

## **To Our Unsung Heroes in Community Residential Programs,**

Meet Jim who worked in a supported living home when one of the clients in the home got very sick and tested positive for COVID-19. When some refused to work in the home, Jim wouldn't leave. He insisted on remaining in the home, working long shifts, and holding things together for the clients. To Jim, who turned the agency's administrator away when she showed up to the house to offer help, telling her she didn't need to put herself and family at risk. To Jim, who spent hours on the phone with other direct support staff telling them "we're going to be ok." Stay the course, wear your protective equipment and "we'll get through this" he'd tell them." To Jim, who became a steadfast leader and a rock during this time of fear and anxiety, you are a hero.

Provail's Administrator, Amal Grabinski, says it's experiences like this that reveals the best in people that otherwise may be overlooked. People with families are continuing coming to work, committed to the people we support. Families and business are recognizing the importance of the front line work for people with developmental disabilities. Amal praised local businesses and staffs families. I asked Amal how business owners and staff's family are helping when they are stuck at home. She said "they may be home, but they are making masks for our staff. It's just amazing to see people come together in the face of this crisis."

Another provider out of the King/Snohomish area, Alpha Supported Living, reports one of his program coordinators, Rory, really stepped up when all four residents in one of their homes tested positive for COVID-19: working 24 hour shifts, alternating with other staff, and doing whatever it took to ensure continuity of care for the 2 clients that remained in the home after 2 were hospitalized. The staff in this home took it upon themselves to set up plastic sheeting in the hallway so the clients could more safely navigate. They also set up a "donning and doffing" tent outside the home for staff to change into and out of their personal protective equipment. Weeks later when DOH came to visit, they were so impressed that they are supporting the agencies to set up their other homes the same way.

Alpha's administrator, Scott Livengood, reports that the community has been impressive during this crisis. He said local distilleries have converted to making hand sanitizer and local churches began making masks and providing them to residential agencies supporting people with developmental disabilities. When Alpha told the church they had enough masks and needed gowns, they started making gowns for staff. The community has been incredible.



From left to right: Tabitha Nganga, Josephine Waweru, Victor Anaele (holding sign), Aicha Donzo.

Even with supportive local communities and altruistic deeds from churches, DDA recognizes the tremendous stress that this pandemic has placed on our Community Residential Providers. We recognize and appreciate staff coverage challenges and the burden on administrators and managers trying their best to maintain continuity of care for some of our most vulnerable citizens. To those fearless staff on the front lines that have gone to work in full PPE day in and day out, to those who have had to put their own families on hold to quarantine in motels or work long shifts in COVID-19 positive homes, you are our heroes. To all the amazing direct support professionals that have remained at the helm throughout this pandemic, Thank You!

Sincerely,

The Developmental Disabilities Administration