

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2021

IN THE ISSUE:
EPI Launches *Human Rights Committee*

Exceptional Persons, Inc.



LIVING OUR MISSION

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

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ABOUT US

LEADERSHIP TEAM

SANDY COLLINS
Human Resources Director

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

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Levi Architecture

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BRIAN GABEL
Panther Sports Properties

MATTHEW GARY
US Bancorp Investments

WADE ITZEN
Banklwa

DEB LILLY
Hawkeye Community Foundation

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PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY

by Chris Sparks

Well in excess of twenty years ago now I was in Washington, D.C., in the Hart Senate office building, in the offices of the Senior Senator from Iowa, Chuck Grassley. I was with an Iowa delegation visiting the Senator, led by my predecessor J. Gary Mattson. Gary had announced his retirement, and I had been announced as his successor. Near the end of the visit Senator Grassley took me aside and said, "Chris, I will help you like I have helped Gary over all these years. When you contact me just tell me that you're the guy who took over for Gary Mattson."

I found it wise to work that into the early part of any conversation with Senator Grassley over a period of years. And, he did help us on a range of public policy needs around community services and funding for people with disabilities. Senator Grassley continues to work on our behalf, making an enormous impact most recently when he spearheaded supplemental funding for Medicaid providers who had been impacted by the pandemic.

I have long been a student of public policy work. By this I mean understanding the state and federal policy elements that govern services and funding for people with disabilities and for child care services. This extends to other things we might think are important (like education, public health, etc.).

Here at EPI all services we offer for people with disabilities and families, children, and child care providers are funded and regulated by public policy. By virtue of this, I argue all who care about human services have a mandate to involve themselves in the public policy and legislative

process. It is entirely possible that this is more important than ever given the challenges we are experiencing on a local and national level this year.

"How do I start," you might be asking. First determine who your state and federal legislators are and how to contact them. You can do this by visiting [house.gov](https://www.house.gov) or [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov). Next, solidify your message. What are the things you are most concerned about, and how might you communicate this to your elected official? As a beginning point, the state association to which we belong has released their 2021 legislative priorities and they can be viewed at iowaproviders.org/policy-priorities. For Children and Family Services legislative priorities can be viewed online at www.iawf.org.

The 117th United States Congress convened in Washington, D.C. on January 3, 2021. The Iowa legislative session began on January 11, 2021. This is an excellent time to contact your legislators, introduce yourself, and advocate for your priorities.

Often in your public policy advocacy work you will talk with the elected members staff, particularly those that hold federal office. In general, staffers are young, extremely bright, work long hours, and truly care about their work. They are interested in learning about our cause and are essential in our work to impact public policy.

Start small, introduce yourself, and tell your story. No one tells your story better than you. Involvement and developing personal relationships are the key to making a difference. Get to work and good luck.

CHRIS' CORNER

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



PEOPLE ARE THE HEART OF EPI



TAKING YOUR FEEDBACK TO HEART BY KATIE SLADE

You are an important person in the life of someone we serve. That's why we ask for your feedback on a regular basis to see how we're doing.

We don't stop there - we listen to the feedback given by you, the people we serve, our employees, the community, and the list goes on. We use the information shared with us to continuously improve, ensuring we're providing the highest quality of services.

In our most recent survey, we asked respondents to provide feedback on 5-7 key questions across each of the service areas in which they have had involvement. We were happy to see an increase in the number of people responding this year - thank you! Overall, the percentage of total respondents satisfied with services provided by EPI increased over the previous year.

One respondent commented, ***"EPI does a fantastic job of working with persons served, and providers to achieve the best outcome for our clients."*** Another responded specifically to how EPI has handled the COVID-19

pandemic stating, ***"This is a tough time & I respect EPI for charging ahead to do their best in spite of the unknown."***

While we certainly appreciate your kind words and encouragement, we also take careful note of the areas we can improve. As an organization, a couple of key areas stood out for us to work on together. We're actively working on communicating significant changes in a timely manner and ensuring our employees have the access to information/knowledge needed to deliver high quality services.

As results are shared throughout the organization, each service area reviews their survey feedback and creates an action plan based on identified areas to prioritize.

Email is one of the best ways we can get information to you quickly. **Do we have your preferred email address?** Send us an email with your information to communications@episervice.org for verification.

Thank you for the time spent on your thoughtful responses. We are grateful for the opportunity to work with you.

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.

CECELIA MUDD

1943 - 2020

We are deeply saddened by the passing of Cecelia Mudd, a former board member and longtime supporter of EPI.



We will forever be grateful for Cecelia's compassion and generosity for those of us within EPI and throughout our community.

We are so blessed to have been able to get to know her over the years and she will be greatly missed by us all.

DAY HAB VOLUNTEERING: TIME WELL SPENT

As a way to give back to their community, EPI day habilitation groups enjoy volunteering their time ringing bells for the Salvation Army.

The Red Kettle Campaign is a holiday tradition day hab takes place in annually.

While this year brought new challenges, the need for donations grew.

Time spent was well worth it! In just one bell ringing shift a single day hab group raised over \$3,000 between two kettles.

The money raised helps those who need it most in our community - providing toys for kids, coats for homeless, food for the hungry and countless programs. We feel honored to be a part of this lasting tradition!



SERVICE EXCELLENCE



NEW TO 2021: HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE AT EPI

BY BETHANY GIACHINO

Over the last year our staff have been hard at work to develop a human rights committee to reduce or eliminate restrictions in the lives of persons served by EPI while increasing awareness and independence for all.

We can happily announce, EPI's Human Rights Committee officially launched with the new year.

The mission of the Human Rights Committee at EPI strives to enable individuals to exercise and promote basic civil, human and legal rights. The Human Rights Committee will function as an advisory body to the organization to improve quality of life for person served.

The role of a member of this committee will be as follows:

- Protect and ensure rights are not ignored or infringed upon
- Support mission and values of EPI while respecting individual preferences

- Challenge and investigate alternative options which promote independence
- Facilitate education around rights and responsibilities for staff and person served
- Be a strong advocate for eliminating restrictions

Committee members will meet monthly to review all service plans. Working closely with service coordinators and the quality improvement department - focusing on plan restrictions, when they were placed, and whether or not they could be lifted.

“I am very excited for the work of this committee, driving forward movement in advocating and reinstating basic human rights. By bringing these hot topic issues to the attention of inner disciplinary teams, we will be working as a community to develop solutions in overcoming barriers and facilitating further independence for person served,” shares Nicole Ericson, Committee Lead and Associate Program Director.

COMMUNITY INCLUSION



AUTO REPAIR SERVICES

Call Exceptional Auto 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.

AGENCY AUDIT RESULTS

by Deb Jungling

Once again, EPI received an unqualified opinion on the audit completed of our Fiscal Year (FY) financial results.

An unqualified opinion on our FY2020 results indicates the organization follows generally accepted accounting principles and fulfills the responsibility of recording and presenting financial statements that are free from material misstatement due to fraud or errors.

This includes the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control.

The auditors applied various testing procedures in all areas including compliance with applicable regulations. The results given indicate we recorded all the financial activity of Fiscal Year 2020 appropriately and we have controls in place that prevent fraud.

- the way in which we document service delivery in determining the revenues to bill
- how we track the cost of benefits to our employees
- and any other activity that generates revenue and expense

Auditors also consider the transparency of our transactions and use all of this information to assess the risk of incorrect financial statements. Then, they test and review documentation to make sure the processes are working to record everything to the right places.

No concerns were noted with no reportable incidents. We take great pride in ensuring all of our services are of the highest quality and recognize our staff for their continued diligence.

What do auditors review?

Accounting processes reviewed by the auditors include:

- how purchases are approved
- how payroll is completed

STAFF EXCELLENCE



For years Exceptional Persons, Inc. has made it a priority to advocate with legislators on behalf of our staff for better pay and professional opportunities, because what DSPs do *matters*.

The state of Iowa and the National Association of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) have seen the advantages with on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs for industry such as ours. So they have put together programs with financial support that mix education with on-the-job training to build careers - support we are now able to adapt and provide to our staff as well.

As the employee completes each apprenticeship, through achieving certifications and on-the-job training, they will advance to a new position with a higher paying hourly wage.

How does this benefit persons served?

The results of better pay and advancement opportunities will support persons served and EPI with less turnover, more full-

ADVANCE YOUR CAREER AT EPI **BY SANDY COLLINS**

time staff - reducing DSP vacancies, and enhance the quality of services we provide.

“I enjoy the CAP program because not only does it reinforce my training; earning each E-Badge allows me to reflect on the services and supports that I provide to my clients. In totality, CAP promotes continuous learning in the workplace and it keeps a DSP engaged in what he or she is doing,”

Wilson Oburra, DSP Apprentice - employee for eleven years.

While our first Career Advancement Program is geared for Direct Support Professionals, watch for additional opportunities to follow.

We are excited about this new opportunity for our staff and look forward to nurturing their growth.

YEARS OF SERVICE

OCTOBER 2020 -
FEBRUARY 2021

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

SERVICE AWARDS

EVERY YEAR COUNTS

FIVE YEARS...

- **LINDSAY KINCANNON** Service Coordinator
- **KRISTEN GUYER** Program Assistant
- **SANDRA ISAACS** Bus Driver

TEN YEARS...

- **LORA TUPY** Administrative Assistant
- **NICOLE ERICSON** Associate Program Director

FIFTEEN YEARS...

- **TERRY CONRAD** Building Maintenance Director
- **NEIL HOPPENWORTH** DSP2 - Night Attendant

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS...

- **MARTHA STEPHENS** Bus Driver

WHAT YOU DO MATTERS

We as an agency have been aggressively managing our finances to help us create a plan in order to do more in expressing our gratitude for our staff working on the front lines.

We know right now, more than ever, a little support goes a long way. That's why we began offering a \$2 dollar an hour increase in compensation last October, for every hour worked in a direct service.

This wage will be made available throughout these difficult times - extended through May of 2021, unless other circumstances intervene. What you do matters to the people you support, to their families, and especially to us.
Thank you.

HEALTH & WELLNESS



EPI WORKFORCE RECEIVES COVID-19 VACCINE **BY MAGHAN BOWMAN**

On January 28, Exceptional Persons, Inc. (EPI) began hosting part one of a two day COVID-19 vaccination clinic for its workforce. This clinic offered the first dose of the vaccine to all staff indicating they wish to receive one.

Exceptional Persons, Inc.'s COVID Task Team has worked tirelessly, first to keep staff and persons served safe and healthy. Then advocating for staff and the vulnerable persons they serve to receive the vaccine. The work is starting to pay off.

EPI's direct service professionals/ healthcare professionals provide services to 400 persons with disabilities in their homes in the Cedar Valley. Often this support is provided to a person 24/7/365 where close contact is inevitable. Due to the nature of their responsibilities and needs of persons served, these critical services cannot be interrupted even when quarantining or self-isolation is recommended through pandemic precautions.

EPI's healthcare professionals work with persons served who have had direct exposures, are symptomatic, and those who have tested positive. Many times these committed professionals voluntarily step forward and offer to quarantine for a stretch of days (ranging from 10-21 days and nights at a time) at the home to ensure the best care for the individual.

COVID task team co-lead Katie Slade remarked, ***"We are so proud of our workforce. They have taken each phase of this pandemic seriously. And now, they are taking an important step to provide further protection for the people they serve, their neighbors, their coworkers, their families, and themselves."***

Data recently collected from eight states in partnership with ANCOR's state association members found that people with Intellectual and/or Development Disabilities were twice as likely as members of the general population to die from COVID-19, despite being no more likely to contract the virus. Meanwhile, an analysis of insurance claims data conducted by Fair Health found people with "developmental disorders"

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.

were among the likeliest to die from COVID-19, while another study in the UK found people with Down syndrome were 10 times more likely to die from COVID-19 compared to members of the general population.

The team is eternally grateful for their partners at UnityPoint Health administering vaccines and the Black Hawk County Public Health for hearing and responding to the advocacy on behalf of our essential workforce.

“With vaccines becoming more available we can all hope that we are entering the beginning of the end of the pandemic. I am so grateful to our staff, they have shown commitment and heart and consistently stepped up in circumstances where their work became significantly more complicated. Being able to provide them with this protection is one way to say thanks and honor their commitment. And it allows us all to breathe a small sigh of relief. I want to credit the perseverance of our COVID team for their vigilance and their refusal to rest until we had a vaccination plan. Along with much

help from our fantastic partners at UnityPoint and advocacy from the Black Hawk County Health Department. ” said Executive Director, Chris Sparks.

Two-hundred of the 300 member workforce voluntarily signed up for the vaccine - and still more have or are planning to receive the vaccine later from their primary healthcare professional.

What about persons served?

Black Hawk County Public Health has communicated they are currently working through vaccination phase 1B in the priority order set by the Iowa Department of Public Health.

We are ready while waiting! Once we get the green light for this clinic from Black Hawk County Public Health we'll communicate next steps from location, date, and time, to what can be expected. We are actively working to secure these details.

CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES



CHILD CARE LEGISLATIVE WATCH **BY MARY JANSSEN**

Black Hawk County was already experiencing a child care crisis prior to COVID-19 but in a few short months the pandemic made the situation even more dire. Providers were forced to close at alarming rates while schools went virtual and essential work continued.

Currently there is a 2,100 gap of space available and children needing care in Black Hawk County alone. When COVID-19 first came to Black Hawk County, many daycares closed temporarily - one remains temporarily closed.

Working hard to respond to the crisis, one new child care center and 15 new child care home providers opened. This provided 130 spaces in child development homes and 50 in child care centers.

To address Iowa's child care crisis, Child Care Resource and Referral of Northeast Iowa along with the Iowa Women's Foundation, and eight other child care advocacy organizations have formed the Iowa Child Care Coalition. The goals of the Coalition are to increase access, affordability, and quality of child care while increasing the stability of the child care workforce across Iowa.

Provided by the Iowa Women's Foundation are 2021's policy recommendations:

- Provide funding for a public private partnership with the purpose of stabilizing and growing the child care industry.
- Increase funding to adequately support and expand WAGE\$® state wide.
- Reinstate the Before and After School Grants program that was established in 2007 to create a state funding stream for before and after school, and summer programs.
- Increase child provider reimbursement rates to the 75% percentile of the 2020 Market Rate Survey (MRS) for all providers participating in the QRS program.
- Increase Child Care Assistance entrance income limits to 185% incrementally at 5% annually.

For more information visit iawf.org/business/.

EXCITING NEW OPPORTUNITY

The Hawkeye Child Development Center (HCDC) - ALC is taking part in an on-going leadership training to help grow skills and provide the best possible care.

Each month lead teachers dive deep into the *Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement*

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.

of Commitment and the *Ethics and Early Childhood Educator* series provided by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

“This training series was designed to give our leads a foundation on which they can practically apply and develop their leadership skills. Our intent was to base this series in a strong code of ethics that can be used to develop creative win-win solutions to the variety of challenges that occur as leaders in childcare settings. These win-win solutions will in turn result in an increased quality of services to the children at the ALC and the Cedar Valley Community as a whole.”

– Sara Law, Staff Development Manager and training facilitator.

Beginning last October, the series of trainings has already received high praise from staff and families.

Jessica Geidel, Child Care Center Coordinator, shares some positive outcomes she's seen thus far, ***“the leadership training has a chain reaction of positive outcomes for our staff. Our lead teachers are more confident and comfortable***

solving problems and working through conflict. They are also able to guide other staff through the conflicts they may be facing. Having this open, honest and solution-oriented mindset has brought our team closer together, created a more positive environment, and began a foundation on which we can continue to build the success of the center through positive leadership.”

Our lead teachers have already implemented these new skills into their work routines such as Sarah Errthum, Infant Room Lead Teacher and Assistant Child Care Center Coordinator, who credits the trainings have strengthened her staff as a team.

EPI's Talent Recruiter and Retention Coordinator and training facilitator, Alissa Geving, shares, ***“we are very excited to continue to watch this training series unfold as well as witness the growth in the professional development of our lead staff at the HCDC-ALC.”***

EXCEPTIONAL PERSONS FOUNDATION



THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING EPI'S VIRTUAL GIVING TREE **BY MADI RUMMEL**

EPI's Giving Tree serves as a way to meet the modest needs of those we serve while ensuring that everyone has a gift to open for the holidays. The Giving Tree has been an EPI tradition for over fifteen years with the number of needs growing exponentially over the last few years.

This year we implemented a virtual Giving Tree to ensure everyone's safety and well-being, and, wow, our community sure responded! We shared the needs of 83 individuals served by EPI that would otherwise go unmet, and we were overwhelmed by the response! All individual's needs were sponsored within a matter of weeks, and we were able to safely ship gifts directly to the recipients' homes.

Thank you to all who participated in this year's Giving Tree event. You brought joy to so many this holiday season, and for that, we are extremely grateful.

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 by 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:

- gifts from retirement plans
- gifts through your will or living trust
- gifts designating the Exceptional Persons Foundation as Payable on Death (POD) or Transfer on Death (TOD) for checking or savings accounts

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.

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.

EPI AWARDED \$20K TO SUPPORT EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

EPI was recently awarded \$15,000 from the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa - Black Hawk County and \$5,000 from the Community Foundation - Veridian Credit Union Fund in support of our employment program.

With the support of grant funds, we can continue to offer this crucial service for individuals following their dreams of finding and keeping a job in our community.

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

We are excited to welcome Madi as we feel she is well equipped to support the mission of connecting people, creating opportunities, and nurturing growth.



"I am honored to be working for such a wonderful and mission-focused organization. I look forward to assisting Katie Slade and Chris Sparks in EPI's continued success," shared Madi.

Give Madi a call at 319-232-6671 or email her at madeline.rummel@episervice.org for all donation related inquiries.

MEET MADI RUMMEL

EPI's new Development Specialist, Madi Rummel, joined our team in early January.

She comes to us with a bachelor's degree from University of Northern Iowa in Leisure, Youth, and Human Services and a strong passion for fundraising.

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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 and valued – 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.