



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

The DSP Chronicles



Antoinette Freeman

Antoinette Freeman:

At SPIN, She's a DSP Leader, Mentor & Advocate

By TOM KING

At A Glance

Name: Antoinette Freeman

Age: 42

Home: Philadelphia, PA

Position: Direct Support Professional

Where: SPIN (Special People In Northeast Inc)

Number of People She Supports: 3

Key Quote: *"I have always had a passion for helping others. When I learned about this job it sounded like a perfect fit. I am a 'people' person. I get a lot of satisfaction in seeing people achieve their goals. When I told my Mom that I had applied for a position at SPIN and the work I would be doing, she said "That's the job for you, that's what you like to do."*

How a Colleague Describes Her:

"She is a true advocate for the people she supports. She is personable, knowledgeable and is wonderful to work with. She's also a great mentor for the new DSPs coming in - she has a lot of experience and really helps to mold them. She's a true leader."

- Kim Williams,
Assisting Director/
Adult Services



Antoinette Freeman loves her work, and her work is all about people. It's as simple as that, she says, yet her job as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) at the Hoffnagle House is anything but simple.

Antoinette has worked as a DSP at SPIN Inc. (Special People In Northeast, Inc.) for five years. She supports three young women with intellectual disabilities who live together in a Community Living Arrangement to live an everyday life in the community.

The excellent work she does has not gone unnoticed. In November 2010 she received the Point of Transformation Award from the city of Philadelphia and in November 2009 she was SPIN's Employee of the Month. She was selected for SPIN's Leadership Opportunities Program and this past September was part of a group of DSPs who met with legislators in Washington, D.C., during the ANCOR Governmental Activities Seminar to discuss the role of the DSPs and the ongoing issue of low wages.

Antoinette supports the three young women - Hannah, Jinnell and Stephanie - and has since they decided to live together at Hoffnagle in June 2009. In her letter to Antoinette about the Employee of the Month honor, here's what SPIN Executive Director Trina Losinno said of Antoinette:

"Hannah, Jinnell and Stephanie are unique and wonderful women who could keep an army of DSPs busy. Each have moved from a restrictive setting environment and each has had to learn the fine art of balancing choice and independence with responsibility. Not so easy for young 20 somethings. And then there is the issue of three young 20 somethings learning to live together - think dorm nightmare! Well Antoinette, you were not to be deterred by all of this and you calmly and patiently used all of the positive approaches known to woman and helped each young woman learn

to deal more appropriately with each situation as it arose. You've also introduced them to healthy eating by visiting a produce store, the wonderful benefits of reading by obtaining library cards and the everyday fun of watching animals at a nearby farm. Your secret weapon seems to be guidance rather than telling them what they should do. A smart move since most 20 somethings don't like being told."

High praise from the executive director who also uses words like "professionalism" and "wisdom" and "caring" and "role model" to describe Antoinette.

How does Antoinette describe Antoinette?

"I'm a very open person and very easy to work with, outgoing, busy and I want things to run smoothly," she said. "If there is something that needs to get done I'm not going to wait on someone else to do it - I'll get it done. I'm a family person and I truly love the three women I support."

The word family triggers something else about Antoinette. We asked her if she would or had recommended this job and career to other people. She has. Her 24-year-old daughter, Monique, the oldest of her three children, is a DSP at SPIN in the residential program - just like her mother.

The state of Pennsylvania was the first state to adopt the College of Direct Support (CDS) as its DSP workforce development tool and SPIN was the first agency to use CDS. For eight straight years SPIN has been named one of the 125 top training companies in the world by "Training" Magazine and CDS is a part of the reason.

Antoinette says the CDS curriculum has helped her a lot during her five years at SPIN. "It has been very helpful and it's taught me a lot of things I didn't know. It has really been great in learning how to deal with different challenging behaviors,"

continued ...

If you would like to nominate a Direct Support Professional to be profiled in *The DSP Chronicles*, please send your correspondence to Tom King at tking@collegeofdirectsupport.com. Please briefly explain why you are nominating this person to be featured.

The Job, The People & More from Antoinette Freeman

Describe the supports you provide for your clients: “I support three young ladies with varying disabilities in a residential home in northeast Philadelphia. They live in a very nice community with friendly neighbors. Each person has their own unique interests and goals. My primary focus is to support and promote their independence and to encourage them to participate fully in community life and to work hard to reach their goals.”

What is the most enjoyable part of your job? “The most enjoyable part of my job is witnessing the milestones in the lives of the people I support – whether it’s making a friend, getting a job, re-acquainting with family, overcoming a hurdle, becoming more independent, volunteering in the community – seeing people achieve their personal outcomes and knowing that I may have played a small part in the process – that’s very satisfying for me.”

What is the most challenging part of your job? “Supporting people to live out their dreams can be the most rewarding and most challenging part of being a Direct Support Professional. Dealing with barriers and disappointments, at

continued from front ...

she said. “It’s both helpful and entertaining.”

But for this DSP, it comes back to the word “people.” As she explains: “To do this work you must have people skills. It is a career for someone who enjoys people and it’s a people business. In every aspect of this job, whether it is supporting someone to achieve goals, reaching out to people in the community or collaborating with fellow staff – your role involves interacting with people.”

When the Points of Transformation awards ceremony was held in early November 2010, Antoinette missed it. She was burying her mother that week. SPIN thought it to be such a significant award, that it recreated the ceremony a few weeks



Antoinette Freeman (in the center) is flanked by some of the people she supports and to the far right is Trina Losinno, SPIN’s Executive Director.

times, can be overwhelming. But being there for the people and helping them to learn and overcome obstacles is an essential part of my role in their lives.”

What got you interested in becoming a DSP? “I became interested in being a DSP through a friend who works in the human services field. I was working in the hospitality industry and I was not enjoying my work. I have always had a passion for helping others. When I learned about this job it sounded like a perfect fit and it has been.”

Would you or have you recommended this career to others and why? “I have recommended this career to several people who I think would be very successful in this field – including my daughter.” (Her daughter Monique, 24, now works as a DSP at SPIN).

later just for Antoinette.

“This honor brought me to tears. It’s the biggest thing that’s ever happened to me,” she said.

Patient. Upbeat. Motivated. Challenge-driven. Influential. Nurturing. Genuine. Those are words that Kim Williams, Assisting Director, Adult Services and Antoinette’s supervisor, says of this DSP. “She is a true friend to the people she supports and to her co-workers. Her role as an advocate for those she supports is incredible – she has no trouble standing up and advocating for them and for others. She’s very special.”

“I just do what I do,” Antoinette says. “And I love doing it.”

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.

The DSP Chronicles are archived on our website at www.collegeofdirectsupport.com and also on the website of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals – www.nadsp.org. If you would like to nominate a DSP to be featured, please contact Tom King at 865.659.3562 (toll free) or email him at tkwrites1021@gmail.com.

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