

## Longevity at Mainstream Living



Living. This environment results in many staff coming to work for us a second time or in a new position of responsibility.

My own journey with Mainstream Living started May 19th 1980. I was going to Drake University and had plans to become an attorney. Along the way, I had met the love of my life (Veronica) and was engaged to be married in July. After the wedding we would be moving to Ames and to attend school at Iowa State University. In short, I needed to find a job in Ames to help cover expenses!

The first time I applied for a job at Mainstream in Ames, I did not get hired, but with Veronica's encouragement, I interviewed in Des Moines and was very glad to be hired. For \$3.10 an hour I worked Wednesday and Saturday evenings and overnights at a home that served six children. My first day was a breeze spent playing board games and getting the kids ready for bed. They were angels.

Saturday, my second day on the job, was a bit more eye-opening. Another staff person warned me about a boy named Tony who needed to be watched closely so he didn't run off. She left to run some errands with some of the other kids and left me with the boys. Shortly after she left, Tony took off out the front door. I left to chase him and very quickly realized the boys had a plan – Tony had ran back into the house and they locked the door – leaving me outside. So, I stood with my hands on my hips and did my best impression of my mother, "You boys better open that door – right now or you will be in BIG trouble!" It was dead silent for a minute

and then....click, the door unlocked.

It was embarrassing but humbling. Those boys taught me a lot. I learned more about myself in those first few days than I could have possibly imagined. Fast forward through 42 years - college, two degrees, various leadership positions and my current role as President and CEO. I have stayed because of my relationships with the members and their families, and my fellow staff and their families. Mainstream Living has been a home for me and my family. Both of my sons worked for Mainstream Living, and they grew up going to Mainstream Living's picnics, and events. And, I have had the pleasure of watching many of our members grow up as well. In fact, one of those guys that locked me out of the house is still with us, and we still laugh about that day.

Many who work for Mainstream did so intentionally while others happily stumbled upon their purpose and personal meaning through this job. This edition of our newsletter is focuses on a few of our employees and their perspective on those questions. As supporters, we hope you'll join us in our recruitment efforts as we work to find other who want to work in this field or who just might be looking for something different but very special.

Thank you,

William Vaughn  
President/CEO

Like every provider in our industry, Mainstream living is challenged to hire and maintain enough qualified staff to meet our mission. Our greatest challenge is recruiting new Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) in this very competitive and difficult labor market. Despite our ongoing staff shortages, we have been blessed with outstanding staff longevity. We recently examined staff longevity and found that one in ten people at Mainstream Living has worked for Mainstream Living 20 years or more.

Our members and families appreciate the continuity of our care and the long-term relationships and friendships that have developed over the years. Many (employees and families alike) have commented on the family- like atmosphere of Mainstream

Mainstream Living

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## Educational Grants 2022

Each year, the Mainstream Living Board of Directors awards \$5000 in educational grants to employees or their dependents to use in pursuing their higher education goals. This year's recipients are, Alexandra Miner, Allison Berstler, Emma Schuler, Jolyn McCalley, and Kirsten Hetland. Awardees are recognized at a luncheon celebration with members of the leadership team and board in attendance.

Pictured (from left to right): Bill Vaughn (President/CEO), David Tucker (board member), Emma Schuler (award recipient), Kirsten Hetland (award recipient), Kris Eastman (COO), Alissa McKinney (board member). Not pictured – Alexandra Miner, Allison Berstler, and Jolyn McCalley.



## Denny Hoyt, Direct Support Professional (Retired)

Being part of the Mainstream team was a remarkable twenty-year experience. Remarkable for what I learned and how I matured, remarkable even for how long I stayed on! Prior to coming here, I was in short-term appointments, soft money positions, contractual work, and a few start-up projects that went well but grew beyond my abilities.

The example and grace of Jesus, who made time for adults and children with disabilities and illnesses and helped them with their concerns, was the heart-shaping influence that sustained me as the father of a son with severe disabilities and health condition for many years. Chris put a torch to bad weeds—my over-concern with intelligence and achievement and looking good, to say only a few—and planted better seeds.

With Chris, I discovered the challenge and joy of bonding with a unique, even mysterious, person. My respect for the worth and dignity of individuals, regardless of ability, deepened. I regarded Chris as an image-bearer and member of my family and community, and as such had a claim upon my time and affection. My regard and his claim, and the curiosity he sparked for understanding others, all factored in my openness to knowing and supporting the men and women we serve. Those give-and-take relationships filled my cup and taught me to listen and be kind and patient and many good things.

I had the privilege of teaming up with wise and caring parents who were my coaches and cheerleaders. Balancing the duty to provide oversight with the obligation to respect and support independence and privacy is no easy thing. Parents who've learned that balance are valuable resources not to be overlooked.

I enjoyed my frontline co-workers who were rarely anything but engaging, energetic and reliable. My supervisors consistently gave the support I needed but allowed the independence I wanted. To those with office doors where I might appear suddenly at any moment, thank you allowing the interruptions and making time to



listen to my updates and occasional concerns.

I like to brag about Mainstream. An excellent place to shed bias, learn to care for others, be on a team with people doing worthwhile things, and even gain practical skills like cooking, grocery shopping, and cleaning. Oh, how much my wife has loved my new skills! Flexibility of hours is high on my list of favorite things. Being able to get lots of hours in a short time and to change up my schedule from full-time to part-time, and to have a say in where I worked—that flexibility kept things from getting routine and afforded me time and energy to pursue my other interests.

Mainstream always seemed to me, I don't know the right term, a humble organization? By humble, I mean a flat organization with few levels, where hierarchy and advancement up the food chain aren't all-important; where the "suits" wear jeans and think like frontline staff because that's where they began; where anyone can go to senior staff with their questions and issues, where loyalty is shown both to staff and those served over a very long time; and where, if there's any thought of changing the world, it's pursued one person at a time with small acts of kindness.

## "What is the best thing about working at Mainstream Living?"

Each year, Mainstream Living conducts an employee survey. The results help us analyze our strengths and identify areas of opportunity in recruitment and retention.

This year's survey was expanded as we looked to dig a little deeper into our culture. Here are just a few of our favorite responses to the question, "What is the best thing about working at Mainstream Living?"

- "I have gotten the opportunity to build so many connections with some of the greatest people."
- "Satisfaction and pride for what I do to help clients and staff."
- "I feel the job challenges me to be a better employee and to be a better person."
- "The ability to make a tangible difference in people's lives."
- "I feel like I belong and have been given the confidence that I'm doing a good job assisting others to live their best lives."
- "I get to work with people from all walks of life, perspectives, and beliefs. When we can all work together in light of our many differences to reach a common goal, it is deeply inspiring to me."
- "Mainstream is like my second family."
- "Job security, a sense of belonging, and making positive impact in people's lives."
- "As a person-centered agency, we foster a nice environment of people who care about others and get things done with practicality and a sense of humor."
- "On top of having taught me so much about what I do, it feels like a family. And I've never felt as valued as an employee as I do here.."
- "I love my job because I love the members. I feel rewarded to be a part of their lives.."
- "Being able to create bonds with the members and seeing the joy on their face when I'm working."

## Sara Sampson, Direct Support Professional



Prior to starting at Mainstream Living, Sara was doing janitorial work, but found that something was missing. She began working for another organization that provided services to individuals with mental illness. That organization unfortunately went out of business and Sara quickly realized she was lost without what she considered "her people." While shopping in Walmart one day, a young man who happened to be a Mainstream Living

member approached her and said, "if you are looking for a job come to Mainstream." She paused briefly and decided that the opportunity in front of her was meant to be. As she watched the member head off with his Mainstream Living staff member, she said "thanks kiddo" and went home to apply for a job.

Sara was hired as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) and says she loved the job on day one. It was everything she had been missing. Five years later, Sara's passion for the job is obvious and she remarks that it's "a fire inside her." She has remained at Mainstream Living because of the relationships she has built with the members and their guardians. Sara loves that she learns something new every day and sees the culture as compassionate, determined and full of life.

When asked if she has a favorite memory, she recalls the birthday of a member who was a huge Marvel fan. Sara invited "Batman" to his party as a surprise and the feeling she had when seeing his reaction affirmed her desire to positively impact others.

Sara loves that she is able to play a role in Mainstream's mission to enhance opportunities, create success, and fulfill dreams. Although Sara says she is just one piece in helping members achieve their goals and dreams, she is grateful for her role. "Mainstream Living is a gift and I am thankful that I am a part of the company," says Sara.

## Tsolo Lebepe, Assistant Team Leader

While attending college, Tsolo Lebepe began working for Mainstream Living, providing direct care to members. The job allowed him flexibility so that he could work while also attending class. He worked for the organization for 6 years. Over a decade later, in 2017, Tsolo returned to Mainstream, remembering the flexibility that was offered. He quickly learned, however that there were opportunities for growth and development within the organization – both professionally and personally.

Today Tsolo is an Assistant Team Leader for our 11-bed Residential Care Facility for Persons with Mental Illness (RCF-PMI). In this role, he provides support to members with chronic and persistent mental illness while also assisting in the supervision of direct care staff. He notes that he has changed and learned a lot about himself in these last five years. His leadership style has evolved within himself and is applied to the members he supports. Tsolo says that he works to look at the big picture and try to identify what life is like for the member. This has required him to change his mentality from he thinks is important and shift to putting himself in someone else's shoes. He says this has helped him to slow down and "smell the flower" which has been beneficial in assisting others with their own goals and objectives.

Tsolo specifically remembers a time when he was working with a member to manage their own medications rather than relying on staff. He not only spent time educating the member on the importance of consistent medication, but used repetition

exercises to help remember the timing of the medications. He found that correlating medication with other healthy habits and self-care was more effective at empowering the member. He continues to use these same technique with others who struggle with medication management, knowing that breaking things down in a way that the member understands leads to greater success.

While Tsolo still appreciates the flexibility that Mainstream Living offers, he has reflected on his time and recognizes how the job has helped him grow. "It has given me a better understanding of one's thoughts and actions and how they impact their environment," says Tsolo. Though the work can be challenging, he values the time he spends teaching and demonstrating all while providing members access to what is true to them. "Finding shared values or identifying values that one can embrace is important."

