

DIRECTIONS

IN INDEPENDENT LIVING

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE • SUMMER ISSUE 2025



Contents

04	06
Agency Spotlight: Dwyer Veterans	Program Spotlight: Transportation
09	10
Agency Spotlight: Golf Tourney	Agency Spotlight: Staff Advance
13	14
Program Spotlight: Transitions	Employee of the Quarter
15	16
Parent Spotlight	June Program Spotlight: REP PAYEE
17	18
July Program Spotlight: NMCC	August Program Spotlight: HHUNY



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Creative Peer Support

Dwyer Painting Fun

Another successful Paint Night is now in the books for the Dwyer Veterans Peer-to-Peer Program, and what an evening it was! Veterans, their families, and community members came together once again to share laughter, creativity, and connection in a welcoming and supportive environment.

A special thank-you goes out to Nancy, who served as our design coordinator for the evening. Her thoughtful planning and artistic direction helped participants feel comfortable picking up a brush, no matter their skill level. Under her guidance, everyone walked away with a painting to be proud of—and plenty of great memories.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to Fusion on Main for hosting us with their usual excellence. Their warm hospitality and community spirit provided the perfect backdrop for an evening of friendship and fun.

The Dwyer Program is built on the simple but powerful idea that veterans thrive when they connect with other veterans who understand their experiences. Events like Paint Night create space for veterans to relax, share stories, and strengthen relationships while enjoying something new and fun.

As always, the real magic of the evening came from the amazing people who joined us. Whether it was the sound of laughter, the conversations shared, or the pride in creating something unique, the night was a wonderful reminder of the strength of our veteran community.



A Day of Discovery

Strong Museum of Play

Participants in Directions in Independent Living's (DIL) Transitions and Transportation Programs recently enjoyed an inspiring and fun-filled day at The Strong National Museum of Play. The group explored a variety of interactive exhibits, combining hands-on learning with opportunities to socialize, laugh, and build lasting memories together. From exploring history through toys to experimenting with science stations, every moment offered both education and enjoyment.

DIL's Transitions Program supports individuals with disabilities as they develop independent living skills, prepare for employment, and engage in their communities. This includes training in daily living, socialization, and vocational readiness, often blending classroom learning with real-world experiences like this museum trip. The Transportation Program ensures participants can access work, school, and community events safely and affordably, reducing one of the most common barriers to independence.

These programs are made possible through a combination of funding sources, including state grants, county contracts, and community donations. By combining these resources, DIL is able to provide individualized supports that help people of all abilities reach their personal goals and participate more fully in community life. The visit to The Science Museum of Play was more than just a recreational outing—it was an extension of DIL's mission to foster personal growth, community inclusion, and lifelong learning. The smiles, laughter, and shared experiences of the day were a testament to the impact of accessible opportunities and the importance of continued investment in programs that empower individuals to thrive.





AGENCY SPOTLIGHT: GOLF TOURNAMENT

Driving Forward with Purpose

4th Annual Golf Tournament

On August 16th, Directions in Independent Living proudly hosted its 4th Annual Golf Tournament at Allegheny Hills Golf Course, and the day could not have been more perfect. Under sunny skies, golfers gathered for a day filled with friendly competition, laughter, and community spirit. From the very first tee-off to the final putt, the tournament was marked by an atmosphere of fun and good-natured rivalry.

The event brought together players of all skill levels, each enjoying the opportunity to spend time on the greens while supporting a meaningful cause. With teams sharing stories, cheering each other on, and celebrating great shots, the tournament captured the very best of what community events are meant to be.

A special congratulations goes out to this year's winners—Dillion, Ryan, and Jack—who impressed with their teamwork and skill. Their achievement highlighted the excitement of the day and gave everyone something to celebrate at the close of the tournament.

Directions in Independent Living is deeply grateful to Allegheny Hills Golf Course for once again hosting the event with such hospitality and professionalism. We are also thankful for and appreciate our Eagle Sponsors - Eden Heights of Olean, ASAP Glass, Mattress Express and Thoughtful Plan INC, and our Birdie Sponsors - Sprague's Maple Farm, Spink Funeral Home, Nascentia Health, and Carr Saglimben LLP. The continued support of our golfers, sponsors, and community partners makes this annual tradition possible.

Most importantly, the funds raised through this tournament directly contribute to DIL's mission: helping people with disabilities live more independent, empowered lives. Each swing of the club, each laugh shared, and each contribution made helps move that mission forward.

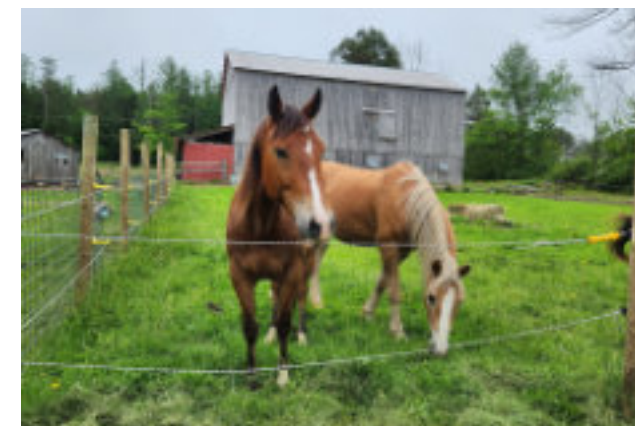


Fresh Air, Deeper Bonds

Rustic Roots Retreat

On June 17th, the DIL team enjoyed an unforgettable Team Building Staff Advance at Rustic Roots Stables in Angelica. From icebreaker games to lighthearted challenges, the day sparked laughter, trust, and genuine connection across programs. Staff spent time with the resident chickens, goats, donkeys, and horses, adding calm, curiosity, and plenty of smiles to every activity.

Sunshine, fresh air, and open pastures set the stage for team members to reflect, recharge, and return inspired to serve our community even better. Many thanks to Rustic Roots for welcoming us and creating a safe, joy-filled space to grow together this summer.



Healing Moments with Goats Therapy Farm Visit

This summer, our Transitions program enjoyed a unique and heartwarming experience at Rowandale Goat Farm. A small group of consumers and staff visited the farm for an hour of goat therapy, a one-of-a-kind opportunity to connect with animals specially trained to bring comfort, joy, and companionship.

From the moment the group arrived, the goats welcomed everyone with curiosity and affection. Consumers had the chance to pet, brush, and spend quality time with the goats, each known for its gentle nature and loving personality. The session was filled with laughter, smiles, and a sense of calm as participants bonded with the animals. Goat therapy is known to promote relaxation, reduce stress, and encourage positive social interaction—benefits that were clear as our group enjoyed every moment.

For many of our consumers, this outing was more than just an activity; it was a meaningful way to experience unconditional love and acceptance from animals who give it so freely. The goats' patience and playful spirit created a safe and welcoming environment for everyone to participate at their own comfort level.

At Directions, we are always seeking new ways to provide experiences that enrich lives, build confidence, and create lasting memories. This visit to Rowandale Goat Farm was a wonderful reminder that growth and joy can be found in the simplest of places—sometimes with four legs, floppy ears, and a heart full of love.



Employee of the Quarter

DJ Moore

For more than 26 years, DJ has been a cornerstone of Directions in Independent Living, serving as a Benefits Advisor and Peer Advocate. In this role, he provides critical support to Social Security and SSI claimants, guiding individuals through applications, appeals, and paperwork while helping gather medical evidence and providing reassurance during complex processes. Beyond applications, DJ also assists those already receiving benefits, answering questions about payments and the effect of other income, and even provides non-attorney representation. DJ's expertise extends into the community as he leads Social Security benefits presentations that empower individuals to better understand their options.

Although dedicated to nearly every project at DIL, DJ's favorite has been the "Quiet Santa" event, a partnership with the United Way of Cattaraugus County. This unique celebration created a calm, welcoming space for children with sensory sensitivities to visit Santa without stress—an example of DJ's passion for making lives brighter.

For DJ, motivation comes from organization and teamwork. He keeps moving forward with to-do lists and by leaning on a strong team he describes as "family." In turn, his humor, kindness, and willingness to help others make him a trusted support within the agency.

DJ's professional growth over nearly three decades has made him both a mentor and "go-to" resource for coworkers. Above all, DJ embodies DIL's mission, explaining, "As a person with disabilities, I stand behind everything DIL advocates for. This agency is not just a job. I believe in our mission, our philosophy, what we do, and everything we stand for."



Dedicated Parent Advocate

Lisa Kurowski

This quarter, Directions in Independent Living is honored to shine a spotlight on Lisa Kurowski of Farmersville, a devoted mother, advocate, and longtime community supporter. Lisa and her husband are now empty nesters, having raised seven children, but their journey has been defined by resilience, advocacy, and love.

Lisa's story with Directions began when her son, now thirty, was in high school. Facing challenges such as a learning disability, severe speech delay, Tourette's, and scoliosis, many doubted his ability to live independently. Yet, with determination, family support, and the guidance of Directions, he proved the skeptics wrong. With tutoring assistance, vocational training at BOCES, and further education in truck driving, he built a career, developed valuable skills, and today lives a fully independent life. Lisa reflects, "Directions was the catalyst for him gaining his adult individuality. He has overcome the barriers that society had placed on him."

For over 28 years, Lisa has dedicated her professional life to Head Start, where she serves as Coordinator of Health Services. Her work empowers families to become self-sufficient and advocates for early childhood development, health, and education. Her career path was inspired by the kindness and advocacy she once received as a Head Start parent herself.

Outside of work, Lisa is active in her church and community, leading children's groups and supporting outreach programs. She also cherishes quiet time in her craft room, a small creative retreat that allows her to recharge.

When asked what advice she hopes to pass down to her children, Lisa's words are simple but powerful: "Don't settle for other people's opinion of you or your limitations. They do not know what you can do."





JUNE PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: REP PAYEE

Featured Consumer for June Cameron Sweet

Directions in Independent Living is proud to recognize Cameron "CJ" Sweet of Franklinville, NY, as our Consumer of the Month. CJ lives with his parents, brother, and three pets—a loyal dog named Buddy and two guinea pigs, Reeses and Ferrero. He comes from a family with a strong tradition of service. On his mother's side, his grandparents were volunteer firefighters, and his mom once dreamed of becoming an EMT before raising a family.

As a child, CJ's imagination soared—he dreamed of being everything from a fireman to a superhero to a wizard. Today, he channels that same creativity into hobbies like building model kits and sculpting mini figures for tabletop games. With his growing interest in archeology and druidry, he dreams of one day traveling to Stonehenge. Until then, CJ jokes that his favorite travel destination is "anywhere but Franklinville," while also enjoying visits to museums, zoos, and archeological digs.

CJ's passions extend beyond personal interests. He is deeply committed to human rights and environmental causes. His volunteer work reflects this dedication, from helping Canticle Farms with archeological digs to assisting the Cattaraugus County Dwyer Program in building a Christmas float.

One unique fact about CJ is that he identifies as a Druid, a reflection of his connection to nature and spirituality. Directions has been instrumental in supporting CJ, particularly with socialization skills. Once hesitant to accept recognition, CJ now proudly steps into the spotlight, crediting his growth to the help he has received. He also appreciates the efficiency and responsiveness of his Rep Payee, Jess.

Jess shared, "CJ is truly a joy to work with—I couldn't ask for a more thoughtful and considerate consumer. He's consistently kind, understanding, and budget-conscious, always staying aligned with his financial goals. Working with him and my coworker Jeb in the ComHab department has been both smooth and rewarding."

JULY PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: NMCC

Featured Consumer for July Mark Smallwood

Directions in Independent Living is proud to honor Mark Smallwood as our July 2025 Consumer of the Month through our Non-Medicaid Care Coordination program. Mark currently lives in Olean with his 17-year-old daughter, Kaci. He is also the proud father of a 19-year-old son who lives independently and a 14-year-old daughter who resides with her mother.

Growing up in Wellsville, Mark dreamed of serving his country as a U.S. Marine—a goal he proudly achieved. His military journey even earned him recognition in the U.S. Marine Corps publication *The Boot*, where his story highlighted his dedication to living the Marine Corps spirit. Mark credits much of his drive and inspiration to his grandfather, Irving Buchanan, a WWII Marine who remains the most influential figure in his life.

When he's not focused on his responsibilities as a father, Mark enjoys fishing and dreams of traveling to Norway. His favorite destination so far has been the Nevada desert, a place that reflects his long-term goal of moving out west to build a life surrounded by the landscapes he loves. At home, he finds companionship with Stormy, his grey and white cat. A loyal Raiders fan, Mark also enjoys following football.

Mark is passionate about the Dwyer Program at Directions, which he calls an incredible resource. Through Directions, he has received help with housing, medical and mental health needs, transportation, food, furniture, and navigating insurance processes.

Looking ahead, Mark envisions a simple but meaningful future: living in the desert, raising his children to be good people, and supporting causes close to his heart.



Featured Consumer for August

Scott Chapman

Directions in Independent Living is proud to recognize Scott Chapman as our August Consumer of the Month. Scott lives in Delevan, NY with a close friend, and he enjoys the support of family members who also reside in the area.

From an early age, Scott dreamed of becoming a truck driver, inspired by the independence and adventure that life on the road represents. While he continues to hold on to that dream, Scott has also developed other passions, including hunting and model building. He enjoys spending time outdoors and finds creativity and focus in building detailed models. When it comes to travel, Florida remains his favorite destination, offering warmth, sunshine, and new experiences.

Animals are an important part of Scott’s life as well. He shares a home with a playful black Labradoodle named Abbie, and his friend’s parents have a cat that adds even more companionship to his days. In addition to his love of animals, Scott is a sports fan who follows NASCAR racing with enthusiasm.

Scott’s goals for the future are straightforward yet meaningful—he hopes to find someone special to share his life with, and one day, to become successful enough to own his own trucking company. He is deeply thankful for life itself and for the opportunities that continue to come his way.

Directions has played an important role in Scott’s journey, helping him with SSI information, housing support, and managing his medical case. He especially values the connection he has with his Directions Specialist, Abbie Peterson. Scott appreciates that she listens without judgment and takes a genuine interest in his life. This caring relationship has given him someone to talk to and trust.

Looking ahead, Scott envisions himself in ten years as both rich and happily married, continuing to pursue the dreams that inspire him today.



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



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