



College of Direct Support

# The DSP Chronicles

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## Kendra Majette: Ability Beyond Disability DSP Focuses on Trust

BY: TOM KING

There's a Direct Support Professional (DSP) at Ability Beyond Disability in Danbury, CT who summarizes success in one word: trust.

"Building trust with people over time is very important in this job," says Kendra Majette. "People need to know you and know that they can trust you and that you will be there and know what you expect. Trust makes all the difference in doing this job well."

Kendra has been at Ability Beyond Disability for over four years. She supports 12 individuals Monday through Thursday as part of the organization's Day and Work Services. Each Friday she drives nearly 20 miles to assist two men who service the magazines and books at a grocery store in New Milford, CT. To add to this already busy workload, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Sundays Kendra covers open shifts at various residential homes. This dedication means Kendra works between 50 and 55 hours a week.

Diane Strom is one of the organization's Community Support Coordinators, and Kendra's supervisor. Diane has been working in the disabilities field for 30 years and at Ability Beyond Disability for 25. She supervises 20 staff members who support 80 individuals

spread over a variety of community locations.

"Kendra's a professional--well spoken, positive, decisive, flexible, and is a superb role model," Diane says. "She works great on our team, is proactive with the people she supports, and manages to find the calm between everyone."

Every day, DSPs encounter countless challenges. But Kendra faces every situation with care and intelligence.

"Whenever she has a problem and comes to me for advice, she also has already thought through the possible solution to the problem and that's a rare quality," Diane explained. "It makes my job easy and it shows how proactive she is in solving problems."

Last October, Kendra was selected for the agency's "Oh My" Award, an on-the-spot recognition for work above and beyond an individual's job description. When a major snowstorm hit Connecticut, Kendra stepped up, going above-and-beyond her duties to help a group home through the turmoil.

"Kendra was very assertive and took total responsibility for ensuring that the staff returned home safely," remembers Sharon Stallings, one of the organization's



Kendra Majette

**Age:** 32

**Home:** Waterbury, CT

**Position:** Direct Support Professional

**Where:** Ability Beyond Disability

**Key Quote by Kendra:**

"Building trust with people is very important in this job. People need to know they can trust you and what you expect. That makes all the difference in doing this job well."

**How a Colleague Describes Her:**

"She is very concerned about the people she supports, and always makes sure they are happy. She keeps them active and engaged. Whenever she comes to me with a problem, she always has a suggestion to solve it as well." – **Diane Strom**, Community Support Coordinator and Kendra's supervisor.

**"People need to know they can trust you and what you expect."**



Residential Coordinators. “Kendra then stayed to assist the residents through the power outage for the evening until the next day.”

Kendra remembers arriving at the group home at 8 a.m. on that Saturday morning and working until 5 p.m. on Sunday. The storm had knocked out the electricity, heat, and water. Kendra and another DSP supported and cared for the men throughout the ordeal until the storm eased and alternate arrangements could be carried out.

This versatile DSP is also close to attaining her college degree. She lacks only one three-credit course from Central Connecticut State University in New Britain, CT to earn a

Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology with a minor in Psychology.

Ability Beyond Disability employs 900 direct care workers and of those, 174 are DSPs who have graduated from the agency’s Pathways to Excellence program, a career-track program that includes the online training through the College of Direct Support/DirectCourse. The agency, established in 1953, serves approximately 1,800 people and their families in Connecticut and New York.

Kendra says the College of Direct Support courses were important for her. “CDS taught me a wide range of skills needed in this profession. I learned what a DSP does day in

and day out and what are the best practices in the field,” she explained. “It reinforced my knowledge on ethics and data privacy and helped me focus on my strengths and weaknesses.”

“Kendra is a great role model and I’d like to get her into a mentoring role soon,” says Diane. “She likes what she does and is concerned about making the people she supports happy, active and engaged.”

Kendra is certainly a DSP with a positive attitude. Of the people she supports, she added, “I know them and they know me. We know our ups and downs, our highs and lows. In a nutshell, it’s all about trust and treating each person with respect.”

## The Job, The People & More: From Kendra Majette

### Describe your primary responsibilities and your current job.

“I am a full-time DSP and Job Coach in our Day and Work Services program. I oversee the overall quality, productivity and performance on the job of the people I support.”

### What is the most enjoyable part of the job for you?

“I enjoy assisting my group with their daily job duties. Turns out I have as much fun with the alternative activities as they do—the music, movies, drawing, arts and crafts, puzzles, and going on trips. Hearing them say ‘I DID IT!’ when they get the job done is great.”

### What is the most challenging part of the job?

“Receiving new work materials and having to find understandable and exciting ways for those I support to grasp them can be a challenge. We have to do it in a way that does not frustrate the individuals and that works with each person’s learning style, interests and skill level.”

### What got you interested in being a DSP?

“Quite a few friends worked at Ability Beyond Disability and told me about it, but I had never worked in this field when I applied. I was in retail at the time and was nervous about working in this field. Eventually I applied and was offered a job as a Life Skills Instructor. My initial training made me nervous, but after about a month realized that it was growing on me. But when I got to know the people I support, I began to really enjoy what I do.

“Building trust with people is very important in this job. They need to know you and know that they can trust you. That makes all the difference in doing this job well.

“In 2009, I applied for the Pathways to Excellence program at Ability that uses the College of Direct Support together with monthly discussion meetings with my co-workers, also in the program. I wanted to enhance and emphasize my current familiarity from what I was taught during my initial training. When I graduated from the program, I received a promotion to Direct Support Professional, with an increase in my pay and a completion bonus.”

### Describe the types of supports you provide for your clients and how many clients do you support and in what setting?

“I am a full-time DSP in the Day & Work Services Department, supporting 12 people who do production and light assembly work. I oversee the overall quality of their work, their productivity and their performance, and help them build their work and social skills.

“Since becoming a DSP in 2009, I have been independently overseeing a community ‘job site’ supporting two individuals. That was a great learning experience for me and for those individuals I support. There, I was able to try new teaching and support strategies to assist while empowering them to work independently. Since then, I have witnessed them develop their independence on the job, be able to problem solve, and communicate more and more with customers. It has been a great opportunity to teach other skills like reading and math on the job.

“Working in the community offers a variety of daily opportunities to reinforce great workplace skills like customer service, social skills, professionalism and positive communication with all different people.”

### Tell us a little about the people you support.

"I support 12 very different individuals whose diagnoses range from traumatic brain injury, Down's syndrome, dementia, autism, hearing impairment, cerebral palsy and psychotic disorders. Each of them work with varying levels of independence. We find work that they can do successfully, that offers opportunities for advancing their skills, and provide further learning opportunities. Ability Beyond Disability provides support to people in groups, but also gives people advance job-seeking skills, so they can find and retain jobs independently with less support.

"Each week, I also support some individuals in their home as part of our residential services."

### Would you or have you recommended this

### career to others?

"I have suggested this career to my sister and to a few of my friends. They'd enjoy providing support needs to individuals in the community and at home and helping them reach their goals."



### Did the College of Direct Support help you?

"CDS taught me a wide range of skills needed in this profession. I

learned what a DSP does day in and day out and what are the best practices in this field. It reinforced my knowledge on ethics and data privacy and helped me focus on my strengths and weaknesses. CDS courses and lessons

emphasized my familiarity with professional and unprofessional practices, HIPAA, skills development and self-determination.

"The College of Direct Support allowed me to complete the lessons around my schedule. I could start a lesson, stop, and begin again at my convenience. As part of the Pathways to Excellence program, I got to talk with my co-workers each month about the lessons and everyone had different perspectives. We were able to learn from each other and really just get to know each other."

## The DSP Chronicles

This publication introduces you to Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) from around the country and chronicles their stories as they go about the important work of direct support. They discuss the job: the challenges, the success stories, how they work with those they support and the unique ways they get the job done. DSPs are America's quiet and unknown heroes. Their dedicated and hard work improves the lives of those they support. Many work more than one job. They are devoted to the DSP profession and to those they serve.

If you would like to nominate a DSP to be featured, please email Lisa Simon at [lisa.simon@elsevier.com](mailto:lisa.simon@elsevier.com).



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