



# COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

## The DSP Chronicles



Darlene Ricco, DSP of the Year

### At A Glance

**Name:** Darlene Ricco

**Age:** 66

**Home:** Carson City, NV

**Position:** Direct Support Professional /Program Counselor

**Where:** Dungarvin Nevada

**Number of People She Supports:** 11

**Key Quote:** *"I am all about giving those I support confidence and letting them live their dreams and at the same time offering the public, everyone, a better understanding of what it means to have a disability. I don't know how I do what I do – I just do it."*

**How a Colleague Describes Her:** *"Darlene is honest and sincere with everyone, which positively contributes to the long-lasting relationships she has developed with the individuals she supports....She is the epitome of change for improving the quality of life for all people, especially for people with developmental disabilities."*



## Darlene Ricco:

### ANCOR's DSP of the Year at Dungarvin Nevada

By TOM KING

Words are important – words like compassionate, positive, vibrant, outgoing, advocating, educating and integrating. They tell you a lot about a person, and in this case they speak legions about Darlene Ricco, a Direct Support Professional (DSP) in Carson City, Nevada.

Here are some more words about her from Genelle Thompson, Executive Director of Dungarvin Nevada, where Darlene works: "What she does and how she does it is a way of life for her. If there is an opportunity to promote the acceptance and integration into the community of the people she supports and others, she takes that opportunity."

Darlene is so effective at what she does that many people have noticed, and in March she was selected as the Direct Support Professional of the Year by ANCOR (American Network of Community Options and Resources) and honored in San Francisco during its annual Management Practices Conference.

Receiving that honor made her a natural to be featured in "The DSP Chronicles" that showcases the wonderful work done by DSPs around the country.

Darlene, a DSP for 12 years, supports 11 adults – male and female – who are in Dungarvin's Independent Supported Living Assistance program in Carson City. It is a job that she loves, a job that is her life, her calling, a job enveloped by her heart and soul.

"Hearing Darlene say 'I hope I make a difference in someone's life in a positive way' is baffling because doing just that is a way of life for her," Thompson says. "She is a compassionate lady who advocates for people with developmental disabilities in every aspect of her life. Darlene excels at community integration. She has been known to put her personal life and relationships on hold for the people she supports."

When she found out about the award, Darlene said she was stunned and surprised. "I never

dreamed in my wildest dreams this would happen. I'm humbled and I am grateful. It's a lot of years of hard work, but I do it for the people who I love and support and who give me so much in return. The individuals are fun. Sometimes we laugh, sometimes we cry, sometimes there's disappointments. We have good days and bad days just like everybody else does. So when things go well, it's fun."

Her approach to her field has two focal points – supporting and integrating those she supports into the community and educating the community about people with developmental disabilities.

"She knows a lot of people here (in Carson City) and knows all of the places here from having lived here for so long and she takes advantage of that. She makes people in the community aware of us and of our people," Thompson says.

"She has the ability to communicate with everyone and it does not matter who it is – a client, a family member of a client, the state legislature. It matters not. She has the ability to share her very real excitement for life with everyone – and she shares everyone else's excitement for life. She has a very unique ability to connect and communicate with anyone."

Darlene has been on talk radio in Carson City, advocating for people with developmental disabilities, rallying support against state budget cuts, working to ensure that all community entities and businesses are in compliance with the American Disabilities Act (ADA). She is out there. "Staff and community members and individuals served highly respect her," Thompson says. "Darlene is the epitome of change for improving the quality of life for all people, especially people with developmental disabilities."

She is a fervent believer in having those she supports lead independent, normal and enjoyable

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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.

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lives. She promotes involvement in parades, karaoke, dances, and two of the men she supports volunteer at the Nevada State Railroad Museum. They all bowl together and she helps them make necklaces and bracelets to sell at community events. "It's apparent that she strives to help people enjoy their lives," Thompson said. "She has demonstrated her leadership skills in the community and at work by leading people to focus on their potential and that of others."

Darlene and several of those in her supported group also advocate for the Wild Horse Rescue Program. "Yep, we've demonstrated in front of the state capitol to stop the slaughter of the wild horses," she says.

Over the years she has introduced those she supports to a small town 12 miles away, Virginia City, which has a charm of its own, she says.

Darlene became a DSP at age 54. Today she is 66. "This is a great career for someone who is semi-retired or retired. It's a wonderful second chance at a career," she said. "There's more stability with an older person being a DSP and it's such a rewarding and positive career."

Someone used the words "tireless" and "full of energy" to describe her. "I guess maybe that's



Darlene Ricco works with Cassie on a project

right about me," she said. "I am my mother's daughter and my Mom is 95 now. I enjoy life to its fullest every day."

When asked to describe how she does what she does so well, she said: "I am all about giving those I support confidence and letting them live their dreams and at the same time offering the public, everyone, a better understanding of what it means to have a disability. I don't know how I do what I do – I just do it."

## The Job, The People & More from Darlene Ricco

**Describe the supports you provide:** "I make appointments for them and work with all of them on developing their cooking skills and I encourage community involvement on a daily basis."

**What is the hardest part of the job?** "Just having enough time in the day to get things done."

**What is the most satisfying part of the job?** "Seeing a goal or a dream reached and making a positive difference in someone's life, no matter how big or small."

**What is the most challenging part of your job?** "When going shopping with everyone, staying within our budget is hard. And coming up with ideas that are great fun and low cost. Also, it's always a challenge to me to educate the community about people with disabilities."

**What do you find to be the most enjoyable parts of the job?** "It is so much fun to help

everyone achieve their goals, no matter what area of life it involves. I am constantly motivated by helping the people I support develop their skills in many areas that help them live in and be part of the community and it's really fun to work with the various personalities."

**How did you become interested in becoming a DSP?** "I worked in the mental health field in the Bay Area in San Francisco and after I moved to Carson City I needed and found this job. I knew that the job is all about serving and helping people and that's what I wanted to do, to be a positive influence in their lives and I want to make a difference in people's lives too."

**Would you recommend this career to others and why?** "Yes, I would recommend it. I love what I do and I love the people I support. They are my dear friends. I am part of their lives, their hopes and dreams and they are part of me. It is a very rewarding career."

### 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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