic, demonstrating an early desire to help others in their hour of need. These days, when he's not spending time with family, Taz enjoys the simple pleasure of watching TV. But he's also a passionate Chicago Bears fan, despite not having any furry friends to share game days with.

In life, Taz has clear and wholesome goals: to be healthy and happy. Alongside this personal mission, he is also passionate about raising money for children with cancer, a cause that highlights his altruistic nature.

One of Taz's standout qualities is his sense of humor. He can find the silver lining in every situation, and his infectious laughter often brings light to the lives of those around him.

When asked about his most influential figure, Taz shares heartfelt memories of his mother, whose lasting impact continues to guide him. If he could make a wish, it would be a practical one – a cool million dollars.

Taz is also focused on his mental health, seeking to improve management strategies. He found a supportive partner in Directions, enabling him to make significant progress, like moving into a new apartment and establishing healthy habits.

Working with our STRAWW Specialists, Taz feels heard and knows he can rely on them for help. Their support has been instrumental in developing his social skills and enhancing his socialization efforts.

The positive effects of his relationship with Directions have also trickled into his academic life. With our help, he can better concentrate on his schoolwork, allowing him to work towards his future goals.

Where does Taz see himself in ten years? In a place where happiness and health are not just distant dreams, but tangible realities.

As he ventures forward on this transformative journey, Taz visualizes a future rich with possibilities, a life where he is not defined by his past or the hurdles that stand in his path. Every step he takes is one that leads him closer to fulfillment and peace.

At Directions, we are steadfast in our commitment to stand by his side, aiding him in navigating the complexities and challenges that lie ahead.

Congratulations to Taz – a beacon of hope and inspiration. His unwavering resilience demonstrates that with grit, determination, and a bit of humor, it's possible to reshape one's life story.

His journey stands as a testament to the transformative power of perseverance, proving that no matter how insurmountable life's challenges may seem, there's always room for hope and rejuvenation.

Featured Consumer for July

Isabel 'Issy' Lyons

Directions in Independent Living Celebrates Our Consumer of the Month for July: Meet Isabel Lyons

At Directions in Independent Living, we take pride in showcasing the inspirational journeys of our consumers. For July, we are thrilled to spotlight an individual whose resilience, dedication, and vibrant personality have touched everyone she meets. Let's get acquainted with Isabel "Issy" Lyons, our distinguished Consumer of the Month for July.

Born and brought up in the loving atmosphere of Olean, NY, Isabel shares her home with her adoptive parents and sister. Being adopted at the age of 17 by her caring, loving, and hard-working mom, she blossomed under their protective wing. Isabel's family unit is a testament to the nurturing and empowering environment they've fostered together, an epitome of love and unity that extends beyond blood ties.

Ever since her childhood, Issy harbored dreams of becoming a veterinarian, a goal fueled by her unwavering love for animals. A fervent animal lover, she invests her time working and volunteering at the SPCA, a hobby that brings her immense joy and fulfillment. Her household buzzes with the energy and love of her pets - two dogs and four cats named Jazzy, Dottie, Digger, Coco, Ollie, and Fluffy, not forgetting her fish that add a serene touch to their home.

Even though she hasn't ventured far, Isabel dreams of the sun-kissed shores of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, envisioning it as her ideal getaway. A staunch Buffalo Bills supporter, her spirit echoes the vigor and enthusiasm synonymous with the vibrant sports community.

When it comes to life goals, Isabel has a clear vision. From finding a steady job and a long-term partner to buying a home and a car, her aspirations reflect her determination to build a stable and happy future. She envisions herself sharing her life story to spread awareness, fostering a nurturing environment for her future family, a life untouched by the trauma she once endured.

Issy is fiercely passionate about advocating for mental health and cancer awareness. A volunteer at the SPCA, her efforts extend into realms that echo her deep-rooted empathy and understanding. Despite grappling with Hashimoto's disease, Isabel's resilience shines through, a living testament to her fighting spirit and the will to thrive against all odds.

Among her strongest influences in life is her mother, Kelly Lyons. A pillar of strength and encouragement, Kelly has instilled in her a sense of passion and a strong-willed attitude. As Isabel contemplates furthering her education, she credits her motivation to the nurturing and supportive backdrop provided by her family, coupled with her desire to broaden her horizons and explore the opportunities that college might present.

Her journey with Directions has been transformative. Working with us, she has honed her social skills, learned the nuances of budgeting, and bolstered her self-confidence. The time spent with her Directions specialist has not only facilitated her personal growth but has also ignited a belief in her own potential, fostering a mindset where she believes she can achieve anything.

Looking ahead, Isabel sees herself independent, with a family of her own, sharing her inspiring life story to raise awareness and foster empathy in the community. Her wish to break the cycle of trauma resonates with her vision for a future filled with healing, growth, and endless possibilities. Join us in celebrating Isabel Lyons, a beacon of resilience, determination, and inspiration. Your journey, Isabel, ignites hope and embodies the spirit of triumph over adversity. Keep shining, and here's to many more milestones on your path to self-discovery and happiness. Congratulations!



Featured Consumer for August

Samuel Riley

For our August spotlight, we are thrilled to highlight Sam Riley, for our Consumer of the Month.

August welcomes the opportunity to celebrate one of our unique and inspiring consumers, Samuel Riley, also affectionately known as Sam. This month, we delve into the life of Sam, uncovering the layers that make him the extraordinary individual he is today.

Sam resides solitarily, cherishing his independence. His early life was a testament to adaptability and perseverance. Coming from a lineage of hard-working individuals, Sam recalls moving three times before he even stepped into 2nd grade. Such frequent upheavals could be challenging for anyone, yet they instilled in Sam an innate strength that would come to define him.

Dreams often begin in childhood. For young Sam, the vision was clear: he aspired to be a 3D product designer and draftsman. While most kids were engrossed in fantasies of superheroes, Sam was already laying the groundwork for his future.

Sam's leisure time paints a picture of contrast. On one hand, he's a fervent gamer, engrossed in the virtual realms of video games. On the other, he's an enthusiast of the tangible, tinkering with RC cars and often visiting his favorite racetrack in Iowa. Though Sam doesn't own any pets, his connections span from close friends in South Dakota to loving grandparents in Idaho.

While sports might not pique his interest, Sam is fervently passionate about environmental causes. He may not volunteer in a traditional sense, but his commitment to a sustainable future is commendable. An interesting tidbit about this eco-conscious young man? At the tender age of 17, he constructed a crypto mining computer – a testament to both his tech-savvy nature and forward-thinking approach.

Sam holds his mother in the highest regard, crediting her as the most influential figure in his life. If a genie were to grant him a wish, Sam would desire a cool 1 million bitcoin, perhaps a nod to his early tryst with crypto mining.

An important chapter in Sam's narrative is his association with Directions. Referred by community services, Sam's interaction with Ted from Directions played a pivotal role in steering his life toward positivity and purpose.

Currently, Sam is employed part-time and has made a cozy abode in his apartment. The future looks promising for this resilient young man. By 33, he envisions a fulfilling life - a loving partner, children, a home, and cruising around in a sleek Infinity. If the past is any indication, Sam's dreams are not just mere aspirations but imminent realities.

We are immensely proud to spotlight Samuel Riley this month. His journey, marked by grit and determination, serves as an inspiration to all. May his story light the path for many more success tales in our community.



Dwyer Veteran's Peer to Peer Trap Shoot Fundraiser

For our Summer Staff Advance we enjoyed a fun filled day at the Allegany American Legion

The Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer to Peer Program recently painted smiles on the faces of local veterans during its successful Trap Shoot event, a beacon of camaraderie and solidarity held at the Portville Conservation Club in Little Genesee, NY. The event unfolded on the bright morning of August 19th, drawing a considerable number of enthusiastic participants ready to partake in a day filled with friendship and competition, all while fostering the spirit of unity.

At the crack of dawn, veterans from across Cattaraugus County converged at the venue, their spirits buoyed by the prospect of reconnecting with fellow veterans and partaking in an activity that has fast become a cherished tradition in the community. Registration kicked off at 8:00 AM sharp, a prelude to the exciting competition slated to commence at 9:30 AM.

Amid the laughter, cheers, and shared stories, one of the day's highlights was the stellar performance by our very own Howard Cornwall, who showcased skill and finesse, securing a notable third place in the overall shooting results. His achievement was not just a personal victory but a moment of pride for the entire Directions in Independent Living community.

We remain committed to fostering this wonderful community where veterans find camaraderie, support, and healing through engaging activities and outings. We are proud to cultivate an environment where our staff can grow both personally and professionally, building a community that stands strong together.



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.



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