

A portrait of Trang Conrad, a woman with dark hair and bangs, smiling. She is wearing a blue top and a dark cardigan. The background is a brick wall.

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2020

IN THE ISSUE:
Trang Conrad
becomes EPI's fifth
Iowa DSP of
the Year!

Exceptional Persons, Inc.



LIVING OUR MISSION

Connecting people, creating opportunities,
and nurturing growth since 1957.

WWW.EPISERVICE.ORG

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Children & Family Services Director

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Chief Financial Officer

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Organizational Development Director

CHRIS SPARKS
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DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

by Chris Sparks

When we realize that we lack a truly informed perspective we should always proceed with caution, listen more than we talk, and challenge ourselves to learn. So I am proceeding with caution to discuss diversity and inclusion.

Exceptional Persons, Inc. was founded in May 1957 on the principles of community inclusion and recognizing and respecting diversity. And later on supporting the needs of families using child care and the providers that serve them – with a focus on the needs of children.

We have been on a sixty three year journey to support people with disabilities to find their voice and take their rightful place in their communities. Theirs is a story of fighting for human rights and struggling to have opportunities equal to others in our country. We have long argued that communities are strengthened when the gifts and talents of all are embraced and appreciated.

The events we have been witness to over the last few weeks, and, sadly, many times before, have illustrated that we have a lot of work ahead of us to address and eliminate racism and racial injustice in the United States. We recognize that many people we serve, and even many current EPI staff, have experienced violence and discrimination, and many carry with them these traumatic memories.

We watched in horror the recent death of George Floyd in Minneapolis at the hands of

police officers. This must have been even more traumatic, and re-traumatizing, for those who have experienced violence and persecution in their lives.

We know that this monstrous act represents but a small minority of the injustices people of color have experienced over time, including the pervasive, generational impacts of structural discrimination.

We add our voice to the many offering compassion and empathy, and calling for justice, and looking for a better path ahead. We want our organization to be part of the solution so we are actively seeking specific ways we can become more welcoming and embrace diversity.

We are working to create a group of people within the organization to work on diversity and inclusion - charged to determine specific and concrete actions that would make the organization more welcoming and inclusive. This work includes consideration of persons served, of course, but also of staff, and the broader community of which we are a part. And further to evaluate relationships and assure partners and vendors likewise uphold the worth of all persons.

We must stand against hate and intolerance and violence. We cannot be silent. We want to do more to eliminate racism and discrimination in our culture and to help assure all are safe, welcomed and accepted into community.

CHRIS' CORNER

CATCH THE LATEST NEWS FROM
OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CHRIS SPARKS.



PEOPLE ARE THE HEART OF EPI



‘EVERY DSP HAS A PURPOSE’: QUARANTINE WITH PERSONS SERVED **BY KATIE SLADE**

During these unprecedented times, our Direct Support Professionals (DSP) truly proved their commitment to the people they serve does not waiver.

Jason, DSP for 11 years, quarantined for 20 days providing care to a home that was exposed to COVID-19. When asked, he told us he wanted to protect the people he serves and his own family. Fortunately, no one within the home contracted the virus.

Bradon, DSP for 5 years, quarantined at a site for two weeks providing care to individuals around the clock who were potentially exposed to the virus.

On the morning of April 23, Kim, who has been with the EPI family for nearly 20 years, was informed an individual she had grown close with had passed away hours before receiving a positive COVID-19 test. His three other roommates were awaiting their results.

EPI had a number of staff step forward to quarantine within the home and we are so thankful for them all. Kim being one of these staff, shares she felt her heart

and mind instantly agree to reach out to the supervisor of the home and volunteer herself to stay within the COVID-19 positive home.

Though this wasn't her usual site, she says she felt these men deserved someone who could put the fear of the virus aside and take care of them at possibly one of the hardest times of their lives.

“I thought about the other men who not only just lost their decades old friend, but could be sick as well. So I went in with nothing but compassion and care ready to be the support they needed,” said Kim.

She stayed in the home from Thursday, April 23, until Monday, May 11, caring for the men in the home without leaving, providing assistance day and night.

“I felt I was the right person to go in and give them the care they needed. I gave them emotional support as well as made sure they ate balanced, healthy meals, stayed hydrated, and that they got outside to enjoy fresh air and sunlight as often as possible.”

LET'S STAY CONNECTED



LIKE US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!

Just by sharing our posts you help engage others with EPI!



SIGN UP FOR OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTER

Stay up to date on the latest happenings around EPI.



SEND US YOUR EMAIL

If we don't currently have your email, we'd love to! Send an email with your info to communications@episervice.org.

On day 16 of Kim's quarantine within the home, an individual that had been battling the virus in the hospital was finally able to come home. When he arrived home, they all sat down to watch the memorial service of their friend who had passed away.

As they cried, Kim comforted them and engaged in sharing many memories with the individual. Kim says she felt honored to be the one there with them as they were celebrated his life.

“Every DSP has a purpose, a calling to do something to make a difference in the world, but some of us go through times that redefine our lives and our abilities to go much further than we ever thought possible and come out on the other side stronger for it. I would do it all over again if needed.”

We are more than happy to report, the three men of this home have recovered from their experience with COVID-19. Kim was immediately tested for the virus after having contact within the home and the result was negative!

“I didn't end up with the virus just because I was in contact with it. I used all of the proper personal protective equipment EPI supplied to me before I went in to the quarantine. I was given the appropriate cleaning supplies as well. Everyone is amazed I didn't get it, but that speaks volumes for PPE (and EPI for supplying all that was needed).”

When discussion began in our nation, about the pandemic potential, we moved immediately to action.

- Staff were trained and infectious illness procedures were carefully reviewed.
- Supplies, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), were assessed and sourced.
- We closely followed guidance from CDC, IDPH, Governor's office, Black Hawk County Health department as well as our funders and regulators.

Stay up-to-date by visiting online at www.episervice.org - under “COVID-19 Response” you will find our latest service information.

SERVICE EXCELLENCE



TRANSPORTATION SERVICE UPDATE **BY RON SATTERLEE**

Since 1961 EPI has had the privilege of transporting children and adults with disabilities to school, work, and throughout other community activities.

In our 58 year service history we've seen first gradual then sweeping changes causing our services to adapt.

A funding change in the last half of fiscal year 2018 resulted in lost riders and subsequently increased our per trip costs for our remaining riders. This has placed a significant financial strain on our transportation services and has necessitated the search to find alternative solutions.

Due to extended program closures as a result of the pandemic, bus/ daily route based transportation will not return through the previously communicated date of June 30, 2020, and will be effectively considered closed.

We are deeply disappointed our last few months of this service and our spring reception were canceled due to COVID-19, but we're ever so grateful for the long service and dedication of our transportation staff. They have spent years truly going above and beyond with their riders.

We have been working with them to find other jobs in the organization - as appropriate and as desired - or support them in finding employment outside the organization.

The transportation garage will now serve as an auto repair service for the public. Services include, but are not limited to, oil changes, tire repair needs, brake pad replacement, exhaust repair and more.

We plan to continue offering our field trip services - provided to school districts, child care centers, nonprofits, local cities and tourism bureaus solely.

Services will be available Monday - Friday, 7AM - 5PM. Contact us at 319-235-9058.

COMMUNITY INCLUSION

LIST OF OUR NEWEST BUSINESS PARTNERS

- Brown Bottle Cedar Falls
- Brown Bottle Waterloo
- Buffalo Wild Wings
- Carlos O'Kelly's
- Days Inn Cedar Falls
- Five Sullivan Brothers Center
- Fleet Farm
- Freddy's Frozen Custard & Steakburger
- Hampton Inn
- Hardee's
- Hawkeye Child Development Center - ALC
- Hy-Vee Ansborough
- Hy-Vee Crossroads
- Long John Silver's/KFC
- Lowe's
- Maple Lanes
- Marco's Pizza
- Marcus Theaters
- MercyOne
- Montage
- Orchard Hill Church
- Papa Murphy's
- Pepper's Grill & Sports Pub
- Starbecks Smokehouse
- Stuff, Etc.
- Texas Roadhouse
- Walmart Waterloo
- Whiskey Road

MICHELLE'S JOURNEY TO INDEPENDENCE

When EPI created its employment service many years ago, we saw a need for enclave services to provide a “stepping stone” for the people we serve to achieve their true goal of gaining a job of their own within their community.

The pause in our enclave services due to the pandemic has given us time to consider our employment program and the desires of the people we serve.

After careful assessment, we feel the people we serve no longer need this “stepping stone”, enclave services, in order to achieve their goal of community employment.

Michelle's journey to community employment did just that. Here's her story.

For Michelle, moving into a place of her own was a something she dreamed about for quite some time. With guidance from EPI's employment services, her dream quickly became a reality.

From Michelle's time spent within our day habilitation program volunteering in the community, our employment services suggested she move straight to job development - resume building and interviewing practice - skipping enclave.

Michelle sat down with the employment services team to discuss the type of work she had experience through volunteering and, most importantly, what interested her. In Michelle's case, she enjoyed retail and working with clothing.

Our employment services began their search for retail careers and found an opening at Stuff, Etc. in Waterloo.

Once EPI notified Michelle, they worked together to apply for the position. With little waiting, an interview was scheduled!

Michelle is happily working and can proudly say she has made her first deposit on an apartment she can truly call her own.

STAFF EXCELLENCE



TRANG CONRAD BECOMES EPI'S FIFTH IOWA DSP OF THE YEAR **BY SANDY COLLINS**

We are pleased to announce our very own, Trang Conrad has been awarded with Iowa Direct Support Professional of the Year by American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR).

ANCOR diligently chooses each winner by the Direct Supports Professional's ability to advocate for persons served, effectively showcase leadership skills to their peers, bridge social relationships for persons served, and support persons served with thinking outside of the box.

Trang, better known to many as Chu, has only called in sick to work one day out of her 25 years with the EPI family. With this in mind, a word-count regulated nomination form was very hard to highlight all of her accomplishments in her time here.

Since 2007, ANCOR's annual DSP of the Year awards recognize outstanding professionals who deliver long-term supports and services to people with I/DD.

The awards celebrate the important role DSPs play in ensuring individuals with I/DD are included and empowered in the community, and raise awareness about a direct support workforce in crisis.

Chu is a fierce advocate for everyone she works with—whether it's to get a medical referral or medication change. She constantly looks for ways people can get out into and enjoy the community. It's important to her that new staff learn person-centered supports. Chu leads by example and encourages staff to listen, follow through and genuinely show they care.

"We appreciate so much Chu's commitment and long service to persons served by EPI. We have always known she is a star and we are thrilled that she is being recognized by ANCOR as the Iowa DSP of the year. We could not be more proud of her and her 25 yearlong dedication and commitment to true community inclusion for the individuals we support," said EPI's Executive Director, Chris Sparks.

JOIN OUR TEAM

IMMEDIATE NEED POSITIONS:

- Direct Support Professional 2 (C.N.A.)
- Direct Support Professional 2
- DSP2 Night Attendant
- DSP2 Weekend Package Night Attendant
- Direct Support Professional 4
- Health & Wellness Professional
- Information Systems Security Administrator
- Maintenance Worker II

This is working at EPI - connecting people, creating opportunities, and nurturing growth.

REAL CAREER. REAL PURPOSE.

Apply at www.episervice.org

*Due to pandemic restrictions all interviews will be conducted virtually until further notice.



MEET ALISSA GEVING

Exceptional Persons, Inc.'s new Talent Recruiter and Retention Coordinator, Alissa Geving, joined our team early March. Her purpose is to help new and veteran staff establish and grow their career within EPI.

The Talent Recruiter and Retention Coordinator's mission to help staff feel connected, to create opportunities within their reach, and nurture their professional growth.

"I am so lucky to be a part of this mission and can't wait to meet you."

Give her a call at 319-232-6671 or email her at alissa.geving@episervice.org to learn more about the open positions we have listed above.

JOIN US FOR THE FOLLOWING CAREER FAIRS

Walk-In Interviews at IowaWORKS

3420 University Avenue, Waterloo
September 16, 1 PM - 4 PM

UNI Fall Virtual Career Fair

Online - visit www.uni.edu
September 21, 11 AM - 3 PM

Wartburg Career Expo

100 Wartburg Boulevard, Waverly
October 1, 11:30 AM - 2 PM

HEALTH & WELLNESS



YOUR HEALTH IS OUR NUMBER ONE PRIORITY **BY MAGHAN BOWMAN**

As our community reopens, we continue to follow all national and state guidance as well as comply with all of Governor Reynold's executive orders swiftly.

After assessing underlying conditions of persons served in our daily residential services, we reduced traffic to these sites by tightening the circle of staff. This procedure remains the same.

In June, we began to lift office restrictions to "by appointment only". We have to do so cautiously, and we can't do it alone.

If you plan to visit our office please review the following actions we are taking:



Requiring **everyone** to wear a mask covering their nose **and** mouth.



Refraining from physical contact and limiting contact with high-touch surfaces.



Maintaining the six-foot physical distancing requirements for **everyone** and asking meetings take place virtually whenever possible.



Requiring hand washing by providing hand sanitizer or soap and water readily available to everyone.



Disinfecting common areas regularly including extra attention to the high-touch surfaces.



Individuals at high-risk are **encouraged** to stay home. **Most importantly, we ask that all who are ill or experiencing any symptoms, to please stay home.**

Please reach out to us at 319-232-6671 if you have any questions. Thank you for your help in keeping the community safe!

INNOVATIVE THINKING

MY25/MAINSTAY

Getting the food right - in other words, changing our eating habits - gets us closer to sustainable good health. Our experience using My25/Mainstay

with our staff and persons served has resulted in persons moving towards their ideal healthy weight and a reduction in preventable health medications.

My25/Mainstay isn't a diet - rather it provides nutritional resources and tools to enhance weight management, mealtime habits, and independent skills.

EPI RECEIVES GRANT FUNDING FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE

By Stacey Lancour

EPI was recently awarded a combined \$14,000 for COVID-19 response efforts. Funding will provide necessary PPE for our front-line staff, supplement direct service staff wages, and much more as we navigate the impacts of the pandemic on our community.

Thank you to Wells Fargo, Delta Dental of Iowa Foundation, and the Black Hawk County COVID-19 Cooperative Disaster Response Fund, a fund of CFNEIA, for their investment to support EPI at such a critical time.

WE ASKED, YOU ANSWERED

In order for our staff to safely continue providing uninterrupted services, we put a call out to our community members and you answered! **We had a total of...**



Your generosity allowed EPI to distribute these to the people we support, Direct Support Professionals and child care staff, among other staff unable to work remotely.

We also asked the community for child sized masks, your donations allowed us to provide the little ones at the Hawkeye Child Development Center - ALC, and children within care throughout the surrounding area.

That's not all! We received 250 face shields, 20 isolation gowns, and N95 masks to better protect our staff working on the front lines.

Thank you to all local businesses who contributed to the face shield production efforts and to Black Hawk County Emergency Management for coordinating the distribution to organizations in need.

We cannot say it enough, thank you to our community members, staff, and friends for helping keep us all safe!

CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES



CHILD CARE HEROES BY MARY JANSSEN

The child care workers moved through each protocol change with grace. Whether they were checking temperatures at the front door as the little ones said goodbye to their parents or getting a room of toddlers to social distance themselves.

We were happy to offer child care staff a temporary pay increase along with our direct support professionals during these challenging circumstances.

When the pandemic struck, families were hit with such unpredictability. Will my child's spring break be extended? Will they return to school next week or even at all this school year? The need for child care sky rocketed as the school closures set in.

For essential workers, their jobs didn't stop for anything, their children still needed the care we promised - and our staff stood ready.

For the families able to work from home and wanting to keep children home, we were able to offer a discount for holding their spot, rather than paying the full amount.

For the little ones especially, times like these can be scary and extremely overwhelming, but we are forever grateful to have staff who stayed positive and continued as if everything remained the same.

Special thanks to our staff at Child Care Resource and Referral for the distributing the "Child Care Heroes Work Here" signs throughout the Cedar Valley!

HAWKEYE CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER - ALC

CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL

Our Child Care Resource and Referral staff are here to help families throughout the Cedar Valley.

Help with:

- Opening a new child care
- Car seat checks
- Finding care for your family
- Training for providers
- and more!

Don't hesitate to give our staff at Child Care Resource and Referral of Northeast Iowa a call at 319-233-0804.

BUTTERFLY RELEASE

Preschoolers at the Hawkeye Child Development Center - ALC recently learned all about the life cycle of a butterfly.

They watched as them grow from a tiny egg all the way into a beautiful butterfly. After days of waiting, they were ecstatic to finally release their little friends out into the world.

With big smiles and many laughs, the preschoolers loved every minute but especially enjoyed feeding the butterflies apples and other sweet treats.



EXCEPTIONAL PERSONS FOUNDATION



PLEASE CONSIDER A
GIFT TO SUPPORT OUR
DEDICATED WORKFORCE
**BY STACEY
LANCOUR**

In these last few weeks we've all witnessed unprecedented challenges - the likes of which we've not faced in more than a century. We've been similarly challenged at our organization too - first to focus on the health and safety of persons served and staff, and then to think very differently about community services for people with disabilities and child care. At the same time, we have watched our organization continue to show uncommon commitment and resourcefulness.

Our day habilitation, employment and route based transportation programs were closed by Governor order mid-March. For weeks now, persons served and staff are largely staying in their homes - leaving only when necessary. While important and necessary for safety right now, these limitations place incredible challenges on the people we serve. And our staff.

As careful as we're being, we're not immune to the effects of this virus within our organization. Our focus is nearly consumed with keeping the 450 individuals we support and more than 240 direct service staff and front line supervisors providing essential services safe.

And yet, I've been reminded by the generous outpouring of handmade cloth face masks (3,300 masks donated!) that our friends are looking for ways to help us.

If you are motivated and have the means, would you please consider supporting our direct service staff who continue to be a source of strength and consistency for those we serve in an increasingly challenging time?

These direct service staff come to work every day with a commitment and strength of character that is truly admirable. While their work conditions are more complicated than ever, they are truly on the "front lines" of this pandemic. As we have watched other community employers most deservedly increase the compensation of their staff on the front lines, like grocery store clerks and stockers, we are challenged to find ways increase our DSPs' compensation.

We've done so temporarily, but without major changes to Medicaid reimbursement rates or other financial support, we won't be able to sustain the increase for as long as we believe necessary.

YOU CAN HELP



Cornerstone Giving

Please include the

Exceptional Persons Foundation in your will and estate planning to ensure EPI services will live on forever.



Qualified Charitable Distributions

Consult with your financial advisor on how to make a tax free donation to EPI as part of your IRA required minimum distribution!



Want to Make a Donation?

Your generosity means so much - thank you! Donations allow us to fulfill our mission when other funding runs short. We accept donations anytime. Visit us online at www.episervice.org.

Please consider a gift to support this dedicated workforce.

- Your gift of \$100 will help ensure each essential member of our workforce has necessary personal protective equipment.
- Your gift of \$300 (The CARES Act allows for a \$300 charitable deduction without tax itemization) will fund one pay period of the temporary pay increase for one employee.
- Your gift of \$1,000 will help with staffing during the pandemic and make an investment in meeting critical long term staffing needs.

If you'd like to support our COVID-19 critical response efforts and these dedicated staff, please mail or visit www.episervice.org to make a donation today. We sure appreciate your support.

THANK YOU TO 2020 MORE THAN YOU SEE SPONSORS

Though we wish we could have been together to celebrate our 7th annual More Than You See, we continue to be blown away by our community's unwavering support.

Thank you to the following businesses who pledged their support for those we serve even in the absence of an in-person fundraising event.

Exclusive Presenting Sponsor

- Dan Deery Motor Company

Filling the Seats Sponsor

- Canadian National Railway

Piano Sponsor

- PDCM Insurance
- Community Bank & Trust

Loyal to the Cause Sponsor

- SCHEELS

Friend Sponsor

- Levi Architecture
- Tony's Plumbing
- VGM
- Wells Fargo

Supporting Sponsor

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- Farmers State Bank
- Hagarty-Waychoff-Grarup Funeral Service
- Harris Cleaning Services
- Hogan Hansen PC
- Magee Construction
- MercyOne
- Montage
- Veridian Credit Union

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ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

Exceptional Persons, Inc.



OUR MISSION

Connecting people, **creating** opportunities, and **nurturing** growth since 1957.



OUR VISION FOR TOMORROW

Working together we will realize a future where all people are recognized as valued citizens – encouraged and supported to live, work, and grow – in their communities.



GET SOCIAL

Follow, like, add us on social media! We have Facebook, Vimeo, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. This is a great way to keep up with the latest news and events for EPI!



QUESTIONS?

Contact our Communications Specialist, Bethany Giachino, with any questions about our newsletter.