



We don't believe that our clients are broken and need to be fixed. We're simply here to give them the extra support they need. — Virginia Thornton, Senior Case Manager

If you have a child or family member with intellectual and developmental disabilities, helping them develop a rich and rewarding life as an adult may seem like too much to hope for outside of your existing family structure. Disability Supports of the Great Plains, in McPherson and Hutchinson, Kan., restores this hope by offering a higher standard of care.

redefining the manner in which care is delivered — within exceptional surroundings, by people with a calling to care, and through limitless creativity.

A parent-driven board of directors has an emotional investment in the clients and, therefore, a stronger foundation as a not-for-profit service provider. These parents' passions for creating a higher standard of care became the foundation for the new agency. It's a vision and commitment that has resulted in an administration and staff completely focused on communicating a parent's limitless love into the hearts and lives of each precious soul, each and every day.

Disability Supports of the Great Plains was formed in 1996 with a board comprised exclusively of parents and began serving people with intellectual disabilities. Founding families were looking for a more progressive option than what was available at the time.

While the types of services provided to disabled adults may be similar from agency to agency, Disability Supports is committed to



WELCOME TO A HIGHER Standard of Care



A rich array of activities and outings promote a sense of family.



An Independent Life

Like all parents, Birdie and DeWayne Herrs had expectations for their daughter; that she would grow up, move out, and establish a life of her own. When Lizzie was diagnosed with significant health problems and intellectual disabilities it did not change the Herrs' expectations. "She was not going to live with us forever," Birdie says. "We wanted her to have an independent life."

However, when the time came, visits to the local service provider found their normally easy-going teenager refusing to get out of the car. Lizzie wasn't happy. DeWayne and Birdie weren't happy. There had to be something better.

Disability Supports has given Lizzie the opportunity to be the person she is. It's everything we wanted it to be.

— Birdie Herrs, Lizzie's Mother

"Then the phone rang," Birdie says. "A group of parents had gone to Topeka to find out what was needed to start a new agency. They were calling other parents who would be interested and involved," she says. "It was an answer to a prayer."

Trees and mailboxes line the streets of our community.



Loving Friends

Meet Rachel, a former cheerleader, choir and band member, and fluent French speaker. One night in her junior year of high school, Rachel's world changed. A drunk driver hit Rachel's vehicle and she suffered devastating injuries. Her French was gone, her eyesight and speech were severely limited and she no longer had the use of her arms, legs and, except for two fingers, hands.

Rachel's daily activities and dreams for the future were forever changed. Likewise, her parents' dreams and focus changed, too. Rachel's mother became a relentless advocate for her care, and when the family was relocated to Michigan, found a measure of peace when she found a home for Rachel at Disability Supports.

"I searched for comparable services and care near our new home, but there was nothing," says Susan McGee. Rachel's new reality required caregivers who understood the behaviors that can accompany head injuries — including previously uncharacteristic bursts of anger. Rachel's outbursts are met with unconditional love and tenderness, rather than punishment.

Though Rachel's parents now live several states away, they know Rachel is at home with her extended family at Disability Supports. "I know she's in good hands," says Susan McGee.

"She likes what every girl likes — clothes, hair, make up — and time spent with friends."



Jon Zehnder greets client with a friendly high-five in hallway.



— A BETTER LIFE THROUGH —

Gentle Teaching

At Disability Supports the outdated model of staff members impersonally dealing with clients is gone. Here, care givers and clients form true friendships under an all-encompassing technique called gentle teaching.

When Disability Supports was founded Jon Zehnder spent two weeks studying gentle teaching with its developer, Dr. John McGee. “The approach is based on interdependence, engagement and valuing that is not earned but given freely and unconditionally,” Zehnder says. Creating opportunities for companionship and dialog is the first step in gentle teaching. True friendships are encouraged in which both client and staff enjoy mutual support, empathy and opportunities to share. Tasks and activities are used as vehicles for engagement.

“We believe in demonstrating love with our clients,” says Virginia Thornton, a senior case manager. Thornton says appropriate but warm, loving physical touch fills a universal spiritual need in each soul, and is quite the opposite of other agencies’ clinical, hands-off approach. “There are no side hugs here. I’ll fully wrap my arms around someone and give them a huge hug.”

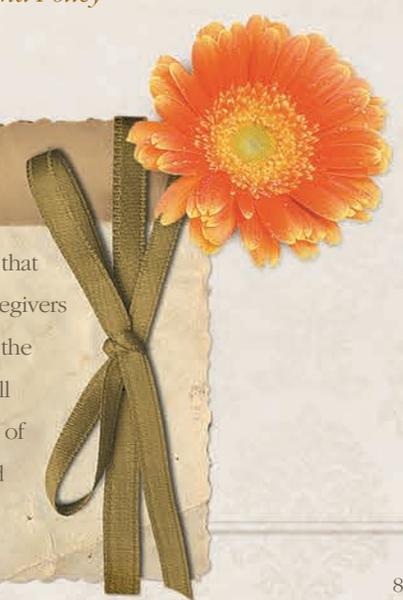
Gentle teaching uses unconditional love rooted in kindness, instead of punishment strategies, to resolve conflict. In time, relationships grow stronger and tensions weaker. Much like a successful family unit, this gentle way of living makes Disability Supports an interdependent, confidence-inspiring community.



“Gentle teaching is simple. We encourage people to be in tune with themselves and the people they are around. It is a way of being with others. It’s just being nice.”

— Jon Zehnder, Director of Advocacy and Policy at Disability Supports

A positive behavior support program that promotes independence between caregivers and clients. This practice begins with the affirmation of the inherent worth of all people, which helps facilitate a sense of companionship, feelings of safety and security, and mutual transformation.





For each of us every day is a gift. While other providers' day programs could be described as vanilla, ours is full of flavor. Staff energy level is high and our focus is to create activities and experiences that are productive in every sense of the word.

"We're committed to providing the best individualized services and supports to children and adults with developmental disabilities. Just as importantly, we're here to support the entire family!"
 — Rick Stanz, CEO

