

PARENT/CAREGIVER AWARD WINNERS

Kimberly and Wendy

Mr. Fred Rogers was once quoted as saying, "The media shows the tiniest percentage of what people do. There are millions and millions of people doing wonderful things all over the world, and they're generally not the ones being touted in the news." Although the media may not be broadcasting about the kind hearted heroes in our community and all throughout the globe, I would like to personally thank LISHA for the opportunity for me to share the story of an incredible human being that I am blessed to know. Her name is Kimberly.

Kimberly is a wonderful speech language pathologist and former colleague of mine. She is one of the kindest, most selfless, generous, and loving people that I have had the pleasure of knowing. I am nominating her for LISHA's Parent/Caregiver Award because of the time, love, dedication, and expenses that she put into being the primary caretaker for her late sister, Wendy. Wendy battled cancer for over 10 years and then suffered a massive stroke inhibiting her ability to speak, swallow, and function independently. Kimberly stood by Wendy's side and provided the most exceptional care for her while displaying incredible patience and compassion.

Kimberly would stop at nothing to do whatever was needed to improve Wendy's communication skills. Using her expertise in the field of speech language pathology, she created picture cards and a communication board for her sister when she was no longer able to communicate verbally. Furthermore, since Wendy still demonstrated the ability to point and gesture, Kimberly would walk around the house with her until she was able to point to what it was that she wanted when she began to express any sense of frustration. Kimberly was also in consistent communication with the various nurses, doctors, speech, occupational, and physical therapists that Wendy worked with in rehab and then at home. She worked alongside them to provide whatever was needed for Wendy which also eventually included a feeding tube when she was no longer able to or permitted to eat by mouth.

Sadly, Wendy passed away from the complications of cancer and her stroke, yet Kimberly continues to provide both financial and emotional support for her wonderful niece Wendy's daughter, Alyssa. Kimberly is financially responsible for supporting her family and at that time paid for medical expenses and the necessary care that insurance didn't cover. In order to make such payments, Kimberly worked two jobs and continues to work both jobs to this day. She is a full time school based speech language pathologist and also works in Early Intervention after school hours and on weekends. Despite the burdens on Kimberly's shoulders, she also continues to be an incredible speech language pathologist who puts time, effort, energy, and love into planning engaging and interactive sessions for the babies and children on her caseload.

Mother Theresa was once quoted as saying, Love begins by taking care of the closest ones, the ones at home. My friend, Kimberly, is the perfect example of someone who is able to share her heart with others by showing her love to her family, students, clients, and on a personal level to her friends. I am lucky enough to be one of them.

Sherryl Ann and Neil

I am nominating Sherryl Ann and Neil, the loving parents of Neil, for the LISHA Parent/Caregiver Award. Neil is a friendly, young man who is 26 years old, who was diagnosed with Autism. I met Neil when he was attending school at Nassau BOCES Rosemary Kennedy School. While I never worked directly with Neil during his time at Rosemary Kennedy School, he was in a few classrooms where I serviced other students, so I was able to get to know him. After Neil graduated from Rosemary Kennedy, his parents, knowing that communication was vital to his continued success, decided to seek out a speech language pathologist to work with him privately. I am very honored to be the one that his parents chose to work with him.

Neil's parents have always been involved in every step of his schooling and his adult placements after graduation. They are dedicated to helping him learn and navigate his environment throughout the community. Neil is never excluded

from anything that the family is doing. They encourage him to be involved in every aspect of life. From preparing meals in the kitchen independently to meal planning and shopping for the required items. I see Neil in his home on Monday afternoons. Sherryl Ann and Neil are always prepared for me with a stack of printed photos from the prior weeks activities. These help to provide information for Neil to communicate about with me. Together we use these photos to answer questions, work on concepts such as before and after, and to comment. As always, I encourage Neil to use complete sentences when responding even though he continues to try to get away with single words. Neils parents have always been present for our sessions and they incorporate the same techniques I use when they are conversing with him. At times, if they are having concerns over something regarding Neil and his communication, they will be prepared to let me know what they would like help working on. They are always looking to improve his communication and his functioning in the community around him.

When Covid shut down the world, Neil began to regress in his skills after some time of just being home. Once things started to open back up, the Lutchmans reached out to me to see if I would be willing to start coming to their house again to work with Neil, with all precautions in place. It was important to them to provide Neil with a little bit of normalcy to help ease his anxiety about the way the world was functioning. Sherryl Ann and Neil always have Neils best interests in mind and having him participate in speech therapy at that time was one step towards his continued success.

Sherryl Ann and Neil. have always been so appreciative of all the assistance that Neils various providers and teachers have given him though out the years. But it is their dedication and involvement that has made things easier for us and has improved Neils life. They truly show their love and support for both Neil and his younger brother Riccardo. For these reasons. I feel they are deserving of the LISHA Parent/Caregiver Award this year.