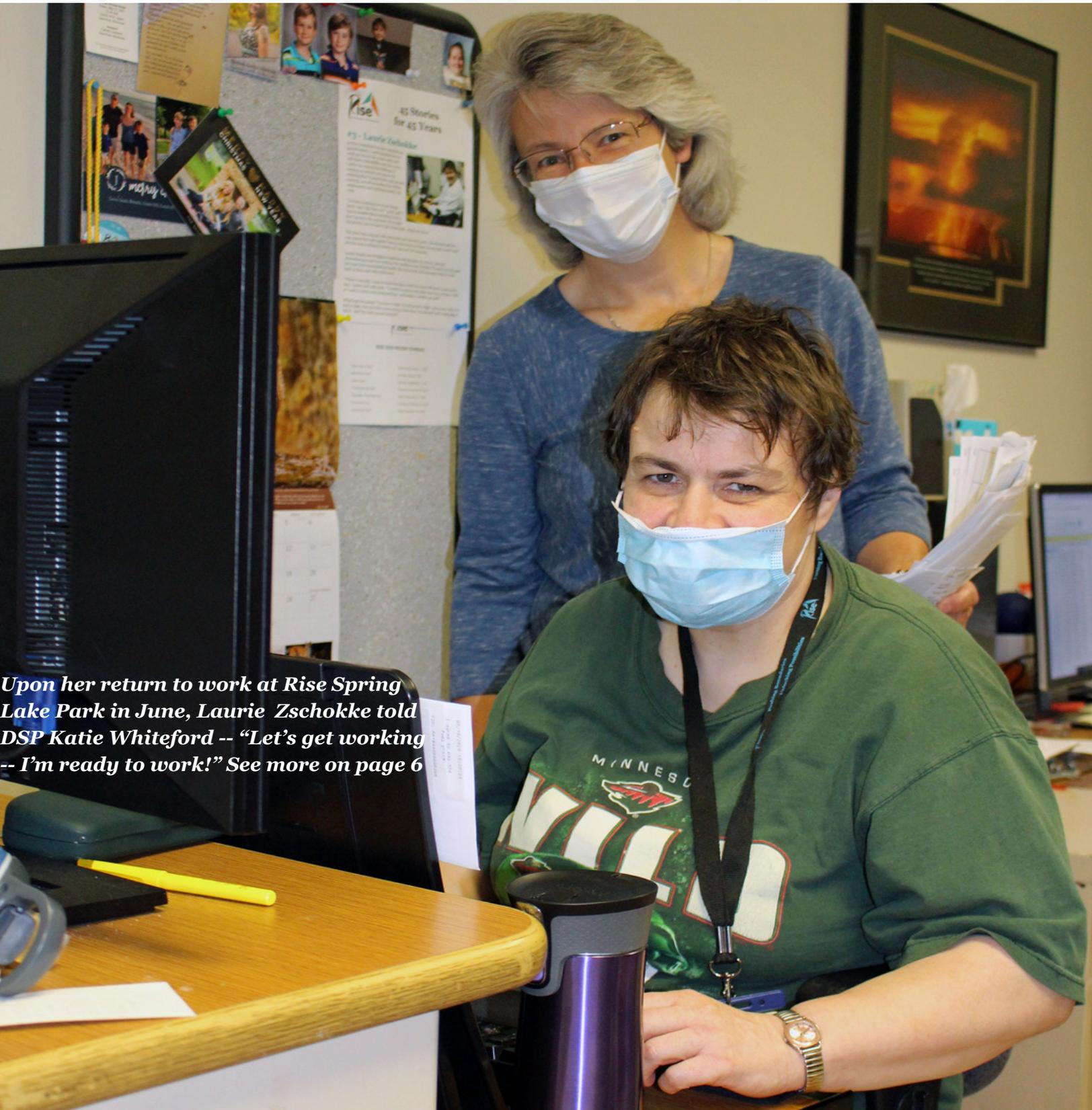


# RISE REPORTER



SEPTEMBER 2020 | VOL. 44, NO. 3



*Upon her return to work at Rise Spring Lake Park in June, Laurie Zschokke told DSP Katie Whiteford -- "Let's get working -- I'm ready to work!" See more on page 6*



# RISE REPORTER

## A LETTER FROM PRESIDENT & CEO LYNN NOREN

If I could pick two words to describe the past six months, they would be CHALLENGING and GRATEFUL. Most of us -- all around the world -- have felt the tremendous impact COVID-19 has had on all aspects of our lives. And Rise, like all other disability service providers, has been tremendously affected by it in every aspect of what we do and how we do it.

Rise has been providing many services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including supports for people we serve who are working in or seeking competitive employment, those in work crews whom we support at essential businesses, as well as people we serve with housing and mental health supports. However, our Day Training and Habilitation and Adult Day services have been significantly impacted by the pandemic. Most of our center-based operations had to close in mid-March and are slowly reopening, but with limited capacity at this time.

Since June, we have been working closely with the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) to slowly reopen our day services programs. Our goal is to ensure that everyone who chooses to receive services will be able to receive support from Rise. Some of those services occur in our centers, in the community, and some using remote technology at home.

At the same time as we are experiencing these many challenges, we are also grateful for the support Rise has received from both the States of Wisconsin and Minnesota by providing emergency funding relief for disability service providers. Many of you reached out to your legislative leaders in support of Rise, and our advocacy efforts worked! While these funds do not address all the COVID related losses, it is a big step in the right direction.

We are also grateful for the commitment and creativity our team members are showing as they try to navigate this unprecedented time. Our work is very person-focused and our typical interactions with the people we serve have had to adjust and change due to restrictions associated with the pandemic. Several of the stories in this issue highlight the creative work that is happening throughout Rise.

Our *Celebrate Rise!* fundraising gala is on October 26 and you are invited to join us this year as we hold the event virtually! Your support could not be needed more to help ensure the future of the supports Rise provides to people who have disabilities in our community. Please share information about the gala with your family, friends and in your personal networks. We are hopeful that even if we can't be together in person, we'll know you were with us for this wonderful event online. Details about the event can be found later in this issue.



## WHO WE ARE

Rise unlocks potential and opens doors to success for people with disabilities or other challenges through creative solutions and customized support. We envision a progressive, supportive, and collaborative environment that fosters meaningful growth and provides opportunities to live a life filled with purpose.

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## AT RISE

**Kathy Klang**  
Chair, Rise Board of Directors

**Lynn Noren**  
President & CEO

**Noel McCormick**  
Vice President of Advancement

**Beth DePoint**  
Director of Public Relations; Editor



✧ JOIN US ✧  
for  
A NIGHT  
AMONGST THE  
STARS

*9TH ANNUAL CELEBRATE RISE*

✧ FUNDRAISING GALA ✧

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2020**

**7:00 PM**



Watch our virtual gala to learn more about Rise's programs,  
cheer on our award winners and bid on our auction items.

To register and learn more visit: [Bidpal.net/celebraterise2020](https://bidpal.net/celebraterise2020)

## People are happy, proud to be back at work!

WHAT DAY IS BETTER or more fun than Christmas or your birthday? If you ask people at Rise, they might answer: “The day I got to go back to work!”

As of June 15, people started coming back to several Rise locations, including Spring Lake Park, Coon Rapids, Anoka, Crystal, New Richmond, and Cottage Grove to work a three-hour shift in the morning or afternoon.

Practicing all Rise’s health and safety policies with social distancing, face masks worn at all times, and sanitizing wasn’t a problem for those who were eager to resume their important work.

”Let’s get working – I’m ready to work, let’s go!” were the first words out of Laurie Zschokke to DSP Katie Whiteford as she walked in to work in June. Her co-worker, Rachel Niedringhaus was in full agreement. The three admit they were just a little ‘rusty,’ but seemed to be able to pick up right where

*As Activar, a manufacturer of display and construction products in Bloomington, is considered an essential business, Daniel Fisher has been working hard throughout these past months assembling custom metal cabinets, many of which are used in medical facilities across the U.S.*



*DSP Melissa Pavek is proud of the great work her team of ten does at Activar. Among many tasks, Jennie Weigelt carefully packages glass shelving that goes into fire extinguisher cabinets.*

they left off in March and get back in the groove of data entry pretty quickly.

Laurie, Rachel, and Katie plan to hold down the fort until a



few more people in their team join them back at work.

Out on the production floor, Rise’s Internal Services team was also working in three-hour shifts with people coming back as they felt comfortable to do so. Others will be scheduled to start work incrementally.

In addition, CBTE Associate Director Kathy Frank notes that Rise offers remote services to people who aren’t ready or able to come back to work quite yet. They can work with a team member on both personal and employment-related skill building, play a related game, or other customized supportive services. *(Read more about Rise’s remote services on pages 6-7.)*

People also have access to training sessions from the Mad Hatter series which discusses boundaries, healthy relationships, and how to greet friends using social distance guidelines. There are also Person-Centered Training (PCT) tools such as Good Day/Bad Day, One-Page Descriptions, and Relationship Circles to develop.

Team members can focus on areas that will help improve work speed using YouTube videos on manufacturing processes or even demonstrate new jobs that have come onto the work floor.

“We were offering these services and activities in our day programs before we had to close due to the pandemic,” Kathy noted. “We think the continuity is important so people can continue to work on their goals.”



*DSP Kaitie Thompson and her team, including Amy Pancake, are hard at work at Donatelle Plastics, Inc. in New Brighton where they quality check and package medical devices and components.*



*Rachel Niedringhaus does data entry for Rise Transportation at Rise Spring Lake Park.*



*Tim Crosser, Lucinda Anderson, and Barb Hokenson jumped right back into work on subassembly contracts with DSP Darla Olson at Rise Spring Lake Park.*



*Robert Lewis says it's good to be back to work at Rise Coon Rapids.*



*Intern Alex Samek produced videos for various Rise locations to demonstrate just how things have changed and what people can expect when they return to work and day services.*

# For those not ready to come back to work just yet, virtual remote services offer a great alternative

DURING THESE CHALLENGING times, people miss their friends, activities, team members, and coming to Rise for services!

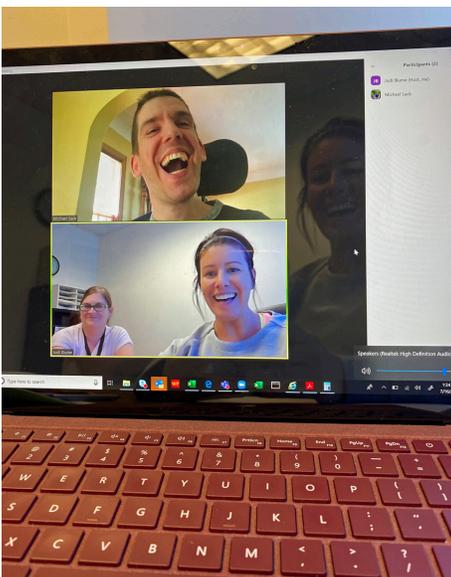
So team members got creative in how to bring Rise services to those who weren't quite ready to come back to a Rise or business work location,

Virtual services give people the opportunity to socialize with their friends who are at home and/or at a Rise location through engaging activities.

Family members, guardians, and residential staff are enthusiastically supportive, have positive feedback, and appreciate that people have the option to partici-



*In addition to their book club, this group from Adult Day Programs especially likes taking “road trips” together. They select a destination, talk about how they would get there and how long it would take, what fun foods they might eat, listen to music from the area, find interesting activities to do, learn about the history of the area, and enjoy the scenery.*



*From his home, Michael Sack connects with Rise’s Bloomington’s Program Supervisor Piper Wohlfeil and Jodi Blume, senior director of Community Integration & Life Enrichment Programs.*

pate in interesting, fun activities throughout the day from home.

Rise team members note they have seen many people “come out of their shells,” increasing their self-confidence and social skills.

They have also observed that virtual services participants seem to be interacting more with others and thriving from these new shared experiences, perhaps with a realization that, truly, “we are all in this together.”

### *Who can receive virtual services?*

- People who are served in Rise’s Day Training and Habilitation and Adult Day Programs have

chosen to return to center-based services, but would still like to do some virtual services

- Those living in their own, home, family’s home, or a group home (Unfortunately, we are currently unable to provide virtual services to people living in ICFs.)

- People who have access to Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Hangout, phone calls or text messages

- Rise may have resources to purchase or loan technology; talk to your Rise team member for more information.



*Rise offers a wide range of engaging virtual activities!*

- Discussion groups for a wide range of interests – current events, sports, health-related topics, ‘bucket lists,’ history, personal accomplishments, biographies of famous people, etc.
- ‘Road trips’ to various states and world countries
- Games – Uno, Bingo, Scattergories, trivia, word games, 20 Questions
- Book Clubs
- “Visits” to zoos, aquariums, museums, parks
- Art Therapy – materials provided, if needed
- Music Therapy
- Occupational Therapy – exercise and movement via Telehealth
- Yoga, exercise, stretching
- Training session from Mad Hatter on boundaries, healthy relationships, etc.



*DSP Janine O’Connell at Rise Anoka helps facilitate a Bingo game between Jordan Halligan, Kaitlin Salo, and Isaiah Thole, at home.*

Roberto and Jim enjoy getting together and practicing spelling, nature studies, and trivia. Roberto is an amazing speller and Rise team members often try to stump him with some spelling contests.

Roberto and Jim both like to say at the end of the session, “Bye friend, I had fun today!”

Michelle started out with just one day a week of remote services and was enjoying it so much that she expanded to four days a week. She does group activities as well as

one-on-one sessions with a Rise team member. She especially likes that she can select activities that best suit her interests and are “perfect” for her.

“I love these remote sessions because we’re doing a lot of things that I actually enjoy doing. I just got a new word scramble book in the mail and a logic puzzle book, too! I also like the fact that I can participate in these sessions from the comfort of my home.”

For more information or to make a referral, please contact a Rise program supervisor.



*Anna, Karen, Carissa and Gillian enjoy connecting through remote services. They are able to find out how each other are doing and let them know how much they are missed. Together, they say:*

*“We love being able to stay connected with our friends from Rise. Even if we can’t chat on the computer, we enjoy writing them letters every week. We get so excited when our friends write back, too!”*

## Jeanean enjoys challenging career as a phlebotomist

AS ALWAYS, BUT especially during this COVID-19 pandemic crisis that is gripping the world, blood supplies are critical to addressing medical conditions.

Jeanean Chatman is proud to be a phlebotomist with the American Red Cross collecting much-needed blood and plasma during these challenging times.

A compassionate person by nature, Jeanean, 49, has always wanted to work in the medical field. Having experienced domestic violence and homelessness herself, she is well-aware of how important it is to be kind and help others.

Jeanean was training to be a medical assistant in 2009 when the college abruptly closed. Despite the fact that she had completed her training, clinicals, and certification, she couldn't find a job because of the college's tarnished reputation.

"It was really frustrating," Jeanean remembers. "I had big loans out and no one would hire us. My mom was in hospice, so I took care of her until she passed."

Jeanean was referred to Rise in 2017 by Amy Johnson, a Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) counselor, for career planning, job search, and follow-up support services.

With assistance and guidance from Rise Employment Consul-



*Amber (right) visited Jeanean during her training with the American Red Cross earlier this year to see how she was doing.*

tant Amber Barnes, she was hired as a direct support specialist / human services technician at a group home for people with disabilities.

Jeanean enjoyed the work, but injured her back and neck while on the job and had to resign. She and Amber began exploring other career options. The American Red Cross in St. Paul offered free training as a phlebotomist which really piqued Jeanean's interest, so Amber assisted her with the application process.

Following the completion of her intensive 12-week training, Jeanean was thrilled to be offered a full-time job in April. She is part of a mobile team that travels to different locations such as American Legion and VFW posts, YMCAs, and churches to collect whole and separated blood from volunteer donors.

"I had great trainers and feel confident I'm doing a good job,"

said Jeanean. "I love this work because it's challenging. I get to meet a lot of people and travel around the cities and outstate Minnesota.

"I collect both the person's health history and blood, and talk to them while they are giving to try to make them feel more comfortable. I love giving people their donor sticker to wear proudly when they're done – it makes them feel special. Donors compliment me on my work and that feels really good."

"I love helping people and they just seem to open up to me, especially older people," Jeanean added. She plans to stay working in the medical field, perhaps one day pursuing training to work as an X-ray technician.

With a good job and steady income, Jeanean was excited to move

*~ Continued on the bottom of page 9 ~*



## Tom appreciates microgrant from The Arc Minnesota

WITH HIS GOAL OF someday soon working competitively in a community business, Tom Erickson was excited when he recently applied for and was awarded \$200 from the Minnesota Microgrant Partnership to purchase cleaning supplies to help him continue honing his skills during the pandemic.

Tom, who Deaf-Blind and communicates through American Sign Language, is volunteering with Erika Powell, the multi-site manager at The Legends in Spring Lake Park where Tom lives, to clean the benches around the outside patio area. Not only is he adding to his work skills, but this volunteer position will be a great addition to Tom's resume when applying for jobs.

Tom is one of a handful of people at Rise who have received these helpful grants (up to \$500) from The Arc Minnesota. This grant program is designed to assist people with disabilities make a sustainable change in their lives in regard to competitive employ-

ment, inclusive housing, and community integration.

On June 22, Tom was happy to go back to work on production subcontracts at Rise Spring Lake Park for three hours a day, Monday through Friday.

He has also appreciated the continuous support he has received from Occupational Communication Specialist Jennifer

Sawyer who meets with Tom near his home weekly during these challenging times of the pandemic to continue his competitive job search.

For more information about the Minnesota Microgrant Partnership, visit The Arc Minnesota's website at [arcminnesota.org/ways-we-can-help/](https://arcminnesota.org/ways-we-can-help/).



*Tom received a \$200 Minnesota Microgrant to purchase cleaning supplies. His volunteer work helps him hone skills and prepare for a competitive job.*

into her first apartment. Amber coordinated with Rise's Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) support services to get Jeanean a voucher for Bridging, a nonprofit organization serving people in need of essential household items, to help her furnish her new home.

Amber continued to check in with Jeanean about twice a month for the first 90 days on the job to help ensure her success.

"I really appreciate the support I get from Amber – every time I needed it, she and Amy gave me the proper help or suggested other resources," said Jeanean. "I don't have a lot of support from other people in my life and it makes me feel good that I have it from Amber. I want to make her proud."

"I admire Jeanean's motivation and hard work," said Amber. "She never complains or feels sorry for herself when faced with adversi-

ty, but is determined to learn new things, change her path, and succeed."

"I'm proud of myself," Jeanean added, "because of everything that I've been through, I'm able to go on and not quit. I want to leave something that my sons and grandkids can be proud of, too."

In her free time Jeanean enjoys fishing, spending time with her family, and relaxing by the water.

# MOHR honors Rise's DSP Katie Whiteford as its 2020 Direct Support Professional of the Year for metro area

RISE PRESIDENT & CEO Lynn Noren (far left) and other team members pulled off a big surprise for Katie Whiteford in July when they presented her with the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation (MOHR)'s 2020 Direct Support Professional award for employment services in the Twin Cities metro area.

Due to the pandemic, MOHR was not able to host its annual state conference this summer at which Katie and other award winners would typically have received their honors.

A 19-year team member at Rise, Katie was recognized for her innovative, compassionate, and person-centered approach to working with people who have intensive support needs.

Katie supports a team of workers who do data entry, document prep, and scanning at Rise Spring Lake Park for area businesses as



well as Rise's Transportation department. Team members have intellectual and physical challenges, and use computer devices that are designed, customized, and programmed to assist them in their work.

"Katie is the epitome of 'person-centered' and naturally looks at each situation with the individual centered in the spotlight," said Rise Program Supervisor Samantha Trebtoske. "She truly knows the people served and wholeheartedly listens to their joys and concerns to ensure they are heard and respected."

Katie assists people continue to expand and hone their work skills so they are prepared for supported and competitive employment opportunities, if they desire, and enjoy success, Samantha added.

"The people Katie works with are fortunate to be able to count on her daily advocacy and passion for their rights," Samantha said. "She

strives to keep the people served well-informed on the legislature and the bills that could directly impact them. Katie joins Rise participants at the *Best Life Alliance Day* at the Minnesota State Capitol event, meeting with state representatives and senators to voice their concerns and interests."

DSPs like Katie are at the core of community-based services for people who have disabilities at Rise and other agencies throughout Minnesota. We appreciate all Rise DSPs who work hard each day to help us carry out our important mission.

MOHR represents more than 110 adult day, day training and habilitation, extended employment, and supported employment service providers across the state. Its members serve more than 26,000 Minnesotans who have disabilities and are committed to respect for each individual, a person-centered approach, and expanding work opportunities.



*Katie without her mask~*



## Three great Rise DSPs were also nominated for statewide award -- Rise is grateful for their good work

EVERYONE AT RISE was certainly excited when DSP Katie Whiteford was awarded MOHR's 2020 *Direct Support Professional of the Year* for the Twin Cities metro area!

But Rise had also nominated three other outstanding people for consideration for this prestigious statewide honor. While they didn't win this year, they are TRULY WINNERS in our Rise eyes!!

**JEBB ANDERSON** has many skills in his 'tool belt' and plenty of passion for Rise's mission which enables him to provide support in a variety of ways.

As someone who has a wide range of work skills in different business environments, Jebb is able to go where he is needed most that day in Rise's DTH department. His float role ensures that



even when team members are absent, Rise can keep community sites open and fulfill our commitments to our business partners and the people we serve.

Jebb is a positive, high-energy guy and when Rise is setting up new community work sites (especially naturally supported sites), Jebb is an innovative job trainer and gifted at setting the tone for a great work environment right from the start. Jebb's strengths in production and building rapport with new business partners make him a great liaison and representative to Rise's community business partners.



**JENNIFER SAWYER** is an occupational communication specialist with Rise's DTH Sensory Support Unit. The people she serves are Deaf, hard of hearing or DeafBlind in addition to having



development/intellectual disabilities; most have never had experience working in the community.

Jennifer is always looking for ways to assist people in leading their best lives and advocating for the intensive, customized services they require. Her Rise team members and the people she supports find her to be dedicated, persistent, and truly amazing.

**MELISSA PAVEK** (above) is a compassionate professional who is always looking for new opportunities for each person to hone their skills and expand their employment opportunities. She has worked as a DSP for more than 12 years at several Rise community work sites.

At each business location, Melissa was instrumental in establishing and maintaining a successful business partnership between Rise and our customers as well as ensuring that each person served received the customized training and support necessary to be successful on the job and live a quality life.

## Five interns bring their talents, creativity, enthusiasm to work on a wide range of important projects

DESPITE THE CHANGES which need to be made in the workplace due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Rise was fortunate again to have five creative and hard-working interns this summer.

We so appreciate all they contributed to Rise and how they helped further our important mission. Meet them here.

**ALEX SAMEK** graduated in May 2019 from Minnesota State University of Moorhead (MSUM) with a major in film production and a minor in advertising.

“I enjoyed working with a diverse group of people who not only work hard, but enjoy the jobs they do,” said Alex. “It was a great hands-on experience working in the field I went to school for and I enjoyed the process of each project I was asked to do.”

Alex created short videos that clearly explained and showed what has been done or altered in Rise’s many work places and the precautions taken so that people could safely return to work. These visual representations make it easier for people to understand and can be referenced again at any time.

He also will be shooting and producing a video for the *Celebrate Rise Fundraising Gala* which will be held virtually on October 26.

“The most rewarding part of my internship was having each person excited to be on camera, which also made my job easier and



even more enjoyable,” Alex added. “It was great to know that the videos I produced were helping people learn the steps and safety measures need to be taken in a new way.”

Alex plans to continue to build his portfolio and work as a freelance videographer.

“Opportunities like my internship at Rise will help open new doors to the wide range of work that I am capable of creating and producing. I hope to one day start my own media production company, advertising for businesses around the world.

**SOPHIA WARD** is a senior at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul and will graduate in May 2021 with a major in business management and leadership and a minor in data analytics.

“Rise’s mission is close to my heart and I was excited to get an internship here,” said Sophia. “I have siblings who have all strug-

gled with their own challenges and some have even used services similar to what Rise offers. I really wanted to help contribute to the great work that Rise does in its many communities.”

Sophia worked with Rise’s Advancement team on a variety of projects related to special events, including reaching out to local businesses for in-kind donations for the fundraising gala’s silent auction coming up October 26.

“Due to the pandemic, Rise’s *Celebrate Rise* event will be virtual for the first time ever this year so I did research on best practices for online fundraisers,” said Sophia. “I learned a lot about different formats and approaches to an online gala and hope that will be helpful as we plan for Rise’s event.

“When companies agreed to donate, it was very rewarding,” Sophia added. “It was nice to know that my work had resulted in tangible items that will help fund the amazing programs at Rise.

“Throughout my internship at





Rise, I was able to improve on many skills and use my strengths.”

With a possible wedding and move out of state next year after her graduation, Sophia is not quite certain yet where or in what capacity she will apply her university degree and experience.

“I have really enjoyed my time at Rise,” said Sophia. “Although it has been an unconventional year, I am grateful for this opportunity to grow and learn new skills.”



**IZZY SPRIGGS** attends Indiana University Bloomington and plans to graduate in May 2021 with a degree in psychology and minors in German and sociology.

“I enjoy working with people with disabilities,” said Izzy. “I am also interested in developing volunteer coordination skills.”

As the lead intern of the summer cohort, Izzy worked on a wide range of projects with Rise’s Advancement team. She helped develop programs and initiatives for *Employee Recognition Week*, organized community building for the fellow summer interns during the summer, and set up mock job interviews by connecting inter-

viewers with people Rise serves.

“One of the most rewarding aspects of my internship,” Izzy said, “was helping build community among the interns, which helped us establish a long-lasting connection to Rise. I think a lot of the interns hope to return to work with Rise again in some capacity.”

Following her graduation next year, Izzy plans to continue on in a graduate social work program, and hopes to work within nonprofit organizations as a social worker.

Although **SELENA MUNSON** hadn’t heard of Rise before she began her research for meaningful internships, she was immediately drawn to the agency’s important mission. Selena is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in business administration with an emphasis in human resource; she plans to graduate in May 2021 from Dordt University in Sioux Center, Iowa.

Selena worked on Rise’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee. “It has been an extremely educational and fascinating process with everything going on in the



world around us,” Selena said. “I focused on cultural competence and brave spaces, which are becoming increasingly important to businesses everywhere.”

She also found that developing new ways to make virtual presentations more engaging has also been a fun challenge.

“The most rewarding part of doing work here at Rise has been the knowledge that my work is very relevant to today,” Selena added. “Cultural awareness and inclusivity have never been more important in the workplace, so it is really cool to know that I have contributed in training sessions that will hopefully be useful to a lot of people throughout the company, making the entire organization more aware and compassionate to the people Rise serves.”

Selena is looking forward to her senior year at Dordt, where she is not only involved in the campus business club, but in the music and theater departments as well. Although she doesn’t yet have a specific long-term goal at this point, Selena says she is looking forward to a career in human resources in which she will be serving others and making a positive impact.

Selena appreciated working with good people at Rise, especially Human Resources Department team members. “They have given me so much inspiration as well as a lot to look up to and strive toward through their teamwork and positive attitudes!”

~ Continued at the top  
of page 14 ~

*Interns - Continued from page 13*

**BEA CHIHAK** was introduced to Rise through Cow Tipping Press, a local organization that works to amplify the voices of people who have intellectual and developmental disabilities through creative writing.

A spring graduate of Macalester College in St. Paul, Bea majored in history, with a concentration on law and social justice, and creative writing.

“I was very excited to intern with such a prominent agency and fortunate to work with Rise’s amazing grants manager, Nicole Conti,” said Bea. “I wrote, co-wrote, and helped organize grants, as well as worked on other projects like Rise’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion newsletter. I also creat-

ed a list of prospective small family foundations for Rise to apply for grants from.”

Bea’s background and involvement in the social justice side of disability work, as well as her knowledge of the history of the disability rights movement, was of great benefit in her projects.

“The most rewarding part of my internship was getting to know how Rise works as an organization. I was truly impressed by the vast variety of programs Rise offers, and the diversity of its communities and the people it serves.”

This fall, Bea will be working fulltime as a direct service professional (DSP) at one of Lutheran Social Services’ group homes.

“I am super excited to learn



more about the day-to-day, on-the-ground work of disability services and become more involved in the communities of people with disabilities across the Twin Cities more broadly. I am incredibly passionate about disability justice, which for me is about a lifetime of activism around disability.”

*ADA has tremendous affect on people’s lives for 30 years*

FOR MOST OF THE close to 3,500 people Rise serves each year in its employment, housing supports, and life enrichment programs, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has had a profound affect on nearly every aspect of their lives. Rise joins millions of Amer-

icans this year in celebrating the ADA’s 30th Anniversary.

Signed into law by President George H.W. Bush on July 26, 1990, this important landmark civil rights law ensures that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as every-

one else.

Further, the ADA prohibits discrimination in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and

all public and private places that are open to the general public.

The ADA gives civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion.

In 2009, a number of significant changes to the definition of “disability” became effective under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA).

To learn more about the Americans with Disabilities Act, visit [adata.org/learn-about-ada](http://adata.org/learn-about-ada).



**Americans with Disabilities Act**



## Amira's first job sets her on a great career path with Burger King

JUST A LITTLE MORE than a year ago, Amira was looking for her very first competitive job, unsure as to what career path she wanted to take. Today, she is working successfully at a Burger King in a small town in Central Minnesota and hoping to get training there to eventually be an assistant manager.

With only some unpaid work experiences through her school-to-work transition program, Amira was referred by Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation to Rise's Minnesota Employment Center (MEC) for People who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing for job placement services.

Occupational Communication Specialist Caitlin Lashbrook worked with Amira, who communicates using American Sign Language (ASL) and had limited comfort in written English, to develop a career plan and prepare for job interviews.

"From the very start, I was impressed by Amira's professionalism, her positive attitude and enthusiasm, and genuine motivation to engage in the job search process," said Caitlin. "We would pull up job leads and discuss the duties and relevant work-related vocabulary."

When Amira landed an interview at Burger King, Caitlin said she "came in with an upbeat motivation that would impress any em-

ployer. After a few basic questions, which I facilitated through ASL, he hired Amira on the spot! I assisted her for the first few days to complete her online and hands-on task trainings."

Amira was originally hired to wash dishes as well as clean the lobby and outside grounds, but now also assembles sandwiches, gathers orders for the drive-thru, and cooks burgers and fries. She has evolved to being a valued member of their work team.

Caitlin assisted Amira in developing basic communication cards for her to use with her managers and coworkers. With the recent arrival of Covid-19, all employees are required to wear masks while working.

"Even small mouth movements are helpful for people with hearing loss to support communication,

so to lose that was a tough adjustment for Amira," Caitlin noted.

"We addressed her frustration by educating her co-workers that she is not going to be able to pick up anything from speech now as well as created new communication cards from pictures Amira took of various items that are discussed regularly. This helped everyone tremendously and she really appreciated that."

"I really like my job," said Amira with Caitlin interpreting in ASL. "My boss is very supportive and helps other workers to understand that I need visual information – gestures, pointing at things to indicate things, etc. I feel like I've learned a lot in only one year."

Transportation in a small town continues to be a challenging issue, but Amira's employer has been willing to adjust her work schedule to accommodate the Tri-CAP Transit Connection schedules. He is very supportive, as he knows Amira is a dedicated, responsible worker, and has been willing to make other job-related accommodations when necessary.

Having just celebrated her one-year anniversary on August 1, Amira is excited that her supervisor supports her career goals. He wants to train her on all aspects of the store, and Caitlin will be assisting in her training with occupational communication support services.



## *Meyer's long journey to recovery leads him to serve others who are struggling with addictions in many ways*

FOLLOWING THE UNTIMELY death of his father when Meyer Belkin was just 14 years old, the young boy began a long, vacillating journey of selling drugs and his own drug abuse, incarcerations, career successes as well as homelessness, severe health issues, relapses and startling 'wake-up calls' -- all leading to his eventual recovery.

"For so long, I felt powerless -- like I was a prisoner in a war," Meyer remembers. "It took me time to realize that I was not a prisoner, but a refugee on a journey."

At his last court appearance in Hennepin County at which he was facing up to 48 months incarceration for a drug possession violation, Meyer was offered the opportunity to participate in Hennepin County Drug Court.

This diversionary court provides wrap-around support such as chemical health treatment, housing, mental health support, education/training, and employment. Its mission is to increase public safety, improve chemical health and reduce crime -- all by providing these wrap-around supports. If the individual follows through on their treatment plan, under the supervision of their probation office and the Drug Court judge, he or she avoids jail time.

Meyer's probation officer referred him to Rise for job placement and support services. Both Employment Consultants Tamiko Edwards and Molly Bartell worked



with Meyer. Rise has served more than 40 people through this project since 2018.

Today, at the age of 57, Meyer Belkin has been sober and clean for more than 18 months.

"Both Tamiko and Molly have given me hope that I could make it," Meyer said. "Tamiko helped me with so much -- from getting new clothes for job interviews, connecting with other resources for care and food, and giving me the support I needed."

As a client at NUWAY, a non-profit serving people recovering from co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders, Meyer did well in his recovery program and was made "lead peer."

The love of his partner, Adam, as well as the support of NUWAY staff and residents, made Meyer realize he was not alone in his journey and he began to have real hope

for the first time in many years.

With Tamiko's assistance, Meyer got a job as a sous chef at the Lumber Exchange Building in downtown Minneapolis. He was well-suited for the job as his mother had been a fabulous cook and Meyer had learned much from her in their own kitchen.

Things were going well -- Meyer was able to pay off his debts, got his driver's license and a car, and really enjoyed his work. His long-term goal was to re-establish his cosmetology career and was excited when a friend's father offered him financial support to open a small salon.

Then COVID-19 hit. Meyer had to regroup and change course.

"The universe took over when a bed-and-breakfast on 25th and Pillsbury Avenues South came up on Craigslist," said Meyer. "At one time, I had lived in a recovery group home across the street and dreamed of living in that beautiful mansion. I decided to put together a business plan to open up a sober house. I named it 'Adam's House' after the love of my life."

The same friend was willing to help him take out a long-term lease with option to buy and NUWAY contracted with him to provide residential services for clients in recovery.

Meyer subsequently opened a second house in South Minneapolis (Nancy's House, named for a woman who was so supportive of

people in recovery and has since passed), for a total of close to 50 men and women. Meyer plans to open another sober house this fall in St. Paul Park.

Having worked hard in his own personal recovery, Meyer said he is grateful for the “gift of desperation” which led him to his spirituality – or as he refers to it: **Good Orderly Direction**.

Managing two sober houses and supporting people through their recovery is both challenging and exhilarating for Meyer. Within two months of opening his first

sober house, he was financially solvent. His residents are both self-pay and NUWAY clients; his relapse rate is among the lowest in the area.

And Meyer’s goal of opening a hair salon is still on the table.

“Molly is now helping me re-test to get my cosmetology license back,” said Meyer. “She got me the resources for testing study guides and equipment. I can’t thank her and Rise enough.

“In the short time I have known Meyer, I have been blown away at the progress he has made

despite the obstacles he has faced, not only all his life, but in 2020 alone,” said Molly. “I am looking forward to his future and the amazing things he will accomplish!”

“I could never really pay back the debts I owe others for their belief in me and their support, but I try to pay it forward by donating \$400 worth of quality health and hygiene products a month to area shelters and homes.” Until COVID-19 hit, Meyer offered his hair-cutting services at women’s sober houses. Today he offers that to his male residents.

## *Kathy Ausmus retires after 43-year career in disability human services*

IT WAS BITTERSWEET for team members and people who are served at Rise Coon Rapids when Program Manager Kathy Ausmus retired earlier this summer. Kathy topped off her stellar 43-year career in human services by working for Rise for the past twenty years.

Kathy went to work at Cambridge State Hospital when she was just 17 years old, and continued to work with children and adults who have disabilities in various positions at organizations throughout Central Minnesota and Anoka County.

In 2000, Kathy came to work as a substitute direct services professional for Rise Coon Rapids. Based on her wide range of skills and solid work ethic, she was subsequently promoted to service team leader and then program manager.

“Rise develops career opportunities for everyone to fulfill their

personal dreams and needs,” said Kathy. “Everyone should have an equal opportunity!”

Kathy is proud of the role she played in expanding employment opportunities for people at Rise Coon Rapids, including both center-based production subcontracts and community business sites.

“I always said ‘Yes!’ when offered a new position or was asked to help set up a new business work site and get it up and running successfully,” Kathy added.

“Kathy made so many contributions to our Coon Rapids program,” said Natalie Zacharias, director of Day and Employment Services. “She’d jump right in to show a person served how to do a job, never believing someone couldn’t do it, and helped staff come up with creative ways to support individuals do meaningful work. Kathy was a real mover-and-shaker. We’ll miss



her, but wish her the best in her retirement!”

Kathy says she has enjoyed working with everyone and will miss assisting people work to their potential and achieve their dreams.

But Kathy plans to make the most retirement life and tells her husband: “Grow old with me - the best is yet to come.’ Every day is a new adventure and new beginnings for me. I try to make every day special for me and my family!”

## Patty Thurk retires after enjoyable, rewarding career

AFTER AN INTERESTING and rewarding career path of her own, Patty Thurk retired from Rise on July 31. In her 14 years as an employment consultant, Patty assisted more than 400 people find jobs that fit their needs and interests, matching them with a good employer so they thrive and be successful.

Following her graduation from the University of Minnesota with a bachelor's degree in parks, recreation and leisure studies with an emphasis on therapeutic recreation, Patty worked for Fairview Hospital for seven years as a therapeutic recreational specialist on different mental health units providing recreation programming for patients. She then worked as a qualified rehabilitation consultant



(QRC) helping injured workers return to work.

After having her second child, Patty stayed home for a few years before returning to the workforce in 2006 with ESR, which merged with Rise in 2019.

"I have been so blessed in this job and have really enjoyed working at Rise with team members who are committed to the mission, professional, and very helpful," said Patty.

"The most personally rewarding aspect of my career is having the opportunity to help someone figure out his or her career path and then create and develop jobs that fit their specific interests and needs," she continued.

"Even after several years, many people are in their same job or they have gotten a better job after gaining experience from the job I originally helped them find and/or are working in their 'dream job.' I love to see people's successes and am proud to be a part of that."

Patty's retirement plans include being an "at-home grandma" for her five-year-old grandson, Bennett, who is starting kindergarten. "Depending on what happens with school this year, I will either be taking him to school or I will be his teacher and lunch lady! My husband Dan and I love traveling so after the COVID crisis, we will continue on. I have four more states to travel to to reach all 50, so that's my goal!

"I have been so blessed in my career," Patty added. "I really enjoyed 14 great years of assisting and serving others. It wasn't without challenges or difficulties, but overall, it was a wonderful experience and I am grateful to have worked for ESR and Rise."

### JOIN THE FUN -- HOST A WATCH PARTY IN YOUR HOME!

We wish we could all gather at the Marriott Hotel this year for Celebrate Rise! -- but since we can't, why not get your friends and family together on Monday, October 26, at 7 p.m. and tune in to our virtual program and auction?!

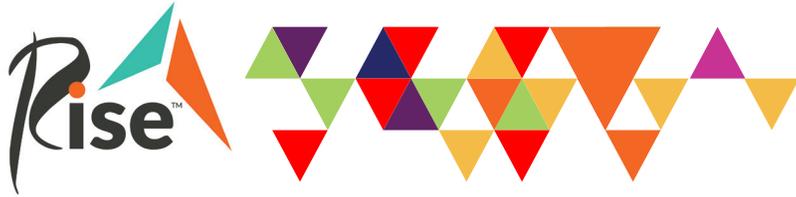
Go to: [Bidpal.net/celebraterise2020](https://bidpal.net/celebraterise2020)

Send photos of your watch party to

[submissions@rise.org](mailto:submissions@rise.org)

and we will post them on

Rise's Facebook page for all to see!



Administrative Offices | 8406 Sunset Road NE | Spring Lake Park, MN 55432-1387

For current updates Rise services relative to the COVID-19 pandemic, please go to our website ([rise.org](http://rise.org)) and click on the



*Updated Changes & Policies*  
banner on the home page.

There you will find updated policies and procedures as well as additional information to help you navigate Rise's program services during these challenging times.

*Be safe. Be healthy.*