



# NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2022

**IN THE ISSUE:**  
Service Powered  
by *Love*

Exceptional Persons, Inc.



## LIVING OUR MISSION

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

**WWW.EPISERVICE.ORG**

760 Ansborough Ave. Waterloo, IA 50701 | (319) 232 - 6671

# ABOUT US

## LEADERSHIP TEAM

MARY JANSSEN  
Children & Family Services Director

DEB JUNGLING  
Chief Financial Officer

KATIE SLADE  
Organizational Development Director

CHRIS SPARKS  
Executive Director

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Hawkeye Community Foundation

STEVE LINDAMAN - Vice President  
Veridian Credit Union

JORDAN ALBORN - Treasurer  
Financial Advisor

GIA SHANNON - Secretary  
Guild Mortgage

SUE FANGMAN - Past President  
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MEGAN FEREDAY  
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VGM & Associates

DAN LEVI  
Levi Architecture

BRUCE MEISINGER  
Volunteer

JOHN MONAGHAN  
PDCM Insurance

KYLE ROED  
CPM Holdings, Inc.

STACEY SMITH  
Mercy Health

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The Veridian Group, Inc.

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Community Bank & Trust

KIRSTEN JUHL  
University of Northern Iowa

SUE FANGMAN  
Volunteer

BRIAN GABEL  
Panther Sports Properties

MATTHEW GARY  
US Bancorp Investments

WADE ITZEN  
Banklwa

DEB LILLY  
Hawkeye Community Foundation

STEVE LINDAMAN  
Veridian Credit Union

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## FACING THE STORM WITH COURAGE AND OPTIMISM

by Chris Sparks

The last year has presented challenges, many unprecedented, and some without very good solutions. It has been very hard to make sense of our world. As oppressive and overwhelming as the problems have felt at times, there have been many shining moments and they continue to see us through.

*What are they, you might ask?*

- Our staff have shown up, stepped up, and courageously worked with open hearts. They have been marvels. They've calmed fears and nurtured the resolve for us all to persevere. If it sounds like I'm exaggerating I assure you I am not, people have been great. Seeing the good our staff do, and their commitment, it's enough to restore your faith in humanity. I keep getting up and entering the battle each day in large part for them, they're my inspiration.
- In the midst of some of the most trying circumstances we have ever experienced, we were selected again as an Employer of Choice by the Waterloo Courier. Nominated by our employees. They had some really nice things to say about us in their nomination - you'll read more about this on page 8.
- We were able to secure vaccinations and boosters for employees and persons served - at a somewhat early juncture. Due in large

part to the partnerships we have nurtured and our dogged determination.

- Fiscal year 2021 was a good year financially. Sure, we got help from a Paycheck Protection Plan Loan, CARES act money from federal and state sources, additional funding for child care services, but we have been surviving a once in a century global pandemic!
- The workforce problems we have been talking about have burst into the open. Much attention is being paid with a study group here, a plan there, and talk of funding... for something. This is great and we are working to amplify our particular industry's needs.

As we look into the next year we see continued challenges; the pandemic and its dangers, managing workforce shortages and challenges, financial restrictions, payment system changes, and continued service system transformation.

We intend to face coming challenges as we always have, keeping our working relationships healthy, taking care of staff, collaborating with like-minded partners, and focusing on our customers.

### ***The state of our organization is strong.***

Yes, we have been battered by the challenges of the last two years, that is true. We have been battered, but we are unbowed. We are financially and operationally stable and we're facing the storm together, and with courage and optimism.

## CHRIS' CORNER

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



Follow my Facebook page for more - [www.facebook.com/ChrisSparksEPI](https://www.facebook.com/ChrisSparksEPI).



# PEOPLE ARE THE HEART OF EPI



## SERVICE POWERED BY LOVE **BY KATIE SLADE**

*“Being a DSP at EPI is a privilege, it’s a call to service. It’s a call to serve,”* Gloria (pictured above), DSP since 2013.

*“Being a DSP means being reliable, patient, compassionate and willing to make a difference in the lives of people we support,”* Kim, DSP since 2002.

EPI along with our national association, American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR), successfully celebrated another week long recognition of the amazing work of a Direct Support Professional (DSP).

“Direct Support Professional Recognition Week is one of my favorite weeks of the entire year! This has been a difficult year and a half for many. Making it all too easy to focus on the negative but in the midst of these lows, there have been many positives coming from the difference makers, our direct support professionals. *They have been my source of inspiration throughout this whole pandemic and deserve this recognition,*” shared Chris Sparks, Executive Director.

In these current conditions, showing up to work anywhere right now gets you full credit, but when you show up and work with a full and loving heart, like our DSPs all do, that is truly going above and beyond and is what makes our direct support staff so incredible.

We want our DSPs to know we see them, and appreciate their efforts. They give so much and rarely receive any or much recognition and for at least one week out of the year we try to change that.

### How does EPI celebrate during DSP Recognition Week?

We say thank you, we celebrate them with a ceremony and a gift, and this time, we asked a few of the people supported by our DSPs and this is what they had to say.

*“I thank Chu for her kindness and for being nice all of the time. I feel like I can open up to her more than other people,”* said Jeremy.

*“I thank Wilson for being there. I like having the same staff and knowing that most of the time it’s going to be him,”* shared Daniel.

# 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](mailto:communications@episervice.org).

*"She is a very nice person and I thank her for that, from the bottom of my heart,"* shared Gary.

No matter the circumstances, our direct support professionals willingly inconvenience themselves for the benefit of others.

They comfort those who are struggling, they sit and calm someone's fears while their own fears of this pandemic are also raging, that is what we call service powered with love.

Another way to show our support is through giving a gift in their honor or by continuously advocating for more funding to pay our direct support professionals a fair wage.

We acknowledge we have made some progress in increasing their wages this year by \$2 an hour back in July, but we promise we are not done advocating for better pay.

We hope that you again join us in celebrating DSPs next September, and always.

## SEND YOUR WELL WISHES

Shortly after celebrating DSP Recognition Week, we begin working on nominations for ANCOR's DSP of the Year.

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.

ANCOR diligently chooses each winner by the DSP'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.

Previously, ANCOR has awarded five of EPI's DSPs at the state level, this year we are hoping to receive the national level award!

*If you have a story of an outstanding DSP you would like to share, scan the QR code to submit your feedback.*



# SERVICE EXCELLENCE



Recently we asked Jessica about her experience with finding a job through EPI's Employment Services.

***"I have worked at Buffalo Wild Wings in Cedar Falls for over four years now. It's the only job I've kept for four years. I have started a job, quit or gotten fired but have now had this job longer than any other and I don't intend to give it up anytime soon. I LOVE working here,"*** said Jessica.

Jessica went on to share her most memorable moment thus far was when her coworkers began coming to her instead of going through her job coach and realizing she no longer needed the support. That's our favorite memory too!

We believe work is a crucial part of feeling a sense of belonging. Despite significant job gains over the past few months, many workers are facing higher levels of unemployment.

***As America's economy recovers, inclusion will be key to our success.***

## INCLUSION; THE KEY TO SUCCESS BY NICOLE RAND

EPI's Employment Services focuses on supporting individuals overcome barriers between themselves and competitive employment. While matching skills and interests to employment opportunities earning at or above minimum wage.

**We have had the honor of supporting people in finding over 200 jobs in the last five years.** Read that again, *over 200 jobs in just five years!* That is no small feat and we are very proud of our team for this level of achievement.

These jobs have been found on local community job boards online, in newsletter classified ads, and through great partnerships. **We have worked with over 100 different area businesses to develop employment opportunities for all.**

These amazing business partners include everything from retail stores, restaurants, family-owned businesses, schools, hotels, child care centers, automotive service centers, car washes, manufacturing plants, and many more! Businesses like one of our longest lasting partners at Walmart

# COMMUNITY INCLUSION



## VEHICLE REPAIR SERVICES

Call Exceptional Vehicle Repair for a free quote to service your vans, buses, or vehicles today!

We offer very competitive pricing for:

- Oil changes
- Tire repair, rotation, alignments
- Brake pad replacement
- Brake repairs
- Heating/cooling repairs
- Exhaust repair

The transportation garage will be open Monday - Friday. Our garage gives us plenty of space to maintain social distancing.

Give our auto repair team a call at (319) 235-9058.

in Waterloo to one of our most recent business partners, Casey's General Store in La Porte City.

Our extremely passionate team assists individuals with building a resume, finding and applying for a job, preparing for interviews and making follow up contacts. If job coaching is necessary, we work with the individual's employer (at no cost to them) to complete on the job training before someone graduates services.

We also assist those receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits through the American Dream Employment Network or ADEN's Ticket to Work program. This free program gives individuals the opportunity to utilize all work incentives and benefits that Social Security offers while increasing greater independence through employment.

Whether someone is just entering the workforce for the first time, returning to work or currently working, our Employment Services can support people in achieving these Ticket to Work program benefits.

But we don't stop there, our Employment Services team stays engaged throughout the community. Recently, Nicole Ericson, Associate Program Director, was named Iowa APSE (Association of People Supporting Employment) Board President. Our very own Stephanie Duffy, Job Coach, was this year's recipient of Iowa APSE's Professional Award for her strong advocacy for persons served.

We will remain committed to finding real jobs for *all*. If you or someone you know is interested in our Employment Services or looking to hire a person with a disability, please do not hesitate to reach out. Visit us at [www.episervice.org](http://www.episervice.org) or call us at 319-232-6671 today!



*Nicole Ericson presenting Stephanie Duffy's Iowa APSE Professional Award.*



# STAFF EXCELLENCE



## FIVE-TIME RECIPIENT OF THE EMPLOYERS OF CHOICE AWARD **BY ALISSA REED**

We as an agency are honored to be again selected for the 2021 Employers of Choice award. This is the fifth time EPI has received an Employer of Choice award and we do not take this title lightly.

Through their nominations, our employees stated this organization is one they are proud to work for - stressing we care for and protect not only the people we support but every staff working for us.

Teri Orr, Child Care Consultant Supervisor within Child Care Resource & Referral, shared her sense of trust she felt as we at EPI navigated through the beginning of the pandemic.

***“Flexibility and trust are the keywords that EPI upheld,”*** Teri shared. “The CDC guidelines were communicated to employees weekly and they made sure our clients served were safe and continued to receive services safely.”

Connie Munchoff, Staff Development Assistant, shared navigating through the pandemic has been a team effort.

“EPI was greatly affected, like so many places during the pandemic. We serve persons with

disabilities who no longer could attend their day programs, couldn't see their family and friends, or go to work or shopping. Many had difficulty understanding the sudden change in the things that they enjoyed. ***Our staff stepped up to the plate and helped our persons served get through it while some of them learned new skills along the way,”*** said Connie.

Not only did our staff share their appreciation in our response to the pandemic, but also in the support they feel and opportunities provided for career advancements within.

***“Amidst 2020 challenges, an employee career ladder was launched to provide more upward movement and compensation,”*** added Katie Bauman, Continuous Quality Improvement Auditor Coordinator.

“I started off as a Direct Support Professional and I immediately fell in love with the people I served and the support I received from my supervisor and co-workers. ***After about two years, I climbed up in the company - there is so much room for growth,”*** shared Katelin Ginapp, now Intermittent Service Specialist.



# YEARS OF SERVICE

## YEARS OF SERVICE FROM AUGUST - DECEMBER

*Thank you for connecting people,  
creating opportunities, and nurturing  
growth through the years!*

*"We are humbled that EPI staff nominated us  
for the Employer of Choice Award, and we are  
honored to receive it. Our staff are superstars,  
without a doubt. The pandemic has increased  
work and home life challenges exponentially and  
through it all our staff showed up, stepped up, and  
worked with their whole heart. I am inspired every  
day by how much our staff care about people with  
whom they work, and by how hard they work."*  
remarked Executive Director, Chris Sparks.

We would like to thank our dedicated team  
members for believing in our vision - *working  
together we will realize a future where all people  
are recognized and valued - encouraged and  
supported to live, work, and grow - in their  
communities.*

### **FIVE YEARS...**

- **CONNIE MUNCHOFF** Staff Development Assistant
- **MICHELLE GORDON** DSP4
- **ASHLEY PUTMAN** Integration Specialist
- **DEBORAH SCHULTZ** Accounts Receivable Manager

## SERVICE AWARDS

EVERY YEAR COUNTS

### **TEN YEARS...**

- **ERIC CHRISTENSEN** Program Manager
- **HEIDI SCHROEDER** DSP4
- **SHELLI WIERCK** HR Coordinator

### **FIFTEEN YEARS...**

- **JEN HOTTLE** Regional Training Specialist
- **CHARLYN ALEXANDER** DSP4
- **LORI TAPKE** Child Care Consultant
- **JACLYN HANSEN** Service Plan Specialist

### **THIRTY YEARS...**

- **CHRIS SPARKS** Executive Director
- **MICKEY GREEN** DSP2

*Know someone who  
would be a great fit at EPI?  
Scan here to view our  
career opportunities!*



# HEALTH & WELLNESS



## VACCINE, BOOSTERS & VIRUS INFORMATION **BY** **MAGHAN BOWMAN**

In order to protect those within EPI and our communities who are more vulnerable to vaccine-preventable illnesses and outbreaks, EPI recently offered a vaccination clinics to all employees to help combat influenza and COVID-19. All employees were invited to receive a flu shot and/or their COVID-19 vaccination/booster if they had not yet received one.

### **Current Status.**

**Black Hawk County remains in a HIGH status.** Omicron is surging. Our health systems are feeling the strain and pleading for help - wear those masks and get vaccinated. Vaccines continue to provide strong protection against what matters most: severe COVID illnesses.

- Even though early data indicates it appears to be moderately less severe experts are predicting it will still lead to a high spike in deaths.
- It appears to cause more cases among the vaccinated than earlier variants, although likely milder.

- Unvaccinated adults are at even greater risk than they were a few weeks ago.
- Even if you've had Covid, immunity wanes over time.

### **EPI's Response.**

We remain committed to protecting the vulnerable persons we serve, our workforce, and our community.

- **Face coverings/Masks** = Following CDC guidance, face coverings/masks are required for vaccinated persons and is continued to be required for unvaccinated persons.

### **Following the CDC, we ask that you continue to:**

- Monitor your symptoms before arriving to an EPI office or home of a person served. **Stay home if you are ill or showing any symptoms.**
- **Seek testing when needed** (tests are readily available consult with your healthcare professional or visit [TestIowa.com](https://www.testiowa.com) for an at-home collection kit where you mail the sample using a prepaid UPS label to a lab.)

# INNOVATIVE THINKING

## LEARN MORE

We're interested in seeing the persons we support live a long and healthy life - full of all the activities they enjoy.

Find out just how we are doing this by scanning the QR code here.



- Remain strong in your efforts of taking **general precautions** such as avoiding crowds, washing your hands/don't touch your face, heighten cleaning routines.

### Vaccine & Booster Information.

Increasing the rates of persons fully vaccinated continues to be our best line of defense to protect the people we serve and yourself from this virus.

- Use the CDC's Vaccine Finder at **[vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov)**
- Visit Vaccinate Iowa - **[vaccinate.iowa.gov/providers/](https://vaccinate.iowa.gov/providers/)**
- Coordinate by dialing 211

Booster doses are available for all individuals 12 and older who received their COVID-19 vaccine at least six months ago or two months ago if you received Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

### Flu Vaccine Resources:

The flu shot vaccine not only reduces risk of illness but can prevent hospitalizations and death. Don't wait, vaccines are available in many areas.

- Talk to your health care provider
- Visit your local pharmacy

- Visit one of the various urgent care facilities in the area

### Why is this still important?

We get it, by now this information can be tiresome and if fully vaccinated, it may at times not even feel necessary. But these actions remain important for all for the following reasons:

- Protecting yourself
- Protecting others, including those we serve
- Preventing new variants
- Breaking the chain of transmission
- Keeping hospitals and health care workers safe

***Thank you for your continued efforts each and every day. Together, we will come through this.***

*This article was written early January, 2022. Some information may have evolved since mailing. Visit us at [www.episervice.org](https://www.episervice.org) for the most recent information.*

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# CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES



## SHINE A GREEN LIGHT ON INJURY PREVENTION **BY** **MARY JANSSEN**

Injuries are the leading cause of hospitalization, disability, and even death to U.S. children from ages 1 to 18 years old. Every day, 20 children die from preventable injuries, resulting in more deaths than all other diseases combined.

In fact, injury is the leading cause of death for people through 44 years of age. Many of those deaths are preventable with the use of safety practices, products, and the implementation of strong legislative policies.

From all across the United States, there is a commitment to shining a green light to join injury prevention advocates and physicians pushing to raise awareness about the need for injury and violence prevention.

That's why on Thursday, November 18, the Injury Free Coalition for Kids and the country's top leading Injury and Violence Prevention Organizations joined forces for the 2nd annual "National Injury Prevention Day," a day designed to raise awareness about the burden of injury, violence and a need for change.

To show our support, Child Care Resource & Referral staff, among many more

throughout the Cedar Valley, wore green to help raise awareness.

We here at CCR&R, promote National Injury Prevention Day for many reasons, one of the main reasons is to support and encourage safe environments in child care. Partnering with Tate's Army Foundation and U of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital allows us to enhance our support to child care and our mission.

The Injury Free Coalition for Kids is a national program comprised of hospital-based, community-oriented programs whose efforts are anchored in research, education and advocacy.

Currently, the Coalition includes more than 42 sites located in just as many cities, each housed in the trauma center of their participating institution. In Iowa, the Injury Free Site is at University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital in Iowa City.

Through its research, the independent, physician led programs determine which injuries are most prevalent and serve then help people to make their communities safer. For more information on this coalition and research statistics, visit their website at [injuryfree.org/index.cfm](https://injuryfree.org/index.cfm).

# CHILD CARE REFERRALS JUST A CALL OR CLICK AWAY

## 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.

## EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY AWARD WINNERS - IOWA CCR&R

Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral received the 2021 Equity and Opportunity Award at the Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children!

The award stated, "the staff worked tirelessly alongside child care providers helping wherever they could over the past year. Staff supported providers to understand and fill out applications so they could benefit from the stipends. They helped programs decipher the recommendations and requirements from the Department of Human Service and Iowa Department of Public Health. They delivered supplies and maintained consultation in any way that they could."

The award went on to include, "staff listened to frustrations and worked on solutions. They were empathetic and understanding, helping everyone to do their best for children and families. ***Many programs closed during the pandemic, yet many stayed open due to the creative and persistent efforts of Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral.***"

Congratulations team!



## MEET NICOLE REESE

The Hawkeye Child Development Center - ALC has welcomed Nicole Reese, new Child Care Center Coordinator.

Nicole was born and raised right here in Waterloo. She comes to us with a background in elementary education and brings with her over ten years of related experience within the child care field.

***"I am thrilled to be working with the children, families, and staff here at the HCDC-ALC.*** Quality child care is so important and I am so happy to be a part of this wonderful team of staff who all share in the goal of providing the best care possible for the amazing families and children that we serve," Nicole shared.

We are so excited to have her join our team. Welcome, Nicole!

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Scan here to learn more about our Child Care services!



# EXCEPTIONAL PERSONS FOUNDATION



## EPI'S GIVING TREE THANKS YOU **BY MADI RUMMEL**

As we all know, the last couple of years have been unusual and, at times, filled with uncertainty. However, we continue to be encouraged by the spirit within all of us, here at EPI and beyond. As we all forged through the holiday season, we once again brought you our annual Giving Tree event.

The Giving Tree started over 15 years ago as a way to meet modest needs of individuals served by EPI which would otherwise go unmet. This year we had 297 needs for 86 people we support!

With the help of our *amazing* staff, community, and partners, we fulfilled over 270 needs this year and made it possible for all 86 people on the Giving Tree to open a gift this holiday season.

We thank you all for your lasting support in this wonderful tradition and sincerely wish everyone in our extended EPI family a happy and healthy new year!

A very special thank you to our long-standing supporters of the Giving Tree, PDCM Insurance and Discerning Wealth for hosting a tree at their businesses!

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### EPI AWARDED \$25,750 TO SUPPORT EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND HOUSING NEEDS

EPI was recently awarded \$1,250 for general needs from Veridian through the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa - Black Hawk County, \$9,500 from the City of Cedar Falls through the Community Development Block Grant in support of housing, and \$15,000 from the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa for employment services.

With the support of grant funds, we can continue offering these important services for individuals to follow their dreams of finding and keeping a job in our community, and to assist in crucial housing needs.

Thank you to Veridian, the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa and the City of Cedar Falls for your investment to ensure EPI's critical services remain available when needed most.

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# YOU CAN HELP



## Planned 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](http://www.episervice.org).

## CONSIDER JOINING THE PLANNED GIVING SOCIETY

Consider including the Exceptional Persons Foundation in your will and estate planning to ensure EPI's services remain for years to come.

Further your impact by joining the Planned Giving Society through designating a future gift to honor your legacy.

These deferred or estate gifts may be in the form of assets, following their lifetime, and may include:

- **Bequest in Will:** A gift you make by naming Exceptional Persons Foundation in your will.
- **Living Trust:** A trust you establish to take effect during your lifetime.
- **Life Insurance Gift:** A gift of old or new policy with Exceptional Persons Foundation named as beneficiary and owner.
- **Retirement Plan Gift:** A gift made by naming Exceptional Persons Foundation as remainder beneficiary.
- **Real Estate Gift:** A donation of real property, either in full or with retained life estate.

- **Charitable Remainder Annuity Trust:**

A trust that pays a set income to you or those you name before Exceptional Persons Foundation receives the remainder.

- **Charitable Remainder Unitrust:** A trust that pays variable income to you or those you name before Exceptional Persons Foundation receives the remainder.

- **Charitable Gift Annuity:** A contract in which Exceptional Persons Foundation agrees to pay you back a percentage of your gift annually for your lifetime.

- **Charitable Lead Trust:** A trust that pays an income to Exceptional Persons Foundation for a period of years before you or heirs receive remainder.

Please consult your personal advisors regarding tax consequences and terms of any will, trust or annuity agreement as well as the advisability of the gift.

*Scan here to be directed to our donate now page!*



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Waterloo, IA

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 and valued – encouraged and supported to live, work, and grow – in their communities.



## STAY UP TO DATE

Our goal is to stay in close contact with you by sending out bi-weekly email communications to help keep you informed. Scan the QR code above if you'd like to receive our latest news faster than twice a year!



## QUESTIONS?

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