



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

The DSP Chronicles



Faye Miller

Faye Miller:

South Dakota's DSP of the Year Is All About Relationships, Connecting & Making a Difference

By TOM KING

When she was just a little girl in Mountain Lake, MN, Faye Miller's mother told her that she had a heart of gold, a heart full of compassion, especially for people with difficulties and for the elderly. Turns out, her mom was spot on.

Today, Faye Miller is a Direct Support Professional (DSP) who supports 16 people between the ages of 18 and 70 at Ability Building Services (ABS) in Yankton, S.D. She works in the agency's Supported Employment/Community Inclusions Department, finding those she supports jobs that match their abilities. She also helps them make social connections and looks for every opportunity to integrate them into the Yankton community. Her work – her calling – has drawn attention, for she was recently honored as South Dakota's Direct Support Professional of the Year by ANCOR (American Network of Community Options and Resources).

During the time she's worked as a DSP, Miller has had her own small literary business called "Write From the Heart." It's all about the heart for her. She has taught workshops about writing your memoirs, journaling and creative writing. She has a degree in English from Mount Marty College in Yankton. She has worked in libraries, been a proof reader and even been a typesetter. From that she went to work in an assisted living setting in the activities department, did home care for the elderly and that led her to her current job.

She was nominated for the DSP of the Year award by Gigi Healy, Director of Vocational Services and Miller's supervisor at Ability Building Services. Here is what Healy said about Miller in nominating her:

"Faye Miller is an extremely dedicated Direct Support Professional. She takes her role very seriously. She listens to the person she is supporting and gives her all toward helping to make great things happen for that person. Faye was working with a gentleman who has a congenital spinal cord disease. He is a very smart man but has progressively lost the use of some his extremities.

He currently uses a wheelchair for mobility and it is somewhat difficult for him to get places because of his physical condition. Faye worked with him and helped him find his dream job. He now works from home for a publishing company. He researches topics for his employer from his home PC. His satisfaction is portrayed through his smile. Faye also worked with a middle-aged gentleman who has a Traumatic Brain Injury. This gentleman has spent his free time over the past few years writing poetry and taking pictures. He has always talked about putting his poetry and photography into book form. Faye assisted this gentleman to contact a publishing company and make this dream come true."

Teddy Herrlein is the proud new published author. His book is called "Quite Simple and Quite True." These are words he uses in his poems, Faye said. The book's subtitle is "Inside the Heart of Teddy Herrlein."

"Teddy has been losing ground, with his traumatic brain injury, and I convinced him that he needed to get it done, and he agreed," she says. "We made the rounds to all of the publishers in town and we decided we didn't want to self-publish, that we wanted this to be a professionally published book and we worked on the cover design and it came out last December."

"This job as a DSP is about relationships. At the end of the day I know I have made a difference. You connect with the people you serve and you connect them to others. You build relationships. There's no price tag on how this makes me feel. It's so much more than just a job," Miller says.

The people she supports have an array of disabilities – mild intellectual disabilities, autism, cerebral palsy, defiant disorders and traumatic brain injury. "Some have minor disabilities and others are more challenging," she said.

Here's how she describes her role as a DSP. "My work is about the relationships, getting to know everyone I support as an individual. Sometimes they

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At A Glance

Name: Faye Miller

Age: 58

Home: Yankton, S.D.

Position: Direct Support Professional in Supported Employment/Community Inclusions Department

Where: Ability Building Services

Number of People She Supports: 16

Key Quote: "At the end of the day I know I have made a difference. You connect with the people you serve and you connect them to others. You build relationships. There's no price tag on how this makes me feel. It's so much more than just a job."

How a Colleague Describes Her: "She is a phenomenal DSP who goes far above and beyond what the job requires. She works very hard to get to know each person she supports and to find them just the right job. She's very professional, kind, patient and whenever anyone talks with her they have her total attention. She brainstorms well and has such great creative thoughts and ideas."



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.

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are shy. I take them to lunch, I listen to them and their stories and their lives. It's an investment of time, finding out where they want to shine. I network in town, and assist individuals in integrating into the community. It's about having a one-on-one relationship with every person I support. Learning to know someone in depth is a gift."

When asked about her primary responsibilities, she said: "As a job developer and job coach my goal is to get a good sense of an individual's likes, dislikes and skills. Based on that information, I try to find a job that would be a good match. Then I continue to support that individual on the job by making regular checks and communicating with the employer."

And she also talks about her link to the families of those she supports. "You get to know the families, through good and bad times. You develop ties to the families and they become my friends too" Miller said.

Faye is a wife to husband Roger and they have two children – Christopher is 24 and Katie is 21. They live on a farm near Yankton, a town of some 13,700 on the north bank of the Missouri River in southeast South Dakota. Away from work she enjoys writing fiction and non-fiction and belongs to a writer's group.

She also enjoyed the College of Direct Support that the agency has been utilizing now for three years in training its DSPs. "A lot of the CDS content was new to me and it has been very valuable in helping me become a more effective DSP," she said. "It's very interesting the way the courses are

The Job, The People & More from Faye Miller

Describe the supports you provide for your clients: "I think one of the most important factors in being effective in supports is spending enough one-on-one time with them so you can build a real relationship. I try to be their encourager, helping to build confidence. This is important, I think, no matter what you do as a DSP."

Tell us a little about the people you support: "I work with a wide range of cognitive disabilities, some of which are very minor and others are more evident. Each individual is different, with weaknesses and strengths just like any of us. Some are elderly, some are just out of high school, so the spectrum is wide.

What is the hardest part of the job? "The hardest part is seeing someone giving up on themselves, or not being able to find just the right job for a very capable individual?"

What is the most satisfying part of the job? "The



Faye Miller shares a happy moment with Sandy Bezug.

done and it's easy to use and understand."

Is this a career that she would recommend to her children? "You know, yes, I would. It takes patience. A lot of patience. But the rewards are so great. You don't go into this to make a lot of money. But it makes such a difference in your life to know that you have made a difference in someone else's life at the end of the day," she said.

And Gigi Healy, her supervisor, added this: "It sounds trite, but it's not. Faye is the total package of a DSP. Talented, very professional. Kind. She's never in a hurry or too busy to listen. She brainstorms things with the people she supports and always has creative thoughts. She loves them and they love her. She is a phenomenal DSP!"

Yes, her mom was spot on!

most satisfying part is making a good job match for a person and seeing them bloom and blossom on the job."

What is the most enjoyable part of the job? "The infinite variety. Every day is different and new– you never know what to expect. Learning to know someone in depth is a gift."

What is the most challenging part of the job? "The most challenging part is the disinterest or prejudice from an occasional member of the community. Sometimes this is a potential employer or just an individual who is less than kind to a person with a disability, or closed to the idea of giving that person a chance."

Would you (or have you) recommend this career to others and why? "Yes, I would recommend this job, especially if you have a heart to help others, and want to see people live up to their potential and experience joy in life."

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 1-877-353-2767 (toll free) or email him at tking@collegeofdirectsupport.com.

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