WLN CONNECT: SPECIAL ISSUE





DSP & CSP Awareness Month

During DSP and CSP Awareness Month, we're celebrating the compassionate and dedicated WellLife professionals who build meaningful connections, support personal growth and make a difference in the lives of the people and families they serve.

> *Direct Support Professionals do more than provide care—they empower independence, protect dignity, and help people live meaningful lives every day.*

The People Behind the Difference: Celebrating WellLife's DSPs and CSPs

In September, we recognize the value and efforts of our Direct Support and Child Support Professionals. We shine a light on the people who show up every day with patience, compassion, creativity, and heart.

As one of the region's largest nonprofit health and human services organizations, WellLife Network has more than 1,600 employees working across more than 100 locations throughout New York City and Long Island. But meaningful change often happens in moments that never make headlines. A goal is reached, a young person is heard, a new skill is learned, or simply a familiar face shows up because someone is counting on them.

For the people we support, DSPs and CSPs are more than employees. They are trusted faces, advocates, teachers, problem solvers, mentors, and often, like family. We asked several WellLife team members what keeps them coming back to this work. Their answers reveal a common thread: this is work powered by relationships.

For **Tina Wynn**, an Assistant Habilitation Specialist in WellLife's Astoria Day Habilitation program, those relationships have changed the way she sees the world.

> *"I learn from them daily."*

Tina says the people she supports communicate in ways that require her to adapt and see things differently. The smallest moments of connection can mean the most, like knowing someone understood what she said through a gesture or expression.

"You have to have a heart for it," she says. *"You got to be patient and attentive. Be understanding."*

Over time, those connections become family. *"They're used to seeing me; it's a familiarized face every day,"* Tina says. *"It becomes family oriented."*

That sense of family is shared by **Beverley James**, an Assistant Habilitation Specialist who began at WellLife in 2002. *"I call the house to see how they are doing,"* Beverley says. *"We have that bond."*

For **Carmetta Dean**, an Assistant Habilitation Specialist in Astoria, that bond is what brings her to work each day. After more than 32 years, the people she supports have taught her lessons she carries with her.

> *"Everybody can make a difference. Everybody can learn and grow. You're never too old."*



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Her message is simple: *"You have to love what you do."*

Bernice Smith, an Assistant Habilitation Specialist who has been at WellLife for almost 20 years, finds joy in the unexpected moments. Music, in particular, helps create connection.

> *"If we go way back and play old music, they know all the words."*

For Bernice, those moments bring people together. *"We feel like we're a family,"* she says. *"Come together, sit down and talk about things."*

Yamilee Megie Lattin, an Assistant Habilitation Specialist who has spent 10 years in Astoria, says she loves helping people work toward their goals and watching them grow.

> *"Seeing them do something they haven't been able to do and watch them grow."*

Yamilee also wants others to remember that disability does not define a person's ability to understand or feel. *"Just because they are disabled doesn't mean they don't understand, they have feelings."*



Her advice to anyone considering this work is simple: *"Come with your heart opened."*

That same commitment extends to WellLife's work with young people. For **Tinekia Lewis**, a CSP who has been with WellLife for 27 years and works in Setauket and Manorville, the kids are what keep her here.

> *"It's really just the kids, I really enjoy what I do."*



Tinekia describes her role as helping bridge the gap between young people and their families, while recognizing that *"every kid is different"* and *"what works for one may not work for another."*

For **Shaniece Wheeler**, a CSP in Dix Hills, the heart of the job is hope.

> *"What I love about being a CSP is that you get to provide hope to children."*

Shaniece believes showing up matters. She also emphasizes teamwork, empathy, and understanding, and points to the success of a young person who recently moved on to college after struggling a year earlier.

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"She calls us frequently to give us updates," Shaniece says. *"It's such a big reward."*

For **Melanie Ghauri**, a CSP in Manorville who has been with WellLife for about four years, the work has brought its own growth.

> *"I've grown, and I've really had to journey through having empathy and compassion."*

Melanie says being part of young people's lives is an honor. *"We make an impact, I don't take that for granted."*

Across WellLife, these DSPs and CSPs describe work grounded in patience, empathy, listening, teamwork, resilience, and growth. Most of all, they talk about relationships.

Progress does not always happen in a dramatic moment. Sometimes it is a new skill, a completed goal, a step toward independence, or simply being the familiar face waiting when someone walks through the door.



During this time, and always, WellLife Network celebrates the dedicated professionals who show up, listen, adapt, advocate, and care, often quietly, always personally, and with the understanding that every person has the ability to learn, grow, and move forward.

As Carmetta reminds us:

> *"Everybody can make a difference. Everybody can learn and grow. You're never too old."*

And perhaps that is the greatest lesson of all: when you help someone move forward, you move forward, too.





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