



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

The DSP Chronicles



Pat Chambers

Pat Chambers:

At 70, This DSP 'Runs Circles' Around Many as She Floats in Her Support Role

By TOM KING

Pat Chambers is a Direct Support Professional (DSP) who works seven days on and seven days off and many times she works days in between. Her 92-year-old mother suffers from dementia and lives with Pat. Her average work week is 80 hours, whether she's at her home or busy in a group home at Starkey Inc. in Wichita, KS.

and her work ethic is unbelievable. I can't really explain Pat to you. She's one of a kind and I'm lucky to supervise her."

Pat, a native of Wichita, floats between Starkey's 42 group homes and independent living apartments and loves every minute of it.

We asked Pat about that work ethic. "I have always worked and it has served me well. Dad had me out selling donuts when I was 4. I delivered newspapers, sold ice cream, worked as a night auditor at a bank and was in the trash collection business for 25 years. I thought Dad was hard on me but it made me tough and ready to deal with the world."

Pat is all about family. She has two grown children, six grandchildren and not long ago lost a son to Alpha I Deficiency, something he suffered with for 20 years and in his last 10 years Pat was his caregiver. "I think that actually helped prepare me for Starkey," she said.

Pat approaches those she supports as family members – plain and simple. "She's taken only four hours off in 2 ½ years and that was for her daughter's wedding and she came right back. I said something to her about it and she said she's not helping me, that she's helping those we support. It's all about them," Merrill said.

As a floater she works across the disabilities spectrum. She's more interested in the person than the disability. "We go to the movies, we go shopping, we sit and watch TV together, we have conversations, play cards and games....and we do normal things that normal people do. They're just like my regular family."

Of those she supports, Pat says: "Where I struggle most often is watching the people I support have difficulties completing tasks that are simple for me. I have watched many people grow and gain confidence in their skills because I have allowed

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Pat builds computers, loves to go surfing on the Internet, enjoys country and square dancing, has to dig in the dirt around her home for therapy and her 50-year-old supervisor says she "runs circles around all of us."

Maybe it's time to mention that Pat's a very young and fit 70 years old. "I don't have time to get tired and I love it that way," Pat says. "I'm a health nut and I watch what I eat and my weight, but I stay so busy I don't need to exercise. I get plenty walking Sugar and working." Sugar is her dog – a big Rottweiler.

For almost three years now Pat has been a "floater" DSP at Starkey, and a floater DSP is a unique person with a tremendous skill set and personality. Karen Merrill, Starkey's Community Living Support Supervisor and Pat's supervisor, describes a floater for us: "Our floaters (they have eight right now) have to be very flexible, adaptable and knowledgeable. They have to learn everything and retain it and be able to work with a different group of people on a day-to-day basis. They work the gamut of people with different disabilities and they have to understand the care plans."

And then she adds this: "We are very careful about filling the floater positions. I do all of the interviews for those positions. I can teach paperwork. I can teach meds to them and behavior plans, but I can't teach them how to have a heart and Pat has a big one, a real big one."

Of Pat, she says this: "She is very good at adjusting to the changing staffs and those she supports. She's incredible. She's so very patient, so understanding,

At A Glance

Name: Pat Chambers

Age: 70

Home: Wichita, KS

Position: Direct Support Professional, Community Living Floater

Where: Starkey Inc.

Key Quote: *Of those she supports: "We go to the movies, we go shopping, we sit and watch TV together, we have conversations, play cards and games....and we do normal things that normal people do. They're just like my regular family."*

How a Colleague Describes Her: *"Pat is 70 years old and she runs circles around all of us. I use Pat a lot in a training capacity when a new person comes on board. A lot of her talents come from her life experiences. She is very patient. I can't explain Pat. She is one of a kind. I'm lucky to supervise her." – Karen Merrill, Pat's immediate supervisor.*



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 tkwrites1021@gmail.com. Please briefly explain why you are nominating this person to be featured.

The Job, The People & More from Pat Chambers

Describe your primary responsibilities and your current job: “A Community Living Floater is a DSP who works in various locations when there are vacancies or an extended illness of a co-worker and if there has been paid time off scheduled for an employee. Therefore, I receive extensive training so I am able to work in any of our community living settings. As a floater you are expected to be knowledgeable and be prepared to assist when different situations arise. This may require me to work several different shifts in a seven-day work week. I may work a split support position one day and then move to a traditional 2nd shift position and perhaps even a third shift position. As one can see, an important aspect for being a floater is flexibility. Also not only for a floater, but for all staff, it is extremely important that everyone establishes trust and a working friendship with all the persons served in the group homes.”

Describe the types of supports you provide for your clients and how many clients do you support and in what setting? “I offer assistance where needed with meds, hygiene, meals, laundry, and outings, which could include going to movies, restaurants, dances, picnics, or simply a walk. I try to have daily conversations with each person.”

Tell us a little about the people you support. “Starkey serves people with many different types of disabilities. I have personally worked with people who have: chromosome anomaly, intermittent explosive disorder, attention deficit w/hyperactive, seizure disorder, dementia, intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, autism, Down syndrome or bipolar disorder. Some of the people we serve also may not be able to speak, hear or walk so we sometimes need all of our resources to be able to better assist them. I have also worked with people who are very high functioning and require very little assistance.”

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them the space to do it – and that is my reward.”

When she began working for Starkey, Pat began taking College of Direct Support (CDS) courses and now she’s taken them all. “The training here is wonderful and overwhelmed me at first,” she said. “There’s a culture here now around the CDS. The courses helped me understand the supports I provide, the whys and the way I do the supports. The examples of behavioral problems in the courses really helped me as well. The CDS has

What is the most challenging part of the job? “At first, it was getting through all of the training. Then it was going to different group homes and not feeling comfortable. Once I gained the knowledge and experience, I began to relax. It was hard gaining and retaining all of the different information about the people we serve. However, I was fortunate and was able to work in the same location for a length of time and this allowed me to get comfortable and gain a sense of security. Once I was moved from that location, I did feel that sense of comfort slip away. Where I struggle most often is watching them having difficulties completing tasks that would be simple for me. I have watched many people grow and gain confidence in their skills because I have allowed them the space to do it and that is my reward.”

What is the most enjoyable part of the job? “Feeling like you are at home with your family. Sharing everyday life stories, experiencing fun and interesting conversations at the dinner table, learning how their day at work went. Understanding how much they love you and appreciate everything you do for them even if you mess up. Their ability to forgive a mistake is just uncanny. They truly accept you for who you are. How they continually accept and have the patience for numerous different staff members coming in and out of their lives is amazing to me. I enjoy coming to work everyday because I know I will always be hugged, loved and accepted for who I am. No questions asked. Even though sometimes they may have to correct me on how I did something.”

Would you recommend this career to others and why? “If someone enjoys helping people to live their lives to the fullest, then I would recommend this job to them. It can be very rewarding and you have the opportunity to meet a lot of nice people.”

made a difference to me for sure.”

Merrill says Pat is very organized and focused. “She’s on it. She focuses on the key points of each person’s behavioral plan, their meds, their goals and objectives. It’s her Bible. Our people love her. She is direct and to the point and she has a great ability to be patient and listen and that’s such a big thing for an effective DSP to do.”

“This is the most enjoyable job I have ever had,” Pat says.



DSP Pat Chambers listens to a client’s needs

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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