

# DIRECTIONS

## IN INDEPENDENT LIVING

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE • FALL ISSUE 2025



Dwyer Peer to Peer Golf Outing pg 4



## Contents

<b>04</b>	<b>06</b>
Agency Spotlight: Dwyer Veterans	Program Spotlight: Transitions/OPWDD
<b>09</b>	<b>10</b>
Program Spotlight: COMPEER	Agency Spotlight: Staff Advance
<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>
Employee of the Quarter	Program Spotlight: COMPEER
<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>
September Consumer Spotlight	October Consumer Spotlight
<b>16</b>	
November Consumer Spotlight	



Directions in Independent Living, Inc.

*5th Annual*

# WARM DRIVE

HATS, MITTENS, SOCKS,  
AND SCARFS  
NOV 1 - DEC 23

**KEEP  
them  
WARM**  
*this winter*

NEW ITEMS ONLY!

CASH DONATION OPTION: If you  
prefer making a cash donation,  
please scan the QR CODE below!

For More Information Please Call:  
**Amanda Hitchcock-Winchell**  
**716-373-4602**

**DIL, inc.**

## DROP OFF LOCATION

512 West State Street  
Olean, NY 14760

A square QR code located at the bottom right of the flyer, which likely links to more information about the Warm Drive event.



AGENCY SPOTLIGHT: Dwyer Veterans Peer to Peer Program

## Connecting, One Swing at a Time

# Dwyer Golf Outing

On October 7th, the Cattaraugus County Dwyer Veteran Program wrapped up its golf season with one final outing at Cardinal Hills Golf Course in Randolph, NY. Although the forecast called for rain, that didn't stop a dedicated group of veterans from coming together to enjoy a day filled with camaraderie, laughter, and friendly competition.

What began back in April 2025 as a small gathering of just two participants and Dwyer Coordinator Brian has grown into a much-loved monthly event, drawing between 16 and 20 veterans each time. The outings were intentionally designed as veteran-only events, giving participants a chance to connect with others who share similar experiences while exploring different golf courses across the county.

Over the months, the group visited a variety of local courses, each offering new challenges and memories. As the season came to a close, veterans voted Cardinal Hills as their favorite stop of the year—making it the perfect choice for their final round.

Beyond the sport itself, these golf outings became a powerful way to strengthen bonds, promote wellness, and foster lasting friendships. The Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Program is proud to provide opportunities like these that help veterans connect, heal, and thrive—one swing at a time.





## More Than a Party

# Fall Bash Festivities

On September 29th, Directions in Independent Living (DIL) brought our FSS Transitions Program and OPWDD team together to host a Fall Bash that was more than a party—it was purposeful programming. Crafts, food, and games offered low-pressure ways to practice real-world skills: following directions, turn-taking, problem solving, and communicating needs. For many consumers, structured social time helps reduce isolation, build confidence, and strengthen self-advocacy—key outcomes in both Transitions and OPWDD service plans.

Hands-on craft tables supported fine-motor skills and creative choice-making; game stations encouraged teamwork and emotional regulation; and the shared meal created natural opportunities for conversation and manners. Staff designed stations to be welcoming and sensory-aware, with options for quiet breaks and one-to-one support when needed. Families reported that consumers tried new activities, connected with peers, and were eager to share their successes afterward.

This collaboration also shows how our programs work together: Transitions helps youth and young adults build independence for school, work, and community life, while OPWDD services reinforce daily-living, social, and community-integration goals. When combined, consumers experience consistent coaching across settings—accelerating growth and celebrating progress.







PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: COMPEER

## Creative Connections

# Compeer Halloween Party

The spirit of Halloween was alive and well during COMPEER's annual Halloween party, where members came together for an evening filled with creativity, laughter, and connection. The event featured pumpkin painting, Halloween cookie decorating, and a lively costume showcase that brought out everyone's imagination.

Participants competed for prizes, showing off everything from spooky outfits to silly and inventive designs. The laughter and friendly competition made it a night to remember for all who attended.

At its heart, COMPEER is about building friendships and strengthening community connections. The program pairs individuals living with mental health challenges with caring volunteers, fostering companionship, understanding, and emotional support. Through social gatherings like this Halloween celebration, members can form meaningful relationships that help reduce loneliness and promote mental wellness.

Events like the Halloween party not only bring smiles and laughter but also embody the mission of COMPEER—to create a supportive network where friendship and acceptance thrive. These gatherings give participants the opportunity to express themselves freely, try new activities, and feel a genuine sense of belonging.





## Staff Advance

# DIL's Fall Fest

This fall, the staff of Directions in Independent Living came together for their quarterly in-person meeting, celebrating teamwork, growth, and seasonal fun during the DIL Fall Fest. The event blended professional development with lighthearted activities that reminded everyone why "Team DIL" truly stands out.

The day included valuable training sessions and team-building exercises designed to strengthen communication, collaboration, and creativity across departments. One of the highlights was the spirited pumpkin-decorating contest, which showcased everyone's artistic side, along with the hilarious "toilet paper mummy" challenge that had the room filled with laughter.

During the gathering, the organization proudly presented the Employee of the Quarter Award to Dawn Tucker, recognizing an outstanding staff member for their exceptional dedication and performance. Additional recognitions were given to our Transitions staff, Alyshia and Ellen whose commitment helped their programs achieve exciting first-time milestones this quarter—an inspiring reminder of the impact DIL makes in the community every day.

The Fall Fest was more than just a meeting; it was a celebration of the unity, compassion, and enthusiasm that define Directions in Independent Living. As the leaves change, Team DIL continues to grow stronger, supporting one another and the individuals they serve with heart and purpose.





## Fall Employee of the Quarter

# Dawn Tucker

Directions in Independent Living proudly recognizes our Fall Employee of the Quarter, Dawn Tucker, a dedicated Com Hab Specialist whose compassion, creativity, and teamwork truly make a difference. For the past two years, she has devoted herself to teaching vital life skills—helping consumers grow in confidence and independence while finding joy in the learning process.

Originally from Rochester, NY, she brings both heart and humor to her work in Olean. When asked what motivates her, she said, “I remember how my help impacts my consumers.” That sense of purpose is reflected in every interaction, from daily lessons to special events. She especially enjoys assisting with fundraising projects and volunteering at company-wide activities, where her enthusiasm inspires others to get involved.

She describes her team as one that “works well together to make our consumers’ lives fuller,” and she deeply values the caring spirit of the leadership staff. Over time, she’s become more confident in her role and has even taken on leadership responsibilities in volunteer projects. Outside of work, she loves crafting, collecting Fenton art glass and Pez dispensers, and spending quality time with her family and friends.

Her favorite destination, Aruba, reflects her calm and joyful outlook—“things are slower paced, and you can just relax there.” Her warmth, teamwork, and unwavering commitment to helping others make her a shining example of the mission and heart of Directions.



## Celebrating 52 Years Strong Friendship Strikes Again

On October 15, 2025, the COMPEER Program marked its 52nd anniversary with a night of celebration at Good Times of Olean. The evening brought together volunteers, program participants, and staff to honor more than five decades of building meaningful relationships that strengthen mental health and community connection.

Guests enjoyed pizza, laughter, and bowling as part of the celebration. The event wasn’t just about strikes and spares—it was a reminder of the power of human connection. COMPEER’s mission has always been simple yet profound: to match caring volunteers with individuals living with mental health challenges, offering companionship, encouragement, and a sense of belonging.

Over the years, COMPEER has helped countless individuals in Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties rediscover confidence and hope through friendship. The 52nd anniversary gathering reflected that ongoing spirit, with both new and longtime members sharing stories and memories that highlight the program’s lasting impact.

As the pins fell and laughter echoed through the lanes, one thing was clear—COMPEER continues to be more than a program; it’s a family built on empathy, inclusion, and the belief that no one should ever have to face life alone.







#### PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: RECREATIONAL DANCE

## Featured Consumer for September Tabitha “Dash” White

This month, Directions in Independent Living proudly celebrates Tabitha “Dash” White as our Consumer of the Month for September! Dash brings light and laughter wherever she goes, sharing her cheerful energy and humor with everyone she meets. Living in Salamanca with her mom and sister—whom she affectionately describes as “goofballs”—Dash reminds us daily of the power of positivity and family.

From a young age, Dash dreamed of becoming a mom, a goal that reflects her nurturing heart and love for children. She enjoys learning about early childhood and says she’d like to “get more knowledge about babies.” When she’s not focused on her goals, you can often find her coloring, dancing, or singing along to her favorite songs—activities that bring out her fun, creative spirit.

A loyal Buffalo Bills fan and animal lover, Dash proudly supports the SPCA, where she’s volunteered caring for cats. Her compassion and dedication shine through in everything she does. Dash also credits Directions for helping her stay focused and work toward better behavior and personal growth.

Looking ahead, Dash sees herself happy and surrounded by the love of her family. Her warmth, humor, and determination inspire everyone around her. Congratulations, Dash—you truly embody the spirit of resilience, kindness, and joy that Directions celebrates each month!

#### PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: DWYER PEER TO PEER

## Featured Consumer for October Brenda Wyant

Directions in Independent Living is honored to recognize Brenda Wyant as October’s Consumer of the Month for the Dwyer program. Brenda, who lives in Cuba, NY with her husband Ken, is known among staff and peers as a true “peacemaker”—a title that fits her perfectly. Her kindness, positivity, and steady compassion make her a joy to be around.

Family means everything to Brenda. She is proud of her two daughters and four grandchildren, all of whom are succeeding in life. Her childhood dreams shifted when she needed braces, sparking an interest in the dental field—but overall, Brenda has always chosen to live fully in each moment.

Brenda enjoys Paint Night, decorating her home, attending the YMCA, participating in church activities, and joining Dwyer events. She treasures travel and holds a deep connection to Scotland, where her family roots trace back to 1637—including relatives who came over on the Mayflower. After a house fire several years ago, a stray kitten appeared at just the right time. Brenda named her Phoenix, a symbol of rising from hardship.

She is a devoted supporter of causes close to her heart, including local charities, juvenile programs, and Wreaths Across America. With both a grandson and a son-in-law currently serving in the Army, supporting veterans and their families is especially meaningful to her.

Through Directions and the Cattaraugus County Dwyer Veteran Program, Brenda has found connection, understanding, and support among other women who share similar experiences. She values the friendships she has built and the genuine care shown by DIL specialists.

Looking ahead, Brenda sees herself simply happy—enjoying life, her home, and her family. A wish she carries is one of peace: that everyone could be happy, healthy, and get along.





## Featured Consumer for November

# Elise Firster

Directions in Independent Living is proud to recognize Elise Firster as our November Consumer of the Month for the Transportation Program. Elise, who lives in Sherman, NY with her dad and stepmom, is known for her kindness, creativity, and passion for helping others.

Elise enjoys spending time with her family and has always dreamed of becoming a teacher—a wish that has stayed with her since childhood. Her interests reflect her creative side, especially her love of coloring and diamond art, which she uses as both a hobby and a relaxing outlet. Elise also loves to travel, and one of her favorite destinations is New York City, where the energy and excitement inspire her.

Life on the home front is lively as well—Elise is surrounded by eight dogs, each one an important part of her daily routine. She's also a proud supporter of the Buffalo Bills, cheering them on every season.

Elise is passionate about Alzheimer's awareness, a cause close to her heart. She has volunteered through the Transition Program in the past and enjoys any opportunity to help others. She credits her grandmother as the most influential person in her life and someone who inspires her compassion and motivation.

Since joining Directions, Elise says the program has helped her meet new people, make friends, and get out into the community. She loves spending time with staff and attending events. Looking ahead, she hopes to be working with kids—continuing her lifelong dream of making a difference.

We're proud to celebrate Elise this month and grateful to be part of her journey!



# About our Agency

Directions in Independent Living is a non profit organization with locations in Olean and Wellsville New York. Directions helps people with disabilities live more independent lives. We have over 17 individual programs that specialize in many different areas or needs that these individuals may struggle with in their daily lives. The Directions organization has been described by its consumers as "understanding, supportive, accommodating, and family oriented."

Every year, more than 1 in 5 New Yorkers has symptoms of a mental disorder, are stricken with poverty, or on the verge of homelessness. Moreover, in any year, 1 in 10 adults and children experience mental health challenges serious enough to affect functioning in work, family and school life. Also, nearly a quarter of veterans (22 percent) in New York state, were found to have a probable diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder and/or major depression. Compared to similar individuals in the general population, the veterans studied were at an eight-fold greater risk of probable PTSD and a two- to four-fold greater risk of major depression.

While many services are available to those in need, more than 40 percent of those in need of services or help report being unaware of what help is available or uncertain about how to navigate the systems that provide assistance. Outreach to connect these individuals with services and better coordination among government and community agencies is needed. We need a more combined effort put into connecting consumers with care coordinators who can provide personalized assistance across a range of service sectors. The existing system often misses those people most in need of outreach or those who have not yet connected with any assistance organizations.

That is why Directions in Independent Living was founded over 30 years ago. It is only through the generosity of people like you, that we are able to continue to serve, assist, and help our friends, neighbors, and veterans that are in need.

If you would, please consider making a donation, referring someone that might be in need of our services, or even volunteer yourself as a helper for one of our programs.

SCAN HERE TO DONATE



Helping those with disabilities live more productive lives.

ACCEPT INCLUDE EMPOWER

OLEAN: 716-373-4602 | OLEAN HOLIDAY PARK: 716-379-8670 | WELLSVILLE: 585-296-3408

Serving Allegeny and Cattaraugus Counties in WNY, and limited areas of Chautauqua Cty as well as McKean and Potter Cty's in PA