

Local case manager honored

Amanda Olson, a case manager with Functional Industries in Cokato, recently received a Direct Support Professional (DSP) Award from the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation (MOHR). The award was presented at the MOHR summer conference in St. Cloud.

The honor for “Enrichment Focus” recognizes individuals for exemplary work, skills, impact, and the “creation and implementation of innovative and proactive services” for people with disabilities.

One of Olson’s greatest skills is her ability to work with individuals who cannot verbalize their needs, explained Lori Benson, director of Waivered Services for Functional Industries. Putting person-centered plans into action, she thinks “outside the box” to form real and meaningful experiences for people, said Benson.

In between her Functional Industries work of a dozen years, collectively, Olson was a mental health specialist in the Army and was deployed to Iraq.

She’s noted by her supervisors for staying calm under pressure. Olson said the military and on-the-job training have helped.

“It’s definitely something you get better at with experience,” she said.

The award-winner joined Functional Industries right out of high school. She started as a job coach, became an assistant case manager, and worked in shipping and re-



Amanda Olson received a Direct Support Professional Award from Lynne Megan, representing the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation.

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ceiving.

Olson now manages a case-load of 36, and the Cokato facility. Some 90 percent of the people she serves work at the Cokato site.

Growing up, she learned from her brother, who has developmental disabilities and mental health issues. She said a lot of satisfaction comes from making a difference in people’s lives. She added, “It sounds so cliché, but I really think it was a calling.”

Award selection committee member Jim Clapper said he was struck by how dedicated all of the candidates are in serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

As a parent of an adult with disabilities, he saw lots of creativity, perseverance, and loving care.

Flexibility is crucial in the field, said Olson, as is creativity. In “making things happen,” there’s an acknowledgment that what works for one person is not always going to work for everybody else, she explained.

DSPs like Olson are at the core of community-based services for people with disabilities throughout Minnesota, according to MOHR. The organization has been advocating at the state level for DSP wage increases, so providers can better compete for quality employees.

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 with disabilities.

