

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2021

IN THE ISSUE:

All people...
LIVE, WORK, & GROW
in our community

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
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JORDAN ALBORN - Treasurer
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GIA SHANNON - Secretary
Volunteer

SUE FANGMAN - Past President
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VGM & Associates

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Levi Architecture

BRUCE MEISINGER
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JOHN MONAGHAN
PDCM Insurance

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The Veridian Group, Inc.

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Community Bank & Trust

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University of Northern Iowa

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Volunteer

BRIAN GABEL
Panther Sports Properties

MATTHEW GARY
US Bancorp Investments

WADE ITZEN
BankIowa

DEB LILLY
Hawkeye Community Foundation

STEVE LINDAMAN
Veridian Credit Union

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CARE AS INFRASTRUCTURE

by Chris Sparks

My first foray into the field of community-based services was when my wife and I got a job in a group home for six people with intellectual disabilities. It was January of 1983, and it was also a crash course in the service system – as it was then – and really into a new and different culture. All those years ago workforce and staffing were among our most primary challenges. We often worked six days a week because we could not find the additional staff we needed. In the ensuing 38 years services have changed dramatically, but our workforce challenges have remained.

Community services for people with disabilities are predominately Medicaid funded and a decades long cycle of inadequate rates then driving inadequate staff pay has prevailed. In part due to this, recruitment and retention problems for direct support staff are consistent challenges across the country, and high turnover threatens continuity and service quality. Probably to no one's surprise, the impacts of the pandemic have served to worsen workforce problems, with even finding qualified applicants becoming a genuine struggle.

If you have gone to a restaurant lately you have likely seen the impacts of workforce problems. Many have reduced hours or are operating with skeleton crews. And, if you have a loved one in a nursing home or assisted living facility, you have almost certainly seen the direct impacts of high turnover and vacant positions. There are simply not enough caregiving staff available to meet the needs.

As we grapple with workforce scarcity as a reality we are delighted that conversation among the Executive Branch and Congress includes

our dilemma. On a federal level “The American Jobs Plan” contained a proposal to “solidify the infrastructure of our care economy by creating jobs and raising wages and benefits for essential home care workers.” One key provision was \$400 billion of new monies for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) - with the provision that workers have a “free and fair choice to join a union.” After bi-partisan discussion around the original legislation hit a dead end the “Better Care Better Jobs Act” was introduced. This currently includes \$400 billion to expand care for people with disabilities and the elderly, improve compensation for critical direct care staff, and create mechanisms for rate growth for service providers. It is unprecedented and would make an enormous difference in our service system, and to our caregiving staff.

As our friends at our national trade association, ANCOR, have written: ***“DSP’s are the backbone of disability support programs, meaning we can’t improve disability supports without strengthening this essential workforce. Responding to the unmet needs of hundreds of thousands of Americans with disabilities will require attracting and retaining more DSPs, particularly in light of a long-running recruitment and retention crisis that stems largely from shamefully low Medicaid wage reimbursement rates.”***

Finally, whether you are a fan of the legislation in its current form, we ask you to consider the critical need for substantial investment in our caregiving workforce. People with disabilities and those who are elderly depend upon caring, compassionate, and reliable staff to live successfully. In turn, these essential staff should be able to earn a living wage that allows them to meet their expenses and care for their families.

CHRIS’ CORNER

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



Follow my Facebook page for more - www.facebook.com/ChrisSparksEPI.

PEOPLE ARE THE HEART OF EPI



MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SERVICE LEAGUE FUND ESTABLISHED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA **BY DIANE HOLMES, LISW**

When I retired as Director of Multiple Sclerosis Services, a department of EPI funded by an endowment established by the Multiple Sclerosis Service League, questions arose about how best to continue services for people affected by Multiple Sclerosis. The income from the endowment was adequate, only when supplemented by additional funding sources. The funding dilemma, coupled with the changing service needs of people with multiple sclerosis, provided motivation for change.

The people best equipped to help consider the next step were the members of the former Multiple Sclerosis Service League Board of Directors. We gathered and, in our conversations, we challenged ourselves to consider past and future needs of people affected by Multiple Sclerosis.

We also discussed the need to honor the intent of the donors to the endowment – to provide counseling, education and advocacy services for people affected by Multiple Sclerosis. As it turned out, the changes in healthcare necessitated by COVID became a “blue print” for new ways of providing care that we incorporated in our plan.

After considering a range of options we contacted the University of Iowa’s Neurology Department. With our updated “blue print” in mind, we met with Dr. Cho, Director of the MS Clinic and Assistant Professor of Neurology at University of Iowa. Based on information we provided about the history of the Multiple Sclerosis Service League, the services provided, and the intent of our donors, Dr. Cho proposed a plan that would include trained Neuro-immunology Fellows who have more time to spend with patients. The specifics of the plan were shared in a mailing with donors to the endowment.

The Multiple Sclerosis Service League has come a long way since its modest beginnings in 1980. Untold thousands of people were served, guided, and supported, during some of the most challenging moments in their lives. During that time the Multiple Sclerosis Service League Endowment was built from fundraising events, memorials, and contributions.

Forty years later, this fund will provide services well beyond what the Multiple Sclerosis Service League could have done alone. I am reminded of sage words of my grandfather who instilled in me the importance and value of nurturing and developing what one has, for the betterment of those who follow. By those

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.

standards, the Multiple Sclerosis Service League was a smashing success.

Thank you...

We are grateful to the hundreds of people who have contributed to the Multiple Sclerosis Service League Endowment. For those who would like to see that fund continue to grow, contributions can be sent to:

University of Iowa Center for Advancement Multiple Sclerosis Service League Fund

P.O. Box 4550

Iowa City, IA 52244-4550

319-335-3305 or 1-800-648-6973

regulatory environment for our child care services and services for people with disabilities.

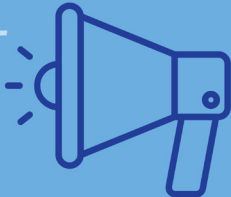
We have been working tirelessly through federal and state associations, to get rate increases for our services specifically to improve the compensation for direct support staff. Their work is critical and they should be paid better.

Recently, Governor Kim Reynolds put a rate increase for Home and Community Based Services into her budget in part to help provide better compensation for this workforce and it has been approved by the Iowa Legislature.

We are happy to announce that, due to this budget approval, we are able to increase all starting wages for our direct support staff by \$2 dollars an hour starting on July 1, 2021. This wage increase was passed on to current EPI direct support professionals.

Our work is not done - we will continue to advocate for the amazing work you all do.

**DIRECT
SUPPORT
STAFF
WAGE
INCREASE!**



WAGE INCREASES FOR ALL EPI DIRECT SUPPORT STAFF

EPI staff have a long history of advocating for public policy and legislative advancements designed to improve the funding and

SERVICE EXCELLENCE



HOST HOME SERVICES NOW AVAILABLE AT EPI! **BY NICOLE RAND**

As of May, EPI began offering a new and exciting service available for persons called Host Home Services.

Through our Host Home Services, EPI helps people with a variety of needs find a supportive, family-like setting where they can gain independence and form strong, lasting friendships.

We carefully match individuals with disabilities to the best home fit for their needs by engaging people who are willing to open their homes and hearts to support persons with disabilities.

Why should someone consider becoming a Host Home Service provider?

Host Home arrangements are intended to provide a private home experience for people with disabilities. Home providers not only offer a residence, but give support, companionship, and opportunities for individual growth. In return, home providers enjoy the satisfaction of making a positive difference in another person's

life, training, as well as a generous tax-free monthly stipend.

What supports are needed for adults with disabilities?

As a home provider, you will:

- Provide daily support for a person with disabilities, including assisting with medications, personal care, meals, medical appointments, shopping, transportation and more, just like you would any other member of your immediate family.
- Provide companionship.
- Facilitate participation in social, community and faith activities.
- Support routine medical care.

What is EPI looking for in Host Home Service Providers?

It all depends on what the person with a disability needs and is looking for, as well as the needs of the home provider. People's ideal living situations vary – ranging from traditional families with children to single housemate arrangements. Many situations can work well, so we will work closely with you to find the best match for your home setting.

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.

How do I become a Host Home Service provider?

Once you've made the decision to explore becoming a provider, we work carefully with you to assess the opportunity.

Here's how to get started:

- Let us know you're interested and want more information by giving us a call at (319) 232-6671 or by filling out our web form found at www.episervice.org
- Complete and submit an application (we'll send you an email!) and pass background check
- Meet with local EPI employees for an interview discussion and to get answers to your questions
- Pass a home inspection
- Complete required training
- Participate in the matching process to find the best individual fit for your home

Why would a person with a disability choose to live in an EPI Host Home?

There are a variety of reasons a person with a disability would choose to live within a Host Home, here are a few:

- Their current home no longer meets their needs or preferences

- Homes they share with parents or other family members are no longer feasible
- They are moving from another host home or group home because change is needed or desired

How do I or a loved one gain support through this service?

If you or a loved one is interested in living within a Host Home, apply for services online at www.episervice.org or give us a call at (319) 232-6671 to begin your matching process.

Contact Tom, Host Home Service Coordinator, with any questions.

If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about this new service, contact Tom Engelbrecht via email

at thomas.engelbrecht@episervice.org or by phone at (319) 232-6671.



STAFF EXCELLENCE



EPI'S LONGEST EMPLOYEE RETIRES **BY KATIE SLADE**

Our longest serving employee retires after 44 years. Being curious how things have changed and how things have stayed the same, we sat down with Lin to find out.

How did your journey at EPI begin?

In 1961, I was hired as a secretary in a wholesale lumber company in Waterloo. Accuracy was essential and at the start I was absolutely thrilled with my job. By year six I grew tired of the same thing day in and day out and decided to move on and began working as needed for a local brokerage firm.

A friend of mine who worked in the Community Services building, told me EPI was looking for a secretary. I called and set up an interview.

Gary Mattson, who at the time was the Associate Director, conducted my interview at 1 PM and said he would get back to me. By 3 PM that same afternoon he called to ask if I could start the next Monday.

Executive Director, Bill Brown, was good friends with the senior broker I had just worked for and after a conversation with him, I got the job!

In your time with EPI, what has changed and what has stayed the same?

Change was always constant. I learned to plan my day's work but switch my plans at a moment's notice if someone had a more critical need. But what stayed the same was the "family atmosphere" in the office.

44 years! What kept pulling you coming back in?

From day one I absolutely loved my job and the folks with whom I worked with.

What did you gain from working at EPI?

I had never known any people with disabilities, with the exception of a disabled man in my hometown. I often noticed that folks greeted him on the street with such friendliness and affection. At EPI, initially, I was a little shy of those we served until I got to know them better, and, in the end, I could count many of them as friends.

YEARS OF SERVICE

YEARS OF SERVICE FROM MARCH 2021 - JULY 2021

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

People come in all shapes and sizes, with different abilities and needs, and in my heart, I deemed it my obligation to treat everyone with the utmost respect, dignity, and helpfulness. This became a habit that I carried to the world apart from EPI.

Lin supported EPI through many changes, working under each of the three Executive Directors. We couldn't be more proud of the work she has done and are forever thankful to her dedication.

During retirement, Lin plans to stay at home with her husband, "the love of her life", as they continue their work on the Waterloo Cemetery Board.

Current EPI ED Chris Sparks admits to a great fondness for Lin. *"Lin was always warm and kind, and so amazingly committed to excellence in her work. She always took time to interact with each person who entered her orbit, and she made sure we had needed and novel office supplies."*

Congratulations, Lin!



FIVE YEARS...

- **MANDY DOWNING** Program Manager
- **EYLEEN ESTRADA** DSP2
- **MARISSA FRYE** Program Manager
- **SHANNON HENSON** Employment Specialist
- **LISA HRUSKA** DSP2
- **KAYLA TAYLOR** DSP2
- **URIAH TUKPAH** DSP4
- **HOLLY WEAVER** DSP2

TEN YEARS...

- **LORI HORN** Custodian
- **SARA LAW** Staff Development Manager
- **NICOLE RAND** Associate Program Director

FIFTEEN YEARS...

- **MARY JANSSEN** Children & Family Services Director
- **GARY MATTHIAS** Mechanic
- **TOM WEMLINGER** DSP4

HEALTH & WELLNESS



VACCINE & VIRUS INFORMATION **BY** **MAGHAN BOWMAN**

COVID-19 cases are surging once again locally, nationally, and around the world.

Black Hawk County is once again in a HIGH status.

According to the CDC, a small percentage of fully vaccinated people can get COVID-19 if exposed to the virus, but they are much less likely to become sick. It's likely they'll have milder symptoms or be asymptomatic.

That's not to say serious cases can't happened for those who are fully vaccinated. This is especially the case for people highly vulnerable to this virus - persons 65 and older, persons who are immunocompromised including those with cancer or who have had organ transplants. Research has found persons with disabilities are also highly vulnerable to this virus.

The CDC reports that the Delta variant causes more infections and spreads faster than early forms of the coronavirus. With the Delta variant's prominence, the

CDC is concerned vaccinated individuals can transmit the virus. Therefore, the CDC is recommending vaccinated persons return to wearing masks indoors where spread is moderate to high.

EPI's Response.

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

Following the CDC, we will make the following changes effective 8/4/21.

- **Face coverings/Masks** = required for vaccinated persons and is continued to be required for unvaccinated persons.

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 [Testlowa.com](https://www.testlowa.com) for an at-home collection kit where you mail the sample using a prepaid UPS label to a lab.)

INNOVATIVE THINKING

MY25

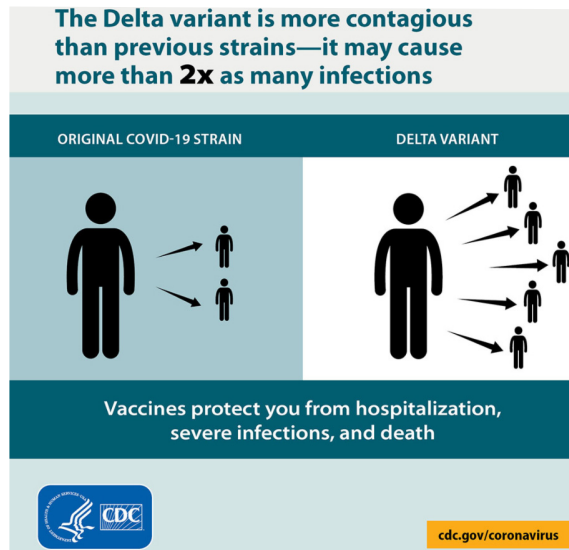
Getting the food right - in other words, changing our eating habits - gets us closer to sustainable good health. Our experience using My25/Mainstay

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.

- 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 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://www.vaccinate.iowa.gov/providers/)**
- Coordinate by dialing 211

Protect Those Unable to get Vaccinated.

Those unable to receive vaccines including children under the age of 12 and those with weakened immune systems, need your help to stay safe.

The more persons who become vaccinated, the more people we can protect whether in our families or in the community.

We remain committed to protecting the people we serve who are highly vulnerable to this virus, our workforce, and our community.

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

CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES



MARY JANSSEN NAMED TO CHILD CARE TASK FORCE BY CHRIS SPARKS

On March 10, Governor Reynolds signed Executive Order 8 launching a new *Child Care Task Force* to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the child care shortage and barrier to work in Iowa. We are excited to announce that Mary Janssen, Regional Director of Child Care Resource & Referral of Northeast Iowa, has been named to this task force.

When asked about being named to the task force, Mary said, ***“I am excited and honored to represent the child care community and develop long-term child care solutions!”***

The Department of Human Services and Iowa Workforce Development worked together to strategically award \$12,052,958 from the DHS Investing in Iowa’s Child Care funding program and \$1,000,414 in Child Care Challenge grants to all eligible applicants throughout the state. Child Care Challenge grants support community projects to establish local childcare facilities, while the DHS funding provides support for equipment, personnel, training, and supplies for new or ongoing child care facilities.

“When we remove the obstacles to high-quality, affordable child care, our families can nurture their kids while maintaining maximum freedom to enter and remain in the workforce,” said Gov. Reynolds. ***“Today’s announcement***

will further our efforts to provide high-quality, affordable access to child care in every corner of the state.”

The central purpose of the task force is to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the numerous issues that contribute to the child care barrier to work in Iowa. The strategy will serve as a foundation for potential action by the Governor, legislature, communities and employers to reduce both short- and long-term barriers.



MARY JANSSEN RECEIVES GOVERNORS VOLUNTEER AWARD

Congratulations to Mary Janssen, Regional Director for CCR&R of Northeast Iowa, for receiving a 2021 Governor’s Volunteer Award!

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.

The Governor's Volunteer Award (GVA) program provides an easy way to honor the dedicated people who volunteer their time & talent to help an agency or organization deliver on its mission. Mary was selected for her volunteer efforts with Tate's Army Foundation, Inc. and for her service to her community.

Thank you for your dedication to children and the state of Iowa!



DEB JUNGLING: CEDAR VALLEY OVATION HONOREE

Congratulations to EPI's Chief Financial Officer, Deb Jungling, on receiving an Ovation award as one of the Iowa Women's Foundation Tributes!

Deb Jungling has been the CFO here at EPI for over 25 years, but many staff alike often refer to her as the "go-to-gal".

Throughout Deb's career here she has built a rapport of trust with staff. Her responsibilities include managing and overseeing a \$20 million yearly budget. She works side-by-side with each department supervisor to help them understand the finances of the programs they manage so they might be empowered to successfully do so. This oversight includes over 100 cost centers.

Deb's passion for persons served is one of her best attributes. She is a consistent voice and always keeps in mind the people we serve have the highest quality of service.

In 2019, EPI entered into a partnership with Hawkeye Community College to offer child care services in downtown Waterloo. During the planning, Deb created a spreadsheet that represented an overall startup budget for the center. This spreadsheet later became part of a statewide tool, Center in the Box. Today, this spreadsheet is used statewide as communities plan for new centers.

Deb's work and passion have made a huge impact on the disability services community and early childhood field. Everyone that has ever encountered Deb or worked with her has walked away learning something and recognizes she is driven by her passion for the people we serve.

EXCEPTIONAL PERSONS FOUNDATION



MORE THAN YOU SEE 2021: *LIVE, WORK, GROW* BY MADI RUMMEL

As many of you know, spring is typically the time of year we would have gathered in person for *More Than You See* – our annual dueling pianos benefit. However, with the CDC's guidelines and the health and safety of the people we serve in mind, we found new ways to connect with the community through a series of online videos.

Without question, COVID-19 made for a challenging year for the persons we serve – many of whom are among some of the most vulnerable to this terrible virus. The toll it's taken has been immeasurable. And yet, in the midst of the many challenges, there have been corresponding bright spots. The dedication and resilience of our EPI staff has shone through clearly and consistently. And, the community has rallied around our organization with support.

For the last SEVEN years *More Than You See* has worked to connect with people and bring our vision to life. This year was no different.

We envision a world where all people are recognized and valued - encouraged and supported to live, work, and grow - in our community.

We created a virtual on-going event featuring four persons served, each in their own videos. These videos not only gave everyone the opportunity to hear the unique stories of each individual, but featured local businesses handpicked by the persons being interviewed.

Viewers were introduced to people like Bishop, who shared his love for UNI Basketball and the Cedar Valley Fish Market in Waterloo, and Julea who took us to her favorite popcorn shop in Cedar Falls.

Through this event we were once again reminded how the Cedar Valley continues to do such an incredible job at embracing the people our organization supports. Not only by the businesses featured, but by the community members and friends they make along the way.

We thank each and every one of you for your dedication to this online event - whether it was social media shares, likes, and comments, merchandise purchased, or donations received, you all played an important role in supporting our vision.

If you didn't get a chance to view the videos, visit www.episervice.org.

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.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2021 SPONSORS

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Scheels

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Work in the Cedar Valley Sponsors:

Dennis Kruger

MercyOne

Tony's Plumbing & Heating

EPI Spirit Sponsors:

Montage

Pixel Labs

Warren Transport

SAVE THE DATE - APRIL 1, 2022

Save the date for **More Than You See 2022: Friday, April 1**. We hope to be back to see YOU in person with another live dueling pianos benefit for EPI.

We envision a world where society looks past the differences they see to the person within. More Than You See is an entertaining fundraising event which will showcase and celebrate the contributions, value, and abilities of all people. MTYS is a time for all to come together, be entertained, and to appreciate each person's unique contributions to community.

Make plans to be entertained while supporting a great cause! Proceeds from *More Than You See* support persons in living their lives independently, being a part of their community, and making their own choices.



Exceptional Persons, Inc.
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PO Box 4090
Waterloo, IA 50704 - 4090

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit # 1778
Waterloo, IA

ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED



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, Instagram, and TikTok. 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.