

## 2024 DSP of the Year Finalists (3)

### Jolene Bowers

#### Host Home Provider, Mosaic: 21 years

We are nominating Jolene Bowers for Direct Service Professional of the year because it is, quite frankly, long overdue. Jolene is a host home provider who has two clients living with her and her husband. They both require a significant amount of assistance with daily living tasks and have trouble verbalizing their preferences and discomfort. Despite many challenges in their lives, Jolene has created an environment where their personalities can shine, and their experiences just keep expanding. Jolene understands that no matter a person's physical limitations, they should be given every opportunity to live a meaningful life.

The people Jolene supports were in a group home together back in 2014 where she worked as the home manager. When our agency began transitioning to host homes for care, she sprang into action. Jolene got the training she needed and, within a month, sold her home and outfitted her new house with a ramp to ensure she could take both Daniel and Mark home with her. Due to their incredibly complicated care, it's unlikely that another person would have taken both of them into their home. Both men have the use of wheelchairs. Daniel has both a catheter and a colostomy bag. With a friendship that was years in the making, splitting them up would have done little to help either settle into their new environments. We couldn't imagine anyone else being able to keep them together and in good health for over 10 years like Jolene has. Several times over the years, Jolene's diligence and personal knowledge of Mark and Daniel has actually saved their lives.

A pattern has emerged when we look at Jolene's decade of care. She quickly recognizes when something isn't right from a physical health standpoint and takes action. According to her IC manager, "She is so familiar with their diagnosis and baseline that when she sees something is off, she knows it's serious. She's been right so many times it's uncanny. She gets them to the hospital, and they are diagnosed, treated, and discharged. That is literally why both Mark and Daniel are still alive today."

For example, in January of 2023, Jolene went to check Daniel's vitals. They were initially normal though he had a dry cough. The next day, his vitals showed a low fever and low blood pressure. Jolene immediately took him to the hospital. She didn't twiddle her thumbs or waiver; she simply took him. Doctors found that he was positive for Pneumonia, had a kidney infection, and needed special medication to increase his blood pressure. All of this from a mild cough and slightly irregular vitals. Jolene stayed with Daniel at the hospital and advocated for him even though she couldn't receive payment from Medicaid for the work she was doing. She made sure there was someone he knew and trusted nearby during a scary experience. More than once she has caught medical issues as they arise after being admitted by a hospital, issues that were missed by doctors and nurses.

But it's so much more than their medical needs. Jolene is honest and respectful with Daniel and Mark's families. She shares updates, video clips, audio recordings, and quotes of things they say. She helps Daniel and Mark stay connected to their families no matter where they are and what they're doing. There's always plenty to share since Jolene and her husband make an effort to bring the guys with them everywhere they can. Whether it's going shopping at Scheels or Lowe's, eating out at the Golden Corral (one of Daniel's favorites), checking out the aquarium, or just taking a walk in Memorial Park, there is always something fun planned with the Bowers family.

We could go on about the medical advocacy Jolene provides and the opportunities she enables, but what we want to leave you with most is this: Jolene has created an incredible bond with Daniel and Mark, kept their friendship close, and deepened ties with their own families. We hope all care providers will strive to be just like her.

**Person-Centeredness:** How does the nominee support people to establish and achieve their goals?  
Both of the people Jolene supports have trouble communicating and with their mobility. She pays close attention to the things that make them react positively or negatively. For example, her husband uses their garage as a woodshop. She noticed that Daniel acts positively and verbalizes his enjoyment when he can smell the fresh cut wood. So, when he is in the driveway getting some rays, they'll open the door to the garage so he can smell the wood shavings. He has a similar reaction to the wood area at Lowe's.

**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?

The most important relationship to Mark and Daniel besides their parents and Jolene is each other. The very fact that she sold her house and purchased a new one just so she could keep them together after the group home closed shows her commitment to their important relationships.

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

Jolene and her husband are very aware of the impact it has seeing someone with significant physical and intellectual disabilities out and about in the community. They take Mark and Daniel with them everywhere they can and create opportunities for exposure, even finding ways to take them both camping!

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

By being their voice when no one else could. Taking responsibility for the lives of the people she supports even when they are now "the responsibility of the hospital" has helped Mark and Daniel feel safe when they were in pain, feel heard when they couldn't speak, and heal despite oversight by other medical professionals. Jolene is a bulldog when it comes to protecting and ensuring the rights of the people she serves, in the best possible way. Another big piece in her success as a DSP are the relationships she has. When Jolene was a group home manager, she established relationships with families, but it was only enhanced when she became Mark and Daniel's host home provider. I think a lot of her success and trust she's built over the years is all a part of the relationships she's developed and maintained.

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

During the pandemic there was another hospitalization for one of her guys. They would not let visitors stay, but Jolene just refused to leave. She was there to be his voice and he needed her there. She didn't take no for an answer, talked to everyone she could, and was given permission to stay with him. She probably cited every right and regulation under the sun to make that happen. She would have pulled from whatever she could to make sure there was someone there who could help him when he was afraid and in pain. She is a true advocate.

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

Both of the people Jolene supports use wheelchairs, but she found a way to not only take them tent camping (though they got a camper soon after for future trips!), but to also help them drive on ATVs for the first time! She doesn't look at the guys and think about what they can't do, she thinks about how she can safely make it happen.

**Mamadou Ouattara**

**Lead Counselor – Residential, Developmental Disabilities Resource Center: 15 years**

Mamadou Ouattara stands out in a field of skilled, compassionate, and experienced professionals. Having just passed his 15-year employment anniversary with DDRC, he is known widely for his advocacy, reliability, and positive demeanor. His success as a Direct Support Professional in a Lead Counselor role in our Residential Department is evident in his longstanding success with challenging situations, ability to meet people where they are and develop a relationship from there, his understanding of a variety of nuanced communication from a variety of people, his consistent willingness to prioritize the needs of the people he supports, and his advocacy and support for each person, based on their individuality.

In 2023, DDRC became a member of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP), an organization dedicated to improving the lives of people with disabilities by elevating the status of the people who support them. In conjunction with this, DDRC adopted the NADSP Code of Ethics and Core Competencies. Mamadou exemplifies the practice of the nine tenets of the Code of Ethics and fifteen competency areas before DDRC adopted them.

There is no question that Mamadou is one of the hardest working professionals in our organization. He routinely fills in at a variety of residences, oftentimes at the last minute, to ensure coverage for vacations and sick time. Before, during, and after the pandemic, Mamadou demonstrated adaptability in his schedule and routine, being trained at all group homes and apartment settings to support all the residents at each location, while fulfilling his responsibilities as a Lead Counselor at a group home.

Does someone need to be picked up? Mamadou's on the way. A new medication needs to be delivered? Mamadou's your guy. Last minute sick call? Mamadou is there.

And it's not just that he is there. It's how he shows up for the people we support, for his co-workers and his supervisor. In the past year, he received two recognition awards for his advocacy and teamwork. When helping someone to resolve an issue with a cell phone company, not only did he support the person by speaking directly with the manager, but he also advocated for this person by supporting their involvement in the resolution. He didn't speak for; he spoke alongside this person. He demonstrated the principle of Participant Empowerment, part of the NADSP Code of Ethics by providing the person with the support and information necessary to assert themselves, thereby building their self-esteem and exercising decision making.

Mamadou was part of a team of people recognized for their demonstration of teamwork, advocacy, supporting health and wellness, promoting the physical and mental health and person centered supports as they temporarily relocated someone to the home where Mamadou serves as Lead Counselor while they recovered from a significant surgery.

He willingly gives of himself for the betterment of the people he supports, his colleagues, the organization, and ultimately our communities. Mamadou truly deserves recognition for his consistent, valuable contributions to the lives of people supported by DDRC.

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

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**Peggy Sullivan**  
**DSP, Laradon: 16+ years**

Laradon is nominating Peggy Sullivan for the Direct Support Professional of Year award. Peggy has worked with people with IDD for over 30 years and her dedication to improving the quality of life of those she supports has never wavered. It is a privilege to work alongside someone who is still passionate about what they do even after being in the field for as long as she has. Sandy, Program Manager. Peggy has worked with Laradon's most vulnerable populations including our older adults

program and the medically fragile individuals. No matter the day, no matter the program, she is constantly bringing laughter into the halls of Laradon.

Peggy truly embodies her role as a DSP. She meticulously plans and executes activities that are inclusive to all of the individuals she serves, ensuring that no one ever feels left out. When walking into program at Laradon you will see and most likely hear Peggy engaging in music to lift the moods of the room, dance parties, Art, exercise classes, or Group Games including Candy Land, Uno, and Checkers. Because of her, program space is always decorated with the help of her individuals to include all holidays, or seasons. She includes everyone in the room asking for their input on what they want for the program. Her compassion is palpable as she goes the extra mile to treat everyone with the utmost dignity and respect. "Peggy is so funny, she makes everyone laugh" Dolores, individual from Program. Peggy's attention to the care and services she provides is truly admirable, as she strives to ensure that everyone is engaged, happy, and having fun. "I like Peggy" Francisco individual, individual from Program.

Peggy's drive to include everyone is immeasurable, and she never allows differences to hinder the quality of care and service she provides. She continuously brings innovative ideas to management while advocating for both the individuals she serves and her fellow staff members. "It's amazing to watch how she includes everyone, no matter their ability, she always finds a way to pull their attention in and keep them engaged." Hederson, DSP "I wish I had half her energy" Mickie, DSP.

Peggy actively involves and encourages her coworkers in the activities she orchestrates, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment for staff. She invests countless hours of her own free time creating engaging activities, demonstrating her unwavering commitment to enhancing the lives of those she serves. "She approaches each day with a sparkle in her eyes and the same level of enthusiasm and compassion as she did the first day she stepped on campus. Her laugh can be heard down the hall and is infectious. Her teammates that have been fortunate enough to work alongside of her have truly learned what Laradon's mission stands for." Brenda, Executive Director of Day Services. "I have learned everything I know from Peggy. She is the one who trained me, and she's the best." Ashley, DSP.

Peggy's passion for empowering others shines through as she leads by example and encourages everyone, staff and individuals alike, to embrace new experiences and strive for independence, helping them reach their fullest potential. "As someone who has witnessed Peggy's dedication firsthand over our many years working together, I can say undeniably what an outstanding employee and invaluable asset she is to the Laradon Adult Day Program. I want to give Peggy a big round of applause for all of her hard work through the years, as she's always willing to help out. She's supportive, creative, funny, kind, is a joy to be around, and is loved by many. Peggy, you're an amazing woman!" Larine, DSP.

In conclusion, Peggy is an inspiration to all who have the privilege of working alongside her. Any one of her remarkable qualities would be enough to nominate her for an award, but all of them combined make her a truly unique and compassionate employee and make her an exemplary candidate for the Employee of the Year Award.