



# COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

## The DSP Chronicles



Theresa Laws

### Theresa Laws:

She Brings a Passion for Advocacy to Her Role At Rensselaer County ARC; 'Awesome' Describes Her

By TOM KING

A typical work week for Theresa Laws at the Rensselaer County ARC of NYSARC in Troy, N.Y. is usually seven days long and then, in her spare time, this single mother of three works seven days a week at home. Her job title of Direct Support Professional (DSP) surely fits this professional.

On December 5th she celebrated her fourth anniversary as a DSP. Her official title is Health Support Specialist/Direct Support Professional. She loves her work and the six women she supports in a group home.

"I have a passion for the field and for advocating for the people we serve and also for all DSPs," Theresa says. "I love giving back and supporting those who can't advocate for themselves or help themselves. I love to see their faces light up when I connect with them and they make my face light up."

In her role as the Health Support Specialist, she orders all of the prescribed medications for the six women she supports. She makes their appointments and goes with them. She advocates for the medical services they need and works with the staff nurses and doctors as a full member of the support team. She makes physical and behavioral assessments on those she supports. And then there are the other support tasks that need to be handled on a daily basis.

With an Associate's degree in Early Childhood Education, she worked for nine years as a Pre-K teacher for the Albany County Head Start program and took a part-time position as a resident counselor at Rensselaer while still teaching. That led to the job she has today.

Denedra Meisner is the agency's Residential Operations Manager and in that role is Theresa's immediate supervisor.

Here's how she describes Theresa: "She just loves helping people and she's so caring. She listens to them and engages them and the women she works with - they just love her presence in their lives. Theresa is easy going and so easy to communicate with and her work ethic is

incredible. She's usually in that house with them seven days a week."

Meisner says that Theresa tried becoming a Program Manager and that didn't last long. "She was great at it but she missed having that close relationship, working with the women one on one and she went back to her DSP job."

Here's how Theresa describes her move out of management back to the DSP and the house: "I yearned to maintain a relationship with the ladies who I support. I missed them and it's as simple as that."

Her passion for those she supports is not her only passion. She also has a passion for DSPs and the important work they do, and is a founding member of the Direct Support Professional Alliance of New York State (DSPANYS). Those 14 founding members of DSPANYS were honored this year at the ANCOR Management Practices Conference and received the ANCOR Advocacy Award for advocating on behalf of DSPs and those they serve.

And in January 2009 she testified before the New York State Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committee on behalf of DSPANYS for better benefits and salaries for DSPs. She stressed how these salaries and benefits lead to reduced turnover and how that improves the lives of the people they support.

"It was exhilarating and a little nerve-wracking to say the least to testify but I was honored to be asked to do it and it's such an important set of issues for DSPs, for those we support and for their families," she said.

Theresa says the courses she has taken through the College of Direct Support (CDS) have been very important in her work. "The CDS is wonderful and it is so very practical and it shed so much light on my role as a DSP. It has really helped me and my co-workers as well and we're all on the same page in our support roles," she

*continued ...*

### At A Glance

**Name:** Theresa Laws

**Age:** 34

**Home:** Albany, NY

**Position:** Health Support Specialist/DSP

**Where:** Supported Community Rensselaer County ARC, NYSARC

**Number of People She Supports:** 6

**Key Quote:** "I love giving back and supporting those who can't advocate for themselves or help themselves. I love to see their faces light up when I connect with them and they make my face light up."

**How a Colleague Describes Her:**

"She just loves helping people and she's so caring. She listens to them and engages them and the women she works with - they just love her presence in their lives. Theresa is easy going and so easy to communicate with and her work ethic is incredible."  
- Denedra Meisner, Residential Operations Manager.



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](mailto:tking@collegeofdirectsupport.com). Please briefly explain why you are nominating this person to be featured.

# The Job, The People & More from Theresa Law

**What is the most enjoyable part(s) of the job for you in your daily work?** “The most enjoyable part is seeing the smiles on the ladies faces when a goal or a task is accomplished, and taking part in an activity or just enjoying life. Exposure is everything. It is amazing to see how the ladies react when they are put in a new situation or setting... for the most part, it’s like they are in a state of awe – like a kid in a candy store. It just touches my heart!”

**What do you find to be the most challenging part of the job?** “Finding time to get everything done. That is one of the main reasons I decided to step down from my Program Manager position. Outside of the documentation and daily paper work, I yearned to maintain a relationship with the ladies who I support.”

**What got you interested in becoming a DSP?** “A good friend of mine was working for the agency and introduced me to the field. I met and formed a relationship (over the phone) with a gentleman she supported and I absolutely loved the bond my friend had with her residents. Although I saw the job could be stressful at times, it can also be VERY REWARDING.”

**Please describe the types of supports you provide.** “I work in a house of six ladies who are supported by staff 24/7. The types of supports that we provide vary greatly. There are three ladies who are pretty independent and require minimal assistance with self-care/personal-care skills; transportation; assistance with medical appointments; health/safety; household chores; advocating on their behalf; keeping track of

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explained. Theresa has earned her DSP-R (DSP-Registered) certificate from the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP).

“She is one awesome DSP,” says Lisa Anderson, a Coordinator who supervised Theresa for three years. “She is an all-around wonderful person and very organized and detailed, especially on the med supports. She pays attention to every detail, and I mean every detail.”

Lisa says that Theresa also stays close to people she has supported in the past and even takes them to her home for meals with the family. “This is someone who is very special in all that she does,” Lisa added.

Her children are Monee, 15; Isaiah, 10; and Sincere, 5. “They keep me as busy as the ladies

finances and community involvement. Two ladies require partial assistance which can consist of more hands on assistance and we have one who needs total assistance.”

**What is the hardest part of the job for you and why?** “Change. Life circumstances are unavoidable and can bring about a lot of change. For example, one of the hardest parts is having to explain to a resident that a staff member will be leaving the team (especially if the staff is well liked) for whatever reason.”

**What is the most satisfying part of the job? And why?** “Forming relationships with the people I support is the most satisfying part of my job. I say this because I enjoy spending time with the ladies and getting to know them better. The interactions are so genuine. It’s as simple as giving your undivided attention (one-on-one) for at least 5 to 10 minutes a day with each resident, sharing stories and things about one another’s life, discussing dreams/desires and just giving a warm smile (with your mouth, eyes and heart) with a personalized greeting makes a world of difference.”

**“Would you or have you recommend this career to others and why?”** “I have recommended this field to others and will continue to do so. I feel as though this can be a very rewarding field (as long as you measure it by the happiness of the people you serve). There are some direct support workers who joined the agency just ‘for a job’ and ended up staying and viewing this as a career. Give it a chance! You never know whose life you will touch.”

I support but I couldn’t do it all without Monee’s help and the help from my Mom,” Theresa said. “They do a great job of supporting me!”

We asked Theresa if she has or would recommend this field to others. Her answer speaks legions about this dedicated professional.

“I have recommended this field to others and will continue to do so. I feel as though this can be a very rewarding field (as long as you measure it by the happiness of the people you serve). There are some DSPs who joined just for a job and ended up staying and viewing this as a career. Give it a chance! You never know whose life you will touch.”

Theresa Law is all about touching people’s lives!



Theresa is assisting Nancy during dinner time

## 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](http://www.collegeofdirectsupport.com) and also on the website of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals – [www.nadsp.org](http://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](mailto:tking@collegeofdirectsupport.com).

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