



West Haven Community House

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WHCH Celebrates National Direct Support Professional (DSP) Week, Sept. 13-19, 2020

West Haven, CT (September 14, 2020) -- National Direct Support Professional Week is an annual celebration that highlights the life-changing contributions of the direct support professional workforce. The West Haven Community House (WHCH) recognizes and appreciates the work of more than 80 direct support professionals (DSP's) who work at Community Connections, a residential and day program serving adults with intellectual disabilities.



DSP's are the heart and soul of supports for people with intellectual disabilities helping them live full productive lives. Among the many aspects of their careers, they help individuals with daily activities including building their social skills, provide transportation, accompanying them to doctor appointments, cooking and serving meals, performing light housekeeping duties, assessing medical needs, and providing companionship.

"WHCH is grateful for our DSP staff who work together to ensure that all people with disabilities are respected as individuals, are empowered to make choices, big and small, and to learn the skills they need to improve their engagement and productivity in everyday life", said Patty Stevens, WHCH executive director.

As a day and residential service provider for adults with intellectual disabilities for 45 years, WHCH's Community Connections program provides critical assistance and meaningful opportunities for adults with intellectual disabilities to experience community living, skill building, and increased independence to become active members in the community. Whether it's living alone or with roommates, learning in a supported environment or participating in community activities, WHCH helps individuals realize their full potential and dreams.



The five month, temporary shutdown of WHCH's Community Connections Day program, due to COVID-19, was an extraordinarily challenging time for individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families. The unpredictable outcome and uncertain duration of the virus, and the stress and anxiety of the shutdown will have a long lasting impact on individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families. Without the structure and routine, individuals can lose ground on the skills they work to build and the connections they make on a daily basis at the program.

During the shutdown, staff from the day program continued to support families and reached out to individuals to offer emotional support and resources, and many staff members stepped up to ensure day-to-day coverage at the agency's Residential program, which provides 24-hour support at seven residential sites.

The Day program reopened in early summer with safety measures in place for both staff and individuals, and although the all-important community outings and day trips have diminished, the connection with their peers and the renewed structure has proven to be a true blessing for the participants and their families.

While residents were sheltered in place and had to forgo visits from family and no day program to go to, it became increasingly difficult for employees to keep up with daily skill building routines and come up with new and engaging activities on top of the added responsibility of following the recommended COVID guidelines to keep everyone safe.

“Cut off from friends, family, day programs and services — sometimes without understanding why — many of our residents struggled with frustration and anxiety in response to the disrupted routines and plans. Our staff did an excellent job stretching their ability to keep the individuals engaged and healthy day in and day out while they couldn't attend a day program or have family visits and outings. The residents see our staff on a daily basis, and although they are not immediate family, they are considered extended family,” said Stevens.

About the West Haven Community House: For more than 78 years, the Community House has been the cornerstone social service agency of West Haven with programs including Head Start, a quality school readiness program for children from income-eligible families; Children & Youth Services, a before and after-school and summer program for school-aged children; and Community Connections day and residential program for people with intellectual disabilities.