

# DISABLED CITIZENS ALLIANCE FOR INDEPENDENCE

Winter & Spring NEWSLETTER 2022/2023

*Serving Crawford, Dent, Iron, Reynolds and Washington Counties*



## THEY SAID I WOULDN'T MAKE IT

It doesn't seem possible that my 10 year anniversary working for DCAI was October 16. I can remember clearly my first few days working as the Executive Director. I stayed in the local motel for the first two weeks until I could rent a home. The motel was connected to the restaurant in Viburnum. This worked perfect for my transition moving from St. Charles, Missouri. Many of the locals referred to me as a city guy coming to the country. I had never been to Viburnum until I came here for a job interview. No one knew that I had grown up in a rural community in Northwest Missouri and wanted to move back to the country.

This was a huge change for DCAI and myself. I knew that I wanted to return to the country life after spending 34 years living in several cities with my previous employer. I started my first day not knowing any of the employees or individuals that lived in this community except the Board of Directors that I had interviewed with twice. I enjoyed eating breakfast and dinner at the restaurant listening to the locals talk about this blind man that came to work for DCAI. Many of them had an opinion on whether I would or could do the job. I remember one man saying, they will steal him blind because he won't be able to see them. This small community was all in a buzz with no one knowing me or knowing what I would be like. I would just smile as I heard the conversations talking about me.

I spent several days listening to the DCAI employees and the community member's suggestions on what changes were needed to turn DCAI around. There were some good ideas but many of the comments were way out there. I would sit in the motel in the evenings and just laugh at some of the wild allegations on past behaviors and fears. I know that the individuals that shared these comments with me truly believed what they were telling me. I had spent 30 years in management before taking on the role of Executive Director. My experience clearly helped me sift through what was true and what wasn't. I knew that I needed to earn their respect and trust while dispelling all the fears. I was determined that things would be better with some hard work. The DCAI management team immediately worked to change almost every procedure, policy, and the environment in our work place. The major challenge was

getting the employees to trust and respect one another. The small community had spent years and years of developing opinions and making judgements of each other.

The first several years were extremely tough. Some of the individuals had decided they didn't like me from day one. The main reason was that I wouldn't immediately accept their views and opinions. I realized that I was going to be watched closely to see how I was going to behave and the decisions that I would be making. I launched a major effort to meet individuals in the community while getting involved in the community events. It became very clear that some individuals were not going to support the changes we had to make. My role and actions as Executive Director immediately caused reactions in the community. I learned quickly that every employee had many close friends and relatives. We had to let some employees go due to poor performance or they decided that they no longer wanted to work for DCAI. I quickly learned that I was under a microscope even when I attended church. I had a conversation with some of the pastors and agreed that I wouldn't cause them any more drama by attending their church. Some of the individuals that had concerns with my actions were long time members. I never wanted to cause harm to a church because of the changes we had to make at DCAI.

I had lost my job after 34 years and I wanted to find another job where I could make a difference. I left my previous job on January 25, 2012 and didn't start working for DCAI until October 16, 2012. After several months of not working, I was thrilled to get an opportunity to move to Viburnum. I had a lot of time to think and pray about the job I wanted. I decided to step out in faith and come to Viburnum not knowing anyone. Some individuals told me as a blind man I had no business just up and moving and especially going somewhere I had never been. I viewed this as a great opportunity and challenge. I had dreamed for years of returning to the country and purchasing a small farm. I was extremely excited about going back to work and the potential to live my dreams. I am so thankful that God and the DCAI Board of Directors gave me the opportunity to move here. I have always liked doing things that others say I can't accomplish. I am planning on spending the rest of my life in this community. I have purchased 96 acres, built a home and buildings, cleared my land and made pastures, built fences, and now have 49 head of cattle. My mother and sister moved here in November 2014. My mother has passed but Rita has made a home out on the farm with me. I love my life and plan on continuing to work for DCAI for many more years.

It doesn't seem like it has been 10 years since I moved here. Yes there have been many difficult times and challenges, but there have been hundreds of good memories of every step we have taken. The work has been hard and stressful at times but we can't expect things to change without major effort. The hard work has made me appreciate where DCAI and my personal life are today. Some individuals still don't care for me but I won't let them change my focus. The Good Lord never promised that life would be all peaches and cream.

To all of those that said I would never make it, I am still here! Ten years is only part of my life, so get prepared for many more. I love the potential of making many more changes that will carry DCAI into the future as a successful organization. We want to serve our communities, individuals with disabilities, children, and those in need. I have made many good friends and working relationships in the last 10 years. I have come to realize that I will never make everyone happy but must focus on fulfilling our mission and purpose of DCAI. I know that I am not perfect and if I make an error it will be due to trying to make a difference.

I have appreciated all the prayers and efforts of everyone that has helped me make this home. The Board of Directors, management team, and employees, I wish to thank you for working with me to implement all the changes and make our Organization successful. I realize that you have been judged by friends and family on your role in implementing all the necessary changes. I hope you have received great joy, like I have, these last 10 years.

I plan on continuing to work at least another 8 years here at DCAI. I will never sell my farm and will have cattle until the last days of my life. I will continue to see that DCAI fulfills its mission and purpose. We will help individuals with disabilities live their lives independently in the community of their choice and every child gets the help they need. These are some of my personal goals that I want to share with you. I encourage you to set some challenging personal goals as well. Accomplishing your goals will give you confidence and the courage to bring about your personal dreams. In my opinion, quitting is never an option. Sometimes we just need to take another course of action from our original plan.

I encourage every individual to get out and vote. The last few years we have faced huge inflation, increases in the interest rates and gas prices, declines in the value of stocks and bonds, and lack of individuals wanting to work. Yes these are huge challenges but none of these should prevent you from accomplishing your goals and dreams. I know that I am willing to make the effort to turn our country around. I believe in each of you and hope you realize your dreams. I want you to find joy like I have!

Please join me in establishing a life of happiness. Remember it is hard work but worth every hill that you must climb.

Dr. Dennis W. Atkins  
October 2022

## DOING WHAT IS RIGHT

This article is a follow-up to my last article. In the last article, I shared some of the things that occurred in my first ten years living in Viburnum and serving as the Executive Director of Disabled Citizens Alliance For Independence. Living in a small community and serving as the head of a company has been a learning experience. For years, I have said to others focus on what you can control and forget about the things you can't.

After a few years of hard work and staying the course, DCAI has developed a more positive work environment. Having a positive work environment helps individuals find satisfaction and joy in doing their jobs. It is so nice to hear laughter and joy throughout our entire building now. Some may not realize that just focusing on doing what is right and focusing on the positive has made the difference. I wish to thank everyone for their hard work and efforts, because of you DCAI is a better place.

One day out running, the Good Lord put it in my heart and mind to start focusing on doing what was right and believing that our efforts would help more people in the community. This was clearly what I did. Now I am so much happier personally and our Organization has been able to do some amazing things for our community.

In my personal life, I had to learn early to not let the views of others cause me to give up. I was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa at 23 years of age. I was told that this would lead to blindness. Of course, I was shaken up about this and concerned on how I was going to live the rest of my life. The Good Lord gave me strength and the courage to put my worries behind me. It hasn't been easy but today I don't even give it any thought of being blind. My focus is on continuing to live my life to the fullest. The result is that I am happier than I have ever been. I realize that having the faith, believing in my abilities, and focusing on doing the right things has given me great confidence and joy. I want this for all of you! Happiness and joy!

I am hopeful that you can find joy and happiness like I have. I have made many mistakes in my life, but I haven't made the huge mistake of giving up or quitting. Many times it takes a lot of prayer, research, and effort to determine what is the right thing to do. We all need to be willing to take another course of action if the one we chose isn't producing the results we hoped for. The main focus is seeing that we make things better. The more success we have the more faith and confidence we



gain. Accomplishing what we set out to do makes us feel good and not afraid to change something else in the future.

My faith has allowed me to not be afraid to pursue my dreams. I know that I have shared several times about wanting to move to the country and purchase my own farm. It took over 50 years for my dream in owning a farm and having cattle to come true. The interesting thing is, over that 50 years, I always believed in my spirit that this would come true. It took 3 years from the time I bought my first few acres to build a house, buildings, fences, sow grass, and have everything to get my first 5 heifers. It took 2 years after I bought my second farm to clear the land, build fences, and sow grass before I could put cattle on it.

Truthfully, I was 5 years old when I started dreaming about owning my own farm. I am 67 years old. It has taken 62 years to get me where I am now. I don't want to discourage anyone but it takes a series of doing the right things to make dreams come true. Praying, believing, stepping out in faith, overcoming all the challenges, not listening to the Naysayers, overcoming fear, and never giving into the spirit of quitting to attain the level of happiness and joy that I have now.

Life isn't easy but being willing to work hard and doing the right things greatly increases your chances of success. I don't have all the answers and could spend days telling you about the mistakes I have made. The key is to forget about those mistakes and take a course of action that won't produce the same results. So many of us just won't forget the mistakes and just live over and over the heart aches. I have learned to ask for forgiveness and to admit my wrong doings to God and those that have suffered from my mistakes. Once I have asked for forgiveness, I set out to do things the right way. It is amazing how I can think clearer and the success that has come about. Realizing success will give you a real sense of accomplishment, happiness, and confidence to pursue your dreams.

I believe that each of you can find great success in your lives. First of all, we need to forget the past. Having a fresh start and outlook will clear our heart, mind, and spirit to help us identify what are the right things to do. I hope that I have given you the desire to pursue happiness and joy like I am experiencing.

I have been truly blessed! We can all experience true joy in life. Just close your eyes and let your heart, mind, and spirit take over like they do in me. Many times we

let the gift of sight block all of our other senses. I have a great advantage over you in that this is the only way I can see. The future can be beautiful. Let's do the right things and make our lives full of happiness and joy.

Now that will be amazing!

Dr. Dennis W. Atkins

November 2022



## EXPERTS OF CDS, IN HOME, ISS, & VETERAN SERVICES

We care about you.  
Being the best, for the best.

### DCAI & FOUNDATION OFFICE

Viburnum, MO

573-244-5402 | 866-844-3316  
dcai.us

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Effective October 1, 2022  
Paying your  
caregivers up  
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# ALLOW US TO INTRODUCE ....

## Our DCAI Foundation In-Home/ISS Program

### Director, Tamara Gill.

Tamara began at DCAI Foundation as a nurse working in clients homes rendering various nursing services, which she greatly enjoyed. She is very passionate about working closely with our clients to establish a positive, trusting, and supportive network to empower them to accomplish their life goals and be the best version of themselves.

She has been married for 26 years and they have three amazing children together, as well as one grandchild whom they love spending quality time with every chance they get. When not spending time with her family, she enjoys being outdoors or playing the piano and singing. Tamara is also a member of the praise and worship team at her church.



(left) **Angie Jimmerson is our CDS Program Director.** She has been employed at DCAI for 20 years and has held several different positions within the CDS Department. She enjoys seeing the bonds that are created between consumers and staff and how the consumers become part of the DCAI family. On her own time Angie enjoys spending time with her family or doing anything outdoors.



(right) **Summer Brooks, our CDS Payroll Supervisor.** Summer has been employed at DCAI since 2008 where she started as a Payroll Data Entry Specialist, entering attendant time sheets, and later serving as our Payroll Tax Agent processing consumers taxes on their behalf. Summer and her husband Tim have been married for 17 years and have 3 children; Hannah, Gabriel, and Jolene. She attends church at the First Baptist Church in Viburnum where she also serves on the Financial Committee. In her free time she enjoys camping, playing board/card games, playing music and singing, watching her children play sports and spending time with family.



DCAI PRESENTS

June

19-23

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION & TO REGISTER : 573-244-3038**

**Ages: 16-21 and returning back to school in fall of 2023**

# **IRON COUNTY C-4 JAYPACK PROGRAM**

I realize that the last 4 years have been very difficult for all of us, but especially for low income families. DCAI became the Community Sponsor for the Iron County C4 Jay Pack Program in January 2013. We have partnered with the school district and community to start this program and now we are in the 11<sup>th</sup> school year. The need to feed our children on the weekends during the school year has seen the number of children grow from 20 to 56 currently with the average cost per child per school year at \$500.

As you can see, the need has grown significantly over the 11 year period. Iron County School District determines the number of children eligible each year based on the family's income level. The challenges with COVID and the huge rise in inflation has caused it to be more difficult for families in our community to feed their children. Proper nutrition is critical for a child to learn, their health, and development.

It is time for me to step up and help our Fund Raising Committee to raise money for the Jay Pack Program. For years, I ran a mile for each child and encouraged individuals to pledge an amount they could give or sponsor a child for an entire year. The last time that I have ask for donations was in 2018. I have greatly appreciated all of you that have helped in the past. It is now time to ask again for help to continue the Jay Pack Program.

I have retired my running shoes except for running a mile or two a few times a week. In March, I am going to put on my walking shoes to play a part in raising the money necessary for the Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 school year. I am going to walk 5 minutes for all 56 children which will be 4 hours and 40 minutes. I plan to walk on two different days in March on the high school track to reach my goal. My walk will have no scheduled event for these days. I plan to walk alone and reflect on the joy of helping our children. Completing my goal will again give me so much joy and happiness in that I can again help raise money for those in need.

I have decided to sponsor a child personally for the school year. I would love for you to sponsor a child along with me. Many of you may not be able to donate \$500 but you could give \$20, \$50, \$100, or an amount that you can. Every dollar that we can raise will 100% will go to the Jay Pack Program. You will receive great joy for playing a key role in seeing our children are not hungry.

DCAI wants to make it easy for you to donate to the Iron County C4 Jay Pack Program electronically or through the mail. Below is the information you will need to donate through

whichever option is best for you.

Make checks payable to:

DCAI

PO Box 675

Viburnum, MO 65566

You may give online through Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/donate/2544821912338286/>.

Did you also know every time you shop on Walmart.com you can automatically round up your change to the nearest dollar and donate it? When you roundup at checkout, all that spare change will go towards funding the Iron County C-4 JayPack Program. Click directly on the link <https://www.walmart.com/.../895df51d-bcc5-4d96.../profile>.

We can also accept payment over the phone (573) 244-5402 or 866-844-3316.

I wish to thank all of you that have help feed our children. I am glad you can share in the joy of giving.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dennis W. Atkins



### **DCAI DONATES CHECK FOR IRON COUNTY C-4 CLASSROOMS**

For the last three years DCAI has been fortunate enough to supply the entire Iron County C-4 School District with school supplies. Along with the supplies, DCAI was able to provide each teacher with \$200 in 2020-2021 and \$100 in 2022 to use for resources within their classrooms.

Pictured left to right: Elementary Principal; Michelle Merseal, Education Supervisor; Ashley Hampton, High School Principal; Jaime Missey, DCAI CEO; Dr. Dennis Atkins, Superintendent ; Adam Portell and IL Director; Kelly Eaton.



# FULL CIRCLE OF CARE

Stephanie Davis was recently approved for Consumer Directed Services through DCAI, however, her journey with the center is far from just beginning. She served as an attendant for 19 years. Stephanie began working as an attendant through DCAI in 2002, where she had been employed with more than 40 consumers. Stephanie loved helping others. She was passionate about ensuring individuals with disabilities had the choice to remain independent in their homes and inclusive within the community. I met Stephanie in 2007 when I became a case manager for her in-laws. She put in many personal care service hours for consumers in which she was employed.

In 2009, Stephanie and her mother-in-law attended a rally against Medicaid cuts at Jefferson City. As thousands of people filled the rotunda of the capital chanting “Medicaid Makes Cents” Stephanie boldly took the podium and advocated for individuals with disability and the elderly residents. She delivered life experience, success stories of the program and the effects the cuts of 2005 had on her loved ones.

After major health concerns, Stephanie had to retire from attendant care in 2021. She began having mini strokes and vertigo brought severe unsteadiness. Her doctor was fearful if she didn’t quit, she was in jeopardy of a major stroke. November of 2022, Stephanie became a consumer of DCAI. After many years of caring for others, she now is in need of services herself.

Pictured below is Stephanie (middle), with her case manager when she was an attendant - Kelly Eaton (far left) and her case manager now as a consumer - Carol Barton (on right).

Stephanie reports, “I love your company. You’ve done so much for me and my family. Without your comfort I couldn’t have got up there that day at the capital”

Stephanie enjoys shooting pool and taking rides on her Trike Motorcycle.

Kelly Eaton  
IL Program Director







Spring is here! Monday, March 20, marks the first day of spring. With the start of a new season comes a fresh opportunity to save energy and money. Below are some helpful tips to improve the energy efficiency and comfort of your home as temperatures warm up.

1. **Service your air conditioner.** Easy maintenance such as routinely replacing or cleaning air filters can lower your cooling system's energy consumption by up to 15 percent.
2. **Open windows.** Opening windows creates a cross-wise breeze, allowing you to naturally cool your home without switching on air conditioners.
3. **Use ceiling fans.** Cooling your home with ceiling fans will allow you to raise your thermostat four degrees.
4. **Cook outside.** On warmer spring days, keep the heat out of your home by using an outdoor grill instead of indoor ovens.
5. **Install window treatments.** Installing blinds, shades, curtains and films can reduce rising temperatures as weather gets warmer.
6. **Caulk air leaks.** Using low-cost caulk to seal cracks and openings in your home keeps warm air out.
7. **Bring in sunlight.** During daylight hours, turn off lights and windows to brighten your home.
8. **Set the thermostat.** On warm days, setting a programmable thermostat to a higher setting when you are not at home can help reduce your energy costs by approximately 10%.
9. **Seal ducts.** Sealing and insulating ducts can go a long way toward lowering your electricity bills. Air loss through ducts can lead to nearly 30% of a cooling system's energy consumption.
10. **Turn on bathroom fans.** Bathroom fans suck out heat and humidity from your home.

<https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/articles/10-energy-saving-tips-spring>



## **INTRODUCING OUR NEW LOGO!!**

**DCAI has a new look! Don't worry, we're still offering all the same excellent Independent Living services, just as we've done since 1980, but we have a fresh new look! Be looking for the new envelopes and letterheads to arrive in your mail with our new logo.**



**P.O. Box 706; Viburnum, Mo 65566**

**Phone: 573-244-5510, Fax: 573-244-5512**

**Toll Free: 1-855-391-4488**

### **\*\*Weekend & Holiday Differential\*\***

DCAI Foundation is accepting applications for Part-Time In-Home and Individualized Support Service Care Aides in Washington, Dent, Reynolds, Iron, Crawford and St. Francois counties.

Must be at least 18 years of age;

Be able to read, write and follow directions; AND

Have at least six (6) months paid experience as an agency homemaker OR at least one year paid or unpaid experience caring for children or for sick or aged individuals.

Pre-employment background screening performed. Qualified applicants may call or complete an application at the office or visit our website at [www.dcai.us](http://www.dcai.us) or find us on Facebook.

DCAI Foundation/Employment. EOE