

2024 Case Manager of the Year Finalists (2)

Mandy Kretsch

Person Accepting Service, Imagine!: 11 years

Mandy has been with Imagine! for just over 11 years. Mandy always stands up for what is right and is able to do so in a very kind and loving way. Mandy is such a caring and compassionate individual. She is always checking in on how others are doing and really listens to what someone has to say in a meaningful way.

Mandy has a strong moral compass and a memory for detail. She's the kind of person who remembers everyone's birthday or milestone and will reach out to them to make sure they know she's thinking of them and sending well wishes. She cares deeply about the people around her and does not hesitate to speak up if she thinks something isn't right or if it could be done better. Mandy is very attentive to others' needs. If she notices a peer who cannot vocalize their needs Mandy has many times alerted staff to make sure that others are cared for. Mandy is excellent at giving directions, making sure that not only her needs but others as well needs are met in the most appropriate manner.

Mandy participated in a class Imagine! used to offer called advocate for your rights. Mandy would go with her class to businesses and work with the businesses to show them how they could become more accessible. Mandy thrived in this class, and really enjoyed working with business owners to make our community more accessible. More recently Mandy worked with the Denver Art Museum in an effort to make the museum more accessible to those with disabilities. Mandy offered ideas to help many individuals experience art in a way that would be meaningful to them.

When a friend is feeling discouraged about their disability and the things, they are unable to do, Mandy is always there to remind them that they are important and remind them of all the things they CAN do. Mandy is amazing at thinking about and supporting others. She is excellent at making her thoughts known and offering her perspective, and she isn't afraid to stand up for what is right. We recently highlighted Mandy in a video that will help to emphasize why she is so deserving of this award. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YeqfPqqPzTk>

Person-Centeredness: How does the nominee support people to establish and achieve their goals?

Mandy uses her voice to make sure hers and others goals are met. If Mandy sees an injustice, or someone in need she is not afraid to speak up, she has a special gift of knowing the right words to say to make sure others and her own needs are met.

Relationships: How does the nominee empower the individual(s) they support to create and maintain friendships and relationships beyond the person's family and staff?

Mandy creates special bonds with everyone she meets. She remembers important details about people and goes out of her way to make sure everyone feels loved and appreciated. A peer was recently really struggling because their mom had passed away. They were struggling to navigate their emotions around the loss of their mother and feeling really discouraged about their disability in the process. Mandy went out of her way to support this individual, reminding them that their disability does not make them less of a person. Mandy was a huge comfort and support to this person through their grief. This is one example of how Mandy supports others on a daily basis.

Relationships: How does the nominee help facilitate relationships that enable the individual to be included in the community?

Because of how Mandy advocates, she is well known and well-loved in the community. She is respected by business owners whom she has worked with to help make their businesses

more inclusive. She is well respected at the local library where she hosts story times and reads from her published stories.

Leadership: How has the nominee demonstrated personal or professional leadership?

Mandy is a clear leader here at Imagine! and in our community, always speaking up for herself and others, and doing so in a really kind and compassionate manner.

Leadership: How does the nominee stand out, even among other DSPs/CMs/Advocates from your organization?

Mandy stands out because she is a self-advocate with a powerful voice. She is always thinking about others, and advocating for how she and others can best be served so they are all living to their full potential.

Innovation: How does the nominee think “outside the box” to improve the quality of life of the person or people they support?

Mandy always brings a new perspective to a situation, and really puts herself in others shows to think of the best ways to help advocate for what will be helpful to all.

Kris Housel

Past President, The Arc of Weld County: 11 years

Kris Housel embodies the value of self-advocacy in all that he does to support people with IDD in his community, across our chapter’s service region, the state, and our great nation. His entire life has been a demonstration in the valuable contributions that people with IDD can make in our shared community. Kris is a graduate of Greeley West High School and has been employed full-time for over 40 years, exemplifying the value of people with IDD in the workplace. Kris’s civic advocacy began with his participation in the City of Greeley’s Commission on Disabilities, as a 5th generation resident, he provided great insights into the journey and future of our rural community and the valuable role people with disabilities can and must play. After his work with the Commission, he became a board member with The Arc of Weld County, over a decade ago, serving as President for 8 years. In 2023 Kris joined The Arc of US National Council of Self-Advocates and become our chapter’s representative on The Arc of Colorado board. Currently, he is the Past President for The Arc of Weld County and is supporting other self-advocate board members in their roles including Executive Officers. Kris’s goal is to one day be an Executive Officer for The Arc of US and continue his advocacy for the rural voice of our shared community.

Person-Centeredness: How does the nominee support people to establish and achieve their goals?

Demonstrates through action and follow up support for other self-advocates in leadership roles.

Relationships: How does the nominee empower the individual(s) they support to create and maintain friendships and relationships beyond the person’s family and staff?

Maintains open communication and always offers his direct support to facilitate and support health communication.

Relationships: How does the nominee help facilitate relationships that enable the individual to be included in the community?

Demonstrates personal leadership and growth, shares his stories of successes and opportunities for growth to remove barriers of fear and possible self-doubt from other self-advocates in their own abilities.

Leadership: How has the nominee demonstrated personal or professional leadership?

By seeking new challenging leadership roles in various organizations

Leadership: How does the nominee stand out, even among other DSPs/CMs/Advocates from your organization?

He challenges himself every day, doesn't quit, and helps to build the confidence of other self-advocates to do the same, he is always willing to be a 1:1 coach.

Innovation: How does the nominee think "outside the box" to improve the quality of life of the person or people they support?

Kris understands you have to be present to make an impact, so he is always willing to attend meeting, provide testimony, or other needs to further the IDD cause and it is in those moments that he is quick on his feet to share lived experiences and be a problem solver for our community.