

What Keeps Me Going

By Larissa Beck, Community Living Program Manager

I have been thinking a lot lately of the reasons that I do and don't do different things, maybe because it is because I recently took another Enneagram personality test, and that is how I got to here. I have been thinking of what keeps me coming back every day to work and why I continue to love what I do. For me, I need to be able to be passionate about what I do and the people that I am working to support. I could never do a job that you "don't have to bring home with you." That's just not how I operate. I want to be able to see good happen and be around people who really care about the people they are working with.

In the world of disability services, it can often feel like the cards are stacked against you. We have looming cuts from the Disability Waiver Rate System, an uncertain legislative outlook, a staffing crisis, and then we work with people...and well, people are unpredictable. In the midst of all of the things that can go wrong, there are really good things that stand out as well.

In one of my conversations with a rock star staff, she told me that someone she was working with had just graduated from a college program. This is her dream. This program (and the job that will come with it) will allow her to take care of herself and her daughter. This program and the people who gave her this chance just opened up her world. When I met her for the first time, she was so downtrodden, it was hard to be able to pull any dreams out of her. She was barely making rent every month, trying to get to any food shelf she could and just scraping by needing to buy diapers for her daughter. When I heard she graduated, that made me want to come back the next day.

I go out to meet with all of the new referrals that are coming into our services, and in these meetings, I see parents who are completely new to the world of services. I talk to them about what services are available to their children, and their minds are blown. They didn't know that there are weekend respite programs that Reach offers that would allow their children to be away from home (sometimes for the first time). These glimmers of hope that I have helped to show parents makes me want to come back the next day.

Many of the staff who work in my department may not stay here for as long as I would like them to. There are many reasons for this. The work that they do is challenging, non-stop, and eye-opening to those who haven't seen the way that some of the people we work with live. However, the biggest reason that I see staff move to something else is this job helps them to realize who they are and what else they want to do to be able to further help people. Sure, that is a bummer for me, but it is also exciting. Within the last 3 months, I have written 8 letters of recommendation for higher education. While I still have these people and their talents here, they are growing and realizing their dreams of what they want to be able to achieve too. I'm excited to watch them grow into therapists, social workers, and lawyers.

So many of us focus on progress and what is the next thing to be able to conquer. I have found that sometimes to be able to see those things, we need to stop trying to make things happen and see what we have done and look at it from a different perspective. Little glimmers for others are progress, realizing that you can even have dreams is progress. It doesn't always have to be the big things on a checklist (although that feels good), sometimes just being in a supportive environment that believes in you is what is needed.