

Exceptional Journeys

November/December 2021

Exceptional Opportunities, Inc.

From the Executive Director:

This wonderful organization, Exceptional Opportunities, and the people we serve have been my passion for over forty-two years. I love the people we serve and our mission of CARE at Exceptional Opportunities. I am grateful to the families who have trusted your loved ones to our care. Spending my career at Exceptional Opportunities has been a most challenging yet rewarding professional opportunity. I have learned so much from the people we serve. Their resilience, persistence, and faith amaze me. The experiences I have had here are forever etched on my heart.

After much prayer and consideration, I am retiring from Exceptional Opportunities in December. Erin Schmidt will be our new Executive Director in 2022. Erin has been at Exceptional Opportunities for fourteen years and will lead Exceptional Opportunities to a great future. It has been an honor to work with Exceptional Opportunities' Administrative Team which includes Cathy Gaton – Financial Director, Erin Schmidt – Associate Director, Lisa Bartolo – Human Resources, Rodney Davis – Director of Community Employment, Erin Thilges and Wendy Harms – Directors of Supported Community Living. This group is an amazingly talented and dedicated team. It has been wonderful working with each of them for all these years. Together, we have built a culture of compliance, excellence, and servant leadership. I am very proud of the many changes we have made to be in compliance with Federal regulations. Truly, we have built a community-based program in compliance with the federal Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Exceptional Opportunities employees, be proud of what you do at Exceptional Opportunities. I respect, am ever grateful, and deeply appreciative of our employee team, for the work they do in caring for the people we have the good fortune to serve. Each of you have the opportunity to change the lives of people each day as you assist, teach, and show care, respect, and empathy to the people you serve. Your dedication and caring are second to none. I am so very proud of you!

I take with me an abundance of memories. Seeing those we serve living happy lives fills my heart with joy. Thank you for the opportunity of a lifetime in leading Exceptional Opportunities. This organization, the people we serve, the people we employ, and all associated with Exceptional Opportunities, will always be in my heart and prayers.

To God be the Glory,
Jean Menning

*"You have not lived today until you have done something
for someone who can never repay you."
-John Bunyan*

Knights of Columbus Iowa State Council Donation



The Knights of Columbus Iowa State Council made a donation in honor of outgoing First Lady, Amanda (Mandy Post) Lee. Ms. Lee is an Algona native and had many accomplishments as First Lady. A portion of the \$1,400 donation allowed us to purchase and install a flagpole so the USA flag may be flown, along with a second flag that reads, "Exceptional Opportunities' Fulfilling Dreams." The remainder of this donation went to Exceptional Opportunities' Foundation for use on a future project to better the lives of the people with intellectual disabilities we serve.

The beautiful smiles, memories, and milestones that donations help to create may be seen on Exceptional Opportunities' Facebook page.

We are very grateful for the donation and support in honor of former First Lady Amanda (Post) Lee. Congratulations former First Lady Lee for your grace, compassion and excellence while serving others the past two years.

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During the holiday season, our thoughts turn gratefully to those who have made our success possible.

It is in this spirit that we say thank you and send best wishes for the holidays and New Year.

Exceptional Opportunities, Inc.

Awards Presented to Employees

On Sunday, September 12, Exceptional Opportunities held its Employee Recognition Banquet at River Road Golf Course. The banquet kicked off National Direct Support Professionals Recognition Week, which was September 12 – 18, 2021. During awards, employees were recognized for years of service at the 1 year and 3 year mark, and every 5 years after. Act of Caring Awards were also presented to those nominated by their peers.

1 Year of Service

Mary Fowler	Madison Parsons
Denise Group	Darci Poulson
Sandy Hentges	Sandy VerHelst
Sue Lenz	Joe Shekey
Dawn Moody	Sadie Zipse

3 Years of Service

Abrial Joy Brady-Rundall
Vicki Briggs
Donna Hellman
Caleb Larsen
Kaitlyn Teepe

5 Years of Service

Brittany Black
CJ Gerlach
Heather Ice
Leanne Laue
Katie Tomason

10 Years of Service

Vickie Ellman

15 Years of Service

Lisa Bartolo	Samantha Richter
Traci Maday	Megan Plathe

35 Years of Service

Paula Baker	Wendy Harms
Lisa Foertsch	

40 Years of Service

Nancy Borchardt

45 Years of Service

Karen Anderson	Karen Posey
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Act of Caring Awards were also given out during the banquet. Employees are nominated by their co-workers for exemplifying the four core values of Exceptional Opportunities – Commitment, Acceptance, Respect, and Excellence.

The Commitment Award is given to an employee who remembers that the primary focus is the individuals we serve and without them we would not have a purpose. Addison Behounek was nominated by her peers for her excellent work in the short time she has been on staff. She works around her school schedule to get to work on time, is willing to pick up shifts for others, and is a busy bee at work - doing something with the people she supports or cleaning away – she is ALWAYS motivated to work! Last spring on prom night, she even took time to stop and visit the home and the gentlemen she supports, just to make sure they were a part of her fun. Addison is very special and goes above and beyond her job duties to make everyone's day.

The Acceptance Award is given to an employee who displays unconditional acceptance to all individuals that we serve and work with, realizing that each has unique gifts, talents, and challenges. Madison Parsons was nominated by a peer for how she looks at others. Her co-worker writes, "Since she has switched to Finn Drive full time, she has done very well adjusting to all the clients and their individual quirks. She knows what they want and need and helps them in any way she can." Madison has made a point to value all aspects of their personalities – including the challenges – and she accepts them for who they are.

The Respect Award is given to a person who respects the privacy, dignity, and individualism of each person they work with, and strives to enrich their lives daily. Caleb Larsen was nominated by his peers for always coming into work with a great mood. Those who nominated him stated, "He is great with both the clients and the staff. As a younger member of our staff, he has a lot of maturity in his work. He looks at each person as an individual and affords them dignity and kindness. In turn, they enjoy his upbeat attitude and easygoing manner."

The Excellence Award is given to an employee who, in everything they do, does it with the utmost care and commitment to excellence. Lori McWithey was nominated by her peers. They stated that Lori is very good at what she does, and wrote the following, "She is excellent with the consumers, and they like her. In fact, two out of the four watch out the window for her to come to work! Her attitude is always positive, and when a problem arises, she keeps her cool and handles it professionally. She has a calming affect on the people she serves and also her co-workers. A great co-worker, she would deserve an award for any category, but she exemplifies excellence over all!"



*Commitment Award Winner,
Addison Behounek (L), presented
by Wendy Harms (R)*



*Acceptance Award Winner,
Madison Parsons (R)*



*Respect Award Winner,
Caleb Larson (R)*



*Excellence Award Winner,
Lori McWithey (L), presented
by Erin Thilges, (R)*

Student Employee Scholarship Program

Exceptional Opportunities, Inc. Student Employee Scholarship Program gives high school and college students the opportunity to gain scholarship money while they earn a wage and valuable work experience at the same time. The work experience that students gain while working at Exceptional Opportunities is outstanding for students considering careers in human services, education, nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech language pathology, psychology, and many other medical fields. This scholarship is awarded based on months and/or summers of service, and the award is made to the institution of the student's choice.

We recently awarded scholarships to our student employees for their service to ExOp. Those receiving scholarships included Mihir Modi (Iowa State University), Molly Lenz (Augustana College), and Jasmyne Harrison (University of Northern Iowa).



*Jasmyne Harrison is pictured receiving
her scholarship check from Erin
Schmidt, Associate Director*

2021 Memorials & Donations

In memory of Ann Arndorfer
Cecil & Lucile Wattermann

In memory of Randy Binning
Ryan & Erin Schmidt

In memory of Clinton Eden
Lamont & Judy Junkermeier

In memory of Betty Finnestad
Ryan & Erin Schmidt

In memory of Gary Flaherty
Cecil & Lucile Wattermann
Ryan & Erin Schmidt
Karen & Herb Saylor

In memory of Steve Grubb
Cecil & Lucile Wattermann

In memory of Melvin Haase
Cecil & Lucile Wattermann

In memory of Alice Kennedy
Lamont & Judy Junkermeier

In memory of Bill Kennedy
Lamont & Judy Junkermeier

In memory of Amy Lee
Dean & Wendy Harms

In memory of Phyllis Oxley
Marlene Merriam
Michael & Nancy Garry
Mark & Alice Cusick
Mary Jane Oxley

In memory of Gary Stall
Bob & June Stall
Darren & Patricia Freeman
Lavonne Christensen-Clarksean
Carolyn Geesman
Chris & Meredith Clifford

In memory of Duane Stecker
Friends of Exceptional
Opportunities
Good Hope Lutheran WELCA,
Titonka
Cecil & Lucile Wattermann
Don & Judy Weber
Ryan & Erin Schmidt
Lamont & Judy Junkermeier
Bess Wilkin
Lanita Kardoes
Sandra & Harold Harms
Lyle & Sue Boeckholt

In memory of Duane Stecker
Jerald & Laurie Harms
Sandy & Cecil Welhousen

In memory of Minnie Walker
Ryan & Erin Schmidt

**In memory of Ernie & Mary Ann
Van Weelden**
Friends of Exceptional
Opportunities

In memory of Pat Wolf
Daniel & Whitney Weiser

Donations
Madden-Mallory Foundation
Darlene Bernhard
Jerry & Barb Knoll
Good Hope Lutheran WELCA,
Titonka
Matt & Lynette Wilson
Karen's Hair Care
Farmer's & Traders Savings Bank,
Bancroft
Bethany E & R Church, Ledyard
LeAnn Berte
Tom & Esther Deitering
Deitering Bros., Inc.

Donations
Ramsey Reformed Church, Titonka
Dacken & Associates Insurance
Nyman TV & Furniture
Leroy Strohman
St. Cecelia Catholic Church
Billy Offerman, State Farm
Insurance
Lyle Risius
Loren & Judy Stilwell
Iowa State Bank
First Baptist Church, Swea City
St. Paul Lutheran Church, Lakota
Knights of Columbus Council
#3420, Bode
Bethany E&R Church, Ledyard
Friends of Exceptional
Opportunities
Wayne Risius
Immanuel Lutheran Church,
Titonka
Apostolic Christian Church, West
Bend
Knights of Columbus Council
#8610, Britt
Bethany E&R Church, Ledyard
Knights of Columbus Council
#3032, West Bend
VFW Auxiliary No. 2541

Staff Training Goes Virtual

Exceptional Opportunities, Inc. was the grateful recipient of a grant from the Kossuth County Foundation for Chromebooks and laptops to provide a computer lab for its employees to complete staff training. In the ever-changing world of technology, the way we provide training to our direct care staff continues to evolve, and most new training that is available is offered in an online format.

Online coursework begins on Day 1 for a new employee when they take the required Department of Human Services (DHS) Mandatory Reporter trainings. After completing orientation, new employees take the six-hour online training, "Prepare to Care." After completing those modules, the new employee can then begin the process of becoming a Medication Manager by taking the online coursework and take the final exam.

Last April, Exceptional Opportunities began using Relias Learning Management System to facilitate the Medication Manager class, state-required and annual training. Employees who work in the Expanding Life Opportunities (ELO) or Supported Employment programs are required to have 9.5 hours of initial, job-specific training within 6 months of hire. Annually thereafter, those employees must complete 4 hours of training specific to the programs in which they work.

There are many annual trainings that all employees are required to complete including OSHA safety trainings, recognizing abuse, corporate compliance, cultural competency, and disaster preparedness. For many years, this training has been presented to employees in small groups one time a year. Our employees will now receive this training in an online format through Relias.

Finally, Exceptional Opportunities, Inc. has created an Apprenticeship Program for its direct care employees. Employees can apply to the program to increase their knowledge and take training that will help them develop their skills. This training is offered on Relias and allows employees to earn credit toward national credentialing offered through the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals. Employees who complete their Apprenticeship within the 12-month period will also earn a wage increase.

RELIAS
LEARNING

SPIRIT Club Offers Healthy Lifestyle Changes



On November 1, our Expanding Life Opportunities (ELO) participants and staff begin a new adventure as they became members of SPIRIT Club. SPIRIT Club provides fun and supportive virtual exercise and healthy lifestyle classes to its members and believes that fitness is for all people.

SPIRIT Club fitness is led by 3 trainers – one seated in a chair or wheelchair, one doing the "baseline" exercise, and one that does the advanced, high intensity exercise. Participants choose the level that works for them to start with. Most workouts are 30 minutes or less and are motivating and entertaining. SPIRIT Club offers a wide variety of workouts including Cardio, Balance, Strength, Boxing, Zumba, Themed Workouts (like a baseball day), Sit and HIIT, Storytime Fitness, and Spirited Sam's Workout Jam. SPIRIT Club also offers Positive Mindset and Meditation Classes. Also available are Healthy Cooking Classes, with cook-along videos and recipes and ingredient lists to download ahead of time.

SPIRIT Club is offered at no charge to ELO participants and their families, as well as Exceptional Opportunities' staff members. Classes are not just limited to ELO, they can be done at any time when people are in their own homes. It is a fun way to get moving each day, and work on the goal of having a healthier lifestyle!



*Pictured left,
ELO
Participants
enjoying a
SPIRIT Club
workout*



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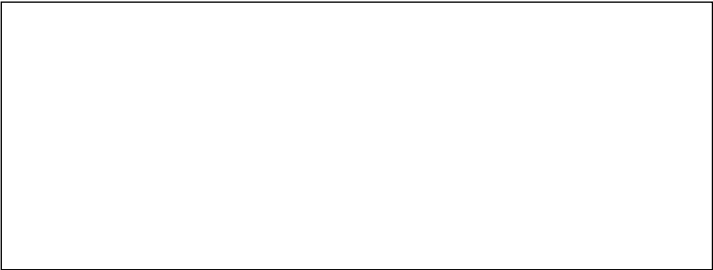
Return Service Requested



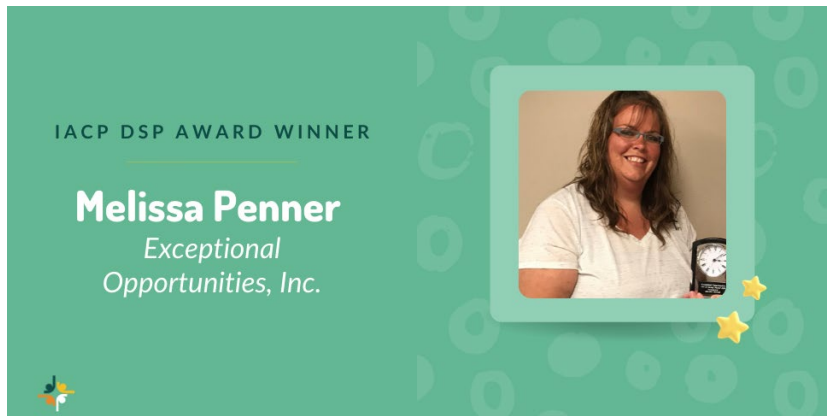
Board of Directors

Dennis Holmes	Judy Weber
Lynn Jenson	Robert Christian
Judy Haag	Rebecca Lewis
Judy Junkermeier	Brien Rindone
W.A. Renger	

Jean Menning, Executive Director
 Cathy Gatton, Financial Director
 Erin Schmidt, Associate Director



Melissa Penner Receives State DSP Award



Melissa Penner was one of nine Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) honored by the Iowa Association of Community Providers during National DSP Week in September. She works as a Consumer Instructor in the Supported Community Living Program and has been in the profession for sixteen years. Melissa was nominated for the award by Jean Menning, Executive Director, who wrote the following in her nomination:

Five years ago, four ladies were moving from Exceptional Opportunities, ICF/ID facilities to a home to access HCBS/ID-SCL. Melissa was a bit reluctant to leave the ICF homes she had worked at for eleven years but made the decision to help these four ladies move and adjust. Some employees were worried that the move would cause negative effects on mental and physical health. However, Melissa made the choice to stick by their sides. Success was an understatement, as she has helped these ladies grow beyond what anyone expected. They are always engaging in activities in the community, walking the path, swimming, going to the YMCA, park, and much more. Their favorite activities include grilling, meals on the patio, hosting their families for celebrations, going to Melissa's farm to bottle-feed animals. All these opportunities are because of Melissa. She oozes optimism, kindness, and care for the people she serves, and truly treats those serves like family.

Melissa's positive attitude and growth mindset make her a wonderful DSP. She likes the challenge of when something doesn't work out as you tried, finding a different way to teach something that in the end helps the people served accomplish a daily task. Melissa has unending patience and takes her time. She is always the first to volunteer to fill a vacant shift, cover for a co-worker, or do something extra to make the day of the people she serves. Melissa is an incredible ambassador for the DSP profession and Exceptional Opportunities.