

WINTER 2025

# inspiration



**EMPOWERING  
ABILITIES**

Creating Opportunities.  
Changing Lives.

# THE PEOPLE POWERING OUR PROGRESS

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Cover: Gail Geiger, an associate in Empowering Abilities' Enterprise, practices diligence and focus to deliver quality outcomes that contribute to the success of local businesses. Our associates are essential partners in supporting and strengthening our community.

## OUR MISSION

As a premier service provider, we passionately advocate on behalf of individuals with disabilities by creating opportunities for them to succeed, to achieve, to grow, and to be happy.

The Empowering Abilities' Enterprise Screen Print & Embroidery associate and leaders pause to celebrate being selected through Locals Love Us as one of the Best Screen Printing & Embroidery serving the Quad Cities! (L to R) Ryan Hoadley, Lisa Bahus, David Balluff, Alexis Dykstra, and Scott Bitting.



# Embracing Change: A Time of Transition and Renewal

As we embark on a new year, Empowering Abilities finds itself at a pivotal moment. Our mission has always been to empower and uplift those we serve, ensuring they have the resources and opportunities to lead fulfilling lives. Over the past year, we have experienced a significant transition that promises to invigorate our mission with fresh perspectives and renewed energy.

For the last 15 months, we have bid farewell to several long-time staff members who have been the backbone of Empowering Abilities. Their dedication and passion have shaped our services and left an indelible mark on our community. We are deeply grateful for their contributions and wish them all the best in their well-deserved retirements.

At the same time, we are excited to welcome a new wave of staff members who bring innovative ideas and a fresh outlook to our mission. These new team members are eager to build on the strong foundation laid by their predecessors, and their enthusiasm is already making a positive impact. They are introducing new energies, leveraging technology to enhance our services, and fostering a culture of teamwork and collaboration.

This period of transition is not without its challenges, but it is also an opportunity for growth and renewal. Our new staff members are working closely with our experienced team to ensure a smooth transition and continuity of care for those we serve. Together, we are exploring new ways to support our participants, advocate for their rights, and create a more accepting society.

At Empowering Abilities, we are committed to providing the highest level of services possible to those we serve. Our focus remains on delivering high-quality, compassionate care that meets the unique needs of each individual. We strive to empower our participants, helping them achieve their goals and live their best lives.

As we move forward, we remain dedicated to our core values of dignity, respect, and empowerment. We are confident that this infusion of new talent will open the next chapter and strengthen our organization, enabling us to better serve our community. We look forward to the exciting possibilities that lie ahead and are grateful for the continued support of our partners, donors, and volunteers.

As this transition continues, we invite you to join us on this journey. Together, we can create opportunities and change the lives of individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities, ensuring they have the support they need to not simply exist, but to live to their fullest potential.

*Jeff Ashcraft*  
Empowering Abilities President/CEO





*Danielle Tedford helps maintain a clean and safe classroom environment for staff and children as part of her job duties at Birdie's Nest.*

# A Quarterly Snapshot: Employment Services

At Empowering Abilities, we are committed to providing meaningful employment opportunities that align with individuals' skills, interests, and goals. Our Employment Services equip participants with the necessary tools to thrive in the workplace, whether they are building job readiness skills, gaining hands-on experience, or securing community-based employment.

Our Prevocational Services help individuals develop essential skills that prepare them for future employment. Through our Community Employment Services, participants receive personalized support from job coaches to find and maintain jobs within the community. Work opportunities are tailored to each individual's skills and interests, ensuring a fulfilling and rewarding experience in the community at local businesses as well as with Empowering Abilities' cleaning crew serving local businesses, our sorting team at the Scott County Materials Recycling Facility, and as part of our Enterprise team. These services empower individuals to achieve greater independence and success in the workplace.

Empowering Abilities' Enterprise is a well-equipped facility featuring over 24,000 square feet of production space, 18,000 square feet of warehouse space, a dock, and a 24-foot delivery truck with a 12-ton capacity. This program

provides a workplace with purpose by employing adults with intellectual and physical disabilities in a light manufacturing setting, offering them the support they need to succeed as valued employees and contributing members of society. Enterprise associates work part-time with the benefits of employment status, performing assembly and packaging services for local and regional businesses. Additionally, Enterprise offers screen printing and embroidery services, partnering with youth organizations, teams, families, and community groups.

## Employee Spotlight: Danielle Tedford's Path to Success

Danielle Tedford began her job search in August 2024, eager to work in child care. With support from her job coach and the Employment Services team, she successfully completed all required training—Mandatory Reporting, Universal Precautions, and Iowa Early Learning Standards—entirely on her own. Shortly after, she secured a position at Birdie's Nest, where she now works three mornings a week.

At Birdie's Nest, Danielle engages with children of all ages, learning their names and encouraging interactive play. She assists in the gym with preschoolers, serves breakfast, and helps maintain a clean and safe classroom environment. She has even mastered a new skill—changing diapers!

To ease her transition into the workplace, Danielle initially received one hour of job coaching per shift. Thanks to her confidence and growing independence, her coaching support has now been reduced to just one hour per week. Her supervisor praised her progress, stating, "She has been doing a wonderful job completing anything we need! We have noticed that she is taking to the job very well and knows exactly what to do every time she comes in!" Danielle's journey is a testament to the power of opportunity, support, and perseverance. Through Empowering Abilities, she found meaningful work, gained new skills, and discovered a path to success, growth, and happiness.

### Performance objectives for Employment Services during the period of October 1 to December 31, 2024:

Total number of persons served: **45**  
Number of intakes: **1**

*Rated on a 4-point scale, performance objectives were achieved at the following levels:*

- Were offered access to community activities: **4**
- Were made aware of options to access the community: **4**
- Increased their independence: **4**
- Achieved at least one goal: **4**
- Were offered choice of activities: **3.7**
- Were satisfied with their community access: **4**
- Were overall satisfied with services: **4**

# Our Thanks Goes To



## The Boosters - Halloween & Christmas Dances / Nut & Candy Sale / Birdies for Charity Donations

A huge thank you to the Boosters Organization for bringing fun and engaging activities to our participants, including the much-anticipated annual Halloween and Christmas Dances! Their fundraising efforts, such as the annual Bob Ott Memorial Nuts & Candy Sale and Birdies for Charity donations, make these events possible. We appreciate your support!



## Spreading Holiday Joy: Community Elves Bring Gifts to Empowering Abilities Residents!

Thanks to Brittany's Gifts, Jeff and Linda Manders, the Elves (honors students from Davenport West, North, and Central High Schools) for delivering joy to residents of Empowering Abilities Residential Center and Group Homes during the Christmas season! The individual gifts, hygiene items, and activity items for the Empowering Abilities Residential Center and Group Homes help people with disabilities live their best lives!



## Davenport Police Association - Thanksgiving Luncheon

Over the years, the Davenport Police Association have created a warm and welcoming Thanksgiving tradition of providing a Thanksgiving Turkey Dinner feast for the staff and participants at Empowering Abilities. Like every year, this year did NOT disappoint! Thanks to each volunteer, all that each does for the community, and how you impact our organization!



## Bee Adaptive & Inclusive - SAU Students at Halloween Dance

A huge thank you to the Bee Adaptive & Inclusive - SAU students for bringing their energy, creativity, and kindness to our Halloween Dance! Their dedication to making the event fun and inclusive through interactive games and engagement truly made a difference for the individuals we serve at Empowering Abilities. We appreciate their support in creating a memorable and joyful experience for all!



## HANDS Annual Donation - \$41,000 at Recognition Event

A heartfelt thank you to HANDS Auxiliary for their incredible dedication and generosity! Through their annual fundraising efforts, they raised an amazing \$41,000 for Empowering Abilities, which was presented at the Recognition Event. Their ongoing support helps us continue creating opportunities and making a lasting impact in the lives of those we serve. We are truly grateful for their commitment!



*Quad City Bank & Trust employees proudly accept their Empowering Abilities Hall of Fame induction, recognizing their unwavering support, generosity, and hands-on involvement in our mission. From fundraising events to board leadership, QCBT truly lives up to its motto—“People you can bank on.”*

# Quad City Bank & Trust Inducted into the Empowering Abilities Hall of Fame



**Quad City Bank & Trust (QCBT)** has long been recognized for its commitment to excellence, earning numerous accolades such as “Locals Love Us,” “Connect for a Cause,” the QC Business Journal’s “Best in the Business” award, and the Quad City Times’ “Best in the QC” award. Many of these honors reflect the organization’s deep-rooted dedication to community involvement and philanthropy. This year, QCBT adds yet another prestigious recognition to its list of accomplishments –induction into the Empowering Abilities Hall of Fame.

QCBT has proven to be an invaluable partner to Empowering Abilities, providing critical financial expertise and support. The bank’s investment advisors have played a key role in ensuring long-term financial stability for the organization, helping grow funds to sustain essential services, support important projects, and provide resources for individuals who lack other means to pay for their care. Their professionalism and responsiveness have ensured that Empowering Abilities’ goals are reflected in financial strategies and investment decisions.

Beyond financial guidance, QCBT has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to supporting Empowering Abilities through active participation in fundraising initiatives. Whether sponsoring events or engaging in them firsthand—racing through the city on scavenger hunts, competing in trivia challenges, or taking swings on the golf course—their employees consistently show up in support of the mission.

The bank’s dedication extends even further with the involvement of its leadership. Recently, Nathan Kessler, a QCBT representative, joined the Empowering Abilities Board of Directors, reinforcing the organization’s commitment to advancing the nonprofit’s mission. This level of engagement exemplifies the bank’s motto, “People you can bank on.”

For its outstanding support, generosity, and continued partnership, Quad City Bank & Trust is a deserving inductee into the Empowering Abilities Hall of Fame. Their impact on the organization and the individuals it serves is both profound and lasting, making them a vital part of the Empowering Abilities community.

# A Legacy of Dedication

After more than four decades of dedicated service, Carol Foster is retiring from Empowering Abilities, leaving behind a profound legacy of leadership, advocacy, and commitment to individuals with disabilities.

Carol's career with the organization began in 1983 as a Workshop Supervisor. Over the years, she became an integral part of the team, contributing to nearly every service and administrative area. Her unwavering passion for improving the lives of people with disabilities led her to take on numerous leadership roles, including Residential Case Manager, Residential Program Director, Vice President of the Residential Center, and Director and Vice President of Resource Development. Most recently, she served as Chief Administrative Officer, where her strategic vision helped shape the organization's future.

Beyond her professional achievements, Carol was known for her ability to foster strong relationships with participants, families, donors, and board members. As a media liaison and spokesperson, she played a crucial role in raising awareness about the work of Empowering Abilities and advocating for those it serves.

Her contributions to fundraising were equally impactful. Carol was instrumental in leading key initiatives such as the Boosters Nut and Candy Sales, the annual HANDS Golf Outing, and the well-known auction and cocktail party—events that became vital sources of support for the organization's programs. While her professional accomplishments are remarkable, it is Carol's personal connections that many will remember most. She was often seen engaging with participants she had known for years, offering words of encouragement, and stepping in to help whenever needed. Her kindness, dedication, and genuine compassion left a lasting impact on colleagues and community members alike.

To honor her outstanding contributions, Carol was inducted into the Empowering Abilities Hall of Fame as the 2024 Individual Award Recipient. This recognition celebrates her decades of service, leadership, and the immeasurable difference she has made in the lives of so many.



*Jeff Ashcraft, CEO, recognizes Carol Foster for her decades of service, her retirement, and Hall of Fame induction.*

As she steps into retirement, the impact of her work will continue to be felt throughout the organization and beyond. Her legacy of advocacy and service will undoubtedly inspire those who follow in her footsteps.

## Honoring a Legacy of Generosity

### The Bev, Leo, and Kathy Kerker Family Inducted into the Empowering Abilities Hall of Fame

For the Kerker family, humility, quiet generosity, and a strong work ethic have been guiding principles passed down through generations. Their parents, Bev and Leo Kerker, instilled in their children the importance of contributing from the background—supporting their community not for recognition, but because it was simply the right thing to do. To honor the Bev, Leo, and Kathy Kerker Family with well-deserved honor, the family has been inducted into the Empowering Abilities Hall of Fame in 2024.

The Kerkers' deep-rooted generosity and compassion were shaped, in part, by their experiences growing up with their sister, Kathy, who faced significant intellectual and physical challenges. Watching their parents care for Kathy with unwavering love and dedication, they learned the true meaning of kindness, empathy, and advocacy.



Their ongoing support of Empowering Abilities is, in many ways, a continuation of that legacy.

The family's connection to the Empowering Abilities Residential Center is especially meaningful. Recognizing the importance of creating a comfortable and welcoming home for individuals with similar challenges to their sister, the Kerkers have played a significant role in supporting projects that enhance the living environment. Their contributions have helped make the center a more inviting and home-like place—something that would have undoubtedly brought joy to their parents.

Beyond their financial support, the Kerkers have immersed themselves in the mission of Empowering Abilities. They are not just donors but active participants, attending events, engaging in fundraisers, and, in one instance, even serving as staff. Ken Kerker, using his background in accounting, dedicated six years to the organization before retiring this past June. His leadership and expertise helped strengthen financial strategies and forge valuable connections that continue to benefit the organization today.

Empowering Abilities proudly inducted the Bev, Leo, and Kathy Kerker Family into the Hall of Fame, recognizing their decades of generosity, service, and commitment to improving the lives of individuals with disabilities. Their legacy of compassion and advocacy will continue to inspire and uplift the community for generations to come.

*The Bev, Leo, and Kathy Kerker Family is inducted into the Empowering Abilities Hall of Fame for their decades of compassion, service, and unwavering support of individuals with disabilities.*



# Empowering Abilities Welcomes New Board Members

At the December Board Meeting, the Empowering Abilities' Board of Directors voted in two new members who will bring their leadership and expertise to the talented and dedicated group. These individuals generously share their time and skills to enhance lives and empower individuals with disabilities.



**Marc Carlson**, Senior Underwriter at Modern Woodmen of America, brings extensive experience in risk assessment and financial services, along with a strong passion for community impact.



**Nathan Billany**, Senior Director of Business Development at Estes Construction, offers deep expertise in strategic growth and relationship-building, strengthening our mission with his industry insight.



# Honoring Achievements: Participants & Staff Shine at the 2024 Recognition Dinner

The 2024 Empowering Abilities Recognition Dinner was a heartfelt celebration of achievements and gratitude. Friends, supporters, staff, and participants came together to enjoy a festive evening honoring the year's milestones. The event highlighted the incredible accomplishments of participants and the dedication of staff, while providing a special opportunity to thank supporters for their invaluable contributions and to showcase the impact they have made.

The following participants and staff received awards at the Recognition Dinner.



## Daily Discovery Achievement Award - Kathy Kindle

Described as a “sweet and spunky social butterfly,” Kathy Kindle lights up every room she enters at Daily

Discovery East. Whether dancing in the hallways or encouraging others to join her in activities, she greets everyone with a smile and her signature “Hello Beautiful.” Over the years, Kathy has embraced nearly every program Empowering Abilities offers, but she has truly found her home at Daily Discovery East, where she easily makes friends and lends a compassionate ear to those in need. Despite life’s changes, Kathy continues to grow, advocate for herself, and face challenges with courage and a smile.



## Daily Discovery Staff Excellence Award - Kristi Urmy

Dependable and dedicated, Kristi is a cornerstone of the Daily Discovery program, rarely missing a day of work

unless she is truly unwell. Over her 11 years with Empowering Abilities, Kristi has developed a deep understanding of the participants, learning their unique ways of communicating and helping them express their needs effectively. Her compassionate support during difficult times and her efforts to create

a harmonious environment ensure participants have the best experience possible each day. Kristi’s timely and thorough work, combined with her ability to provide valuable insights for participant goal-setting, has made her an invaluable team member. Her steadfast commitment has not only helped her grow but has also contributed to the growth and success of the participants she serves.

## Endeavor Living Services Achievement Award - Sean France

“Change” has been a constant for Sean over the past few years, starting with his move to an Endeavor Living site in late 2021. From adapting to independent living and managing medical challenges to learning new routines and diets, Sean has handled every adjustment with patience and resilience. Even as he transitioned to living with three new housemates, he approached the changes with ease and an open mind. Although naturally introverted, Sean has embraced new experiences, participating in community activities like bowling, parades, and baseball games. He is willing to learn new tasks, try new foods, and maintain a positive outlook despite challenges.



## Endeavor Living Staff Excellence Award - Mark Barnes

Mark Barnes has been making a positive impact at Empowering

Abilities for 22 years, building meaningful relationships with participants through his patience, empathy, and dedication. Whether helping individuals achieve their goals or advocating for their needs, Mark treats each person with dignity and respect, ensuring their preferences and aspirations are at the forefront. Now as part of Endeavor Living, Mark continues his legacy of excellence, consistently going above and beyond to provide stability and support for participants, including managing shopping, banking, and additional hours. His commitment extends beyond his role, as he volunteers his time to lead Zumba classes for participants, sharing his enthusiasm and fostering connection. Mark exemplifies the high standards of Empowering

Abilities, performing his responsibilities with professionalism and care.



### **Residential Center Achievement Award - Nicole Lester**

Since arriving at the residential center in 1991 at just six years old, Nicole has thrived with the support of caring staff. Despite many changes over the years, one thing has remained constant: Nicole's radiant smile and joyful attitude, which brighten the days of everyone around her. Her cheerful demeanor is infectious, making new staff feel welcome, uplifting seasoned staff, and bringing comfort to other residents. Nicole has faced numerous medical challenges with incredible resilience, always returning home with a smile that reminds everyone how much she is loved. Her positivity, especially evident in her special bond with her best friend and roommate, has touched the hearts of all who know her.



### **Residential Center/Group Homes Staff Excellence Award - Anne Tudzin**

Anne plays a pivotal role in onboarding and mentoring new group home staff, ensuring they are well-prepared to provide compassionate and high-quality care. With three years of experience as a group home supervisor overseeing 21 participants across three homes, Anne exemplifies dedication by managing operations around the clock, often stepping in herself to maintain the highest standards of care. Anne has a tireless work ethic and makes an exceptional impact on both staff and participants. Her empathetic training style, unwavering leadership, and commitment to Empowering Abilities' mission have set a remarkable standard for her team.



### **Employment Services Achievement Award- Harold Benson**

Harold starts each busy day in Enterprise with his favorite soda before diving into work with focus and determination. Since joining Enterprise in 2020, he has mastered a variety of tasks, including packing pallets for Car Freshener and assembling auger finger kits for John Deere, often working independently with

his team. Known for his exceptional attention to detail and quality, Harold is a reliable and hardworking colleague who gets along well with everyone. Outside of work, he's a passionate Hawkeyes fan, a collector of semi-truck models, and enjoys spending time with his girlfriend and playing video games.



### **Administrative Services Staff Excellence Award - Erin Albertson**

Erin holds a unique role at Empowering Abilities, bridging the gap between welcoming new participants and ensuring staff are trained and supported to provide exceptional services. As one of the first faces both participants and staff encounter, she brings a calming presence that instills confidence and positively represents the organization. With experience spanning from the Residential Center to case management in Employment Services, Erin draws on her extensive knowledge to improve operations and services. Despite the challenges that come with her role, Erin's unwavering positivity and dedication exemplify the mission of Empowering Abilities every day.



### **Gary Ashcraft Memorial Award - Katie Biermann**

In a time when finding dedicated nurses is challenging, Empowering Abilities is incredibly fortunate to have Katie Biermann. Over her 15 years with the organization, Katie has risen to Director of Nursing, overseeing the medical needs of 56 residential center residents and 22 group home residents with unmatched compassion and commitment. Whether working all hours to pass medications, take vitals, or sitting at a resident's side during their final moments, Katie's dedication to resident care is unwavering. She builds personal connections with each resident, ensuring they receive the best medical care from both her team and the broader medical community. Katie's tireless devotion and leadership inspire everyone around her.

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generosity.*

# Grateful for Grants

## **The TJX Foundation, INC**

A huge thank you to The TJX Foundation for their generous \$10,000 grant toward our Daily Discovery East project with Edwards Creative! Their support is helping us create engaging, accessible, and enriching experiences for the individuals we serve at Empowering Abilities. We are incredibly grateful for your commitment to inclusion and creativity!

## **Scott County Regional Authority**

A huge thank you to the Scott County Regional Authority for their generous \$8,200 grant toward our Daily Discovery East Sensory Room! Your support is helping us create a calming and engaging space that enhances sensory experiences for the individuals we serve at Empowering Abilities. We truly appreciate your commitment to inclusion and well-being!

## **Kiwainis Club of Davenport**

A big thank you to Kiwanis Club of Davenport for their generous \$1,500 grant toward our newly installed walking path! Your support has helped create a safe and inclusive space where the individuals we serve at Empowering Abilities can enjoy movement, connection, and the outdoors. We truly appreciate your commitment to making a positive impact in our community!





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