



STAFF

Spotlight

Amanda Nelson, Supervisor

Amanda is a case management supervisor for North and Northwest Indiana. Amanda provides case management for FSW and CIH Waivers.



What led you to the social service field?

My first “real” job out of college was as a Correctional Counselor in an adult men’s facility. I learned that I am a strong advocate. I also learned that it is important to me that all individuals have access to the skills and resources that they need to succeed. It is easy to judge a person by the worst day of their life. It is much harder to identify the factors that led to it and the establish the resources and strength it takes to move forward.

What is a random fact about yourself?

I have over 40 pairs of glasses. (Not including sunglasses)

What do you love most about your job?

I love that the dynamic changes daily. I also enjoy working with individuals as they recognize and identify their strengths!

Tell us a favorite pastime you enjoy?

My current obsession is heirloom tomatoes! Our home garden is primarily different varieties of tomatoes. The best variety name last summer was the Electric Dwarf Pinky. We drive to Michigan to pick up seeds and starts. The trip is about 8 hours round trip, but the best part is the road trip with my family. During COVID, we randomly came across a socially distanced jazz concert at the University of Michigan/Flint. It was a mobile jazz trailer and we got to dance in the parking lot!

Do you have a career success story to share?

I volunteered to assist families that were living in a homeless shelter that was closing when the organization went bankrupt. Everything was uncertain and we didn’t even know how long the power would be on in the units. A co-worker and I met with each family to identify their individual needs, advocated with landlords to disregard prior evictions, and worked with local agencies (like United Way) to provide assistance with security deposits and first month rent. Every family found permanent housing within the week!

~Amanda



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Spotlight

Rhonda Bass, Case Manager

Rhonda serves Porter and surrounding counties for the FSW and CIH Waivers.



What led you to the social services field?

I always was driven to help others. After I had a child with special needs, I knew I needed to be on this side of social services. Helping and empowering others who need a team for emotional or physical support keeps me in this field.

What is a random fact about yourself?

I know every word to *Little Shop of Horrors*.

What do you love most about your job?

I love learning about the people we support and seeing just how they absolutely value you for the smallest of things.

What is a favorite pastime you enjoy?

I love card games like Uno, Old Maid and Go Fish.

Do you have kids or pets?

I have three kids (Claira 8, Carson 9 and Chrissy 17). I have two dogs, Saint (Kelpie) and Peppa (American bully).

Do you have a career success story to share?

A young adult that I support was often told he would not learn to read. This was the only desire the family had for this young man. The recreational therapist and I coordinated community resources and weekly social options for this person to receive tutoring and read at nursing homes. Four years later, he now reads big novels and challenges others to read books with him.

~ Rhonda



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Spotlight

Jani Bennett, Case Manager

Jani serves Elkhart and surrounding counties for the FSW and CIH Waivers.



What led you to the social services field?

I believe that I have always had an interest in the social service field. As a child and into adulthood I have always shown an interest in helping others, equity, and equality. I began my college career majoring in Psychology due to a fascination with how the mind works. When I began looking into future careers, I realized that they did not align with the psychology field and after a long discussion with my advisor I switched my major to social work. In the social work field, I found a strong connection with advocating, supporting, and uplifting others.

What is a random fact about yourself?

I have never broken a bone, which was surprisingly disappointing because as a child I wanted a cast for people to sign!

Do you have a career success story to share?

I was raised in poverty most of my life and college was never thought to be an option. I lived most of my life thinking that maybe I would go one day if I could. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, I was not able to finish high school with my peers. When I was 23, I went back to get my GED and started looking into community colleges. I began my college career at Ivy Tech Community College. After one full semester, I transferred to Saint Mary's College of Norte Dame. I graduated Saint Mary's College with a 3.95 GPA!

Do you have kids or pets?

Yes! I have two cats Maze and Cooper. Cooper is an older male cat and I have had him for 10 years (Although I got him when he was about 5!). Maze is a female main coon breed and is just over 2 years old. I have one daughter born in 2011.

~Jani



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Spotlight

Melody Kennedy, Case Manager

Melody serves La Porte, Porter and St. Joseph counties for the FSW and CIH Waivers.



What led you to the social services field?

After working in a variety of social service and psychology settings after college, I ultimately felt the most connected to working with individuals with developmental disabilities.

What is a random fact about yourself?

I am an "Office Head." I can quote any episode of the office.

What do you love most about your job?

I love watching individuals succeed, accomplish and often "surpass" the goals that they set for themselves.

Do you have a career success story to share?

I love when an individual graduates from Vocational Rehabilitation. A lot of hard work goes into this huge accomplishment and should be celebrated!

Do you have kids or pets?

I have been married to my husband for almost 9 years. We have three beautiful children together. We have a cat and a dog.

~ Melody



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Spotlight

Monika Puskac, Case Manager

Monika serves Lake and Porter Counties for the FSW and CIH Waivers.

What lead you to the social services field?

My heart is enormous. Growing up seeing pain and hearing painful stories just crushed my soul. I always questioned myself, "How can I assist?" "Where do I start?" Many questions I would ask myself. Then I was told, if this is your calling, invest in a social work degree and that is what I did for myself. I started at Ivy Tech Community College and finished at Indiana University Northwest. Now, I'm ready to make many differences in the social services field.

What is a random fact about yourself?

I'm persistent and a strong advocate. I absolutely LOVE the Ohio State Buckeyes! Go Bucks! I try to make a few games every year. Fun, wild fact about me is I have 15 tattoos.

What do you love most about your job?

I fully love when I get to hear about all the wonderful things that are going on in the lives of the individuals I work with. Not only hear, but to see the joy and happiness, is everything I look forward to.

Tell us about your pets and children?

I have one son, Avery. He's the best! He loves sports just as much as I do. Street ball is what he loves to do. He is fast, quick, and amazing at it. I have two dogs that are Chow Chow mixes.

~ Monika





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Spotlight

Rebecca Pysh, Case Manager

Rebecca serves Kosciusko and surrounding counties for FSW and CIH Waivers.

What led you to the social services field?

I have always felt the need to be in a field where I helped others. Growing up, I was set on being in the education field. I took a psychology course in college, and everything changed. I then added a minor of psychology and shortly after just switched my whole major. After being in the field for a couple years after school I went back and got my master's degree...and the rest is history. I have worked in a variety of social services settings and with a variety of populations and I have loved them all.

What is a random fact about yourself?

I play or have played 7 instruments over my life. I still play the piano regularly but have played a variety of others with one of my favorites being bassoon. (I wish to own another someday!) Playing the bassoon led me to partake in a trip to Europe when I was in high school with a concert band where we traveled 7 countries playing concerts for locals. It was amazing!

What do you love most about your job?

I love people and connecting with others on a variety of levels. I also love the sense of community Connections has even though we work all over the state and don't see each other regularly in person.

What is a favorite pastime you enjoy?

I typically dabble in many things just to try them out. This year I learned how to do stained glass! Of the hobbies that I have stuck with my whole life, some favorites would be reading, golf, playing the piano, and jigsaw puzzles.

Do you have pets?

I have a white German Shepard named Rizzo. He is very quirky.



~ Rebecca