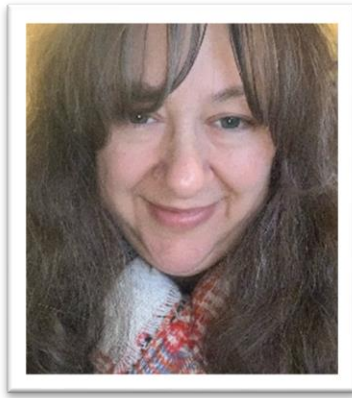


# DDS Recreation is Back!



**Corinne Jackson, RTAII**

Recreation and social opportunities are instrumental for people with disabilities in any circumstance. When you add in a pandemic that shuts down the entire country, this is an understatement. Ironically, in November of 2020, seven months into the pandemic, Corinne Jackson was hired at DDS in the South Region as a Recreation Therapist II. Her work is person-centered and self-direction focused. These new social and educational opportunities are providing people with a way to engage with other like-minded folks, to build social circles and expose them to people and other interests that they may not have otherwise known.

## **Stepping Outside of the Box**



Corinne brought a wealth of experience into this position based on mostly all in person events pre pandemic. In the past, Corinne would poll the group of people she supported and offer what they liked, for example, bowling, concerts, fairs, and dances. When faced with shifting from in-person events to virtual, Corinne applied that same person-centered out of the box approach to develop a wide array of activities that met the needs of many.

Corinne is the only person in this position providing these essential “community” based services in DDS. Based on the attendance and feedback she has gotten, there is a need for expansion. Over 20 people in the South Region were referred by case management for in person recreation. When recreation events began on zoom, people didn’t know what to expect. There were some hiccups with using the platform, but once those were ironed out, we began to see the same friendly faces week after week. Last February 2021, she would average 7 people in an event. Now there are 20 regulars who have gotten to know each other well and look forward to being together, even though it’s virtual. And while we have missed person to person contact, it’s been a big hit for people who struggle with mobility. Corinne now offers two to three virtual groups a week.

### **Self-Advocate Coordinators**

A new spin on offering recreation has been to have Self Advocate Coordinators host events of interest to them. The SACs co-facilitate an event and are provided with the opportunity to teach and mentor while sharing a common interest, hobby, or skill. Corinne’s first step in her new role was to reach out to all SACs in all regions to get their ideas, input, and participation. She then consulted with her director and supervisor, together, and they assisted Corinne in creating a plan. Fortunately for Corinne many of the self-advocate coordinators co-facilitate events monthly. Some are so skilled that Corinne fades into the background while the Self Advocate Coordinator runs the show!

The objectives the Self Advocate Coordinator's created with Corinne were number one, to have fun! Other objectives included offering a format that encourages friendship, social skills, being part of a team that is collaborative and always encouraging opportunities for self-advocacy. For example, learning to listen and take turns, speaking about interests and goals, and encouraging each other.

### **Types of Events:**

The monthly programs include fun dance nights, games such as Name That Tune, and Jeopardy. One of the self-advocate coordinators hosts The Critter Corner. This meeting educates and entertains people about animals. Another self-advocate coordinator presents a series of exercise routines with fun music to dance to. We have seen communication skills strengthen, and everyone's computer skills improved.

## **What do the Self Advocate Coordinators think?**

### ***Kellie shared:***

I like the interacting part of being a host, it makes me feel like I am helping individuals learn new things and participate. It also helps me be more outspoken and learn new skills. A few things I had to overcome were learning how to incorporate and adapt my games and events to each of the individual's needs and abilities. I have also been able to expand my computer knowledge. Searching the web for games has helped me become more comfortable with the internet. Individuals enjoy these recreation events because it gives them a mental break from work and life. They are fun and interactive and seem to bring joy. I try to make everyone happy and forget about the current world situations. These virtual events are very important because some individuals may not be able to go out due to the pandemic, mobility, or transportation issues. These events help them become more involved and independent. It also helps them meet new people and learn new things. Recreation events should continue and be here to stay!

### ***Natasha shared:***

As a recreation host, I enjoy being able to share information on how to stay fit and healthy. I like that we all participate together in a fitness journey while having fun. A challenge I had to overcome was getting the participants ready to start when it was time to. A skill I had to learn was how to pick different kinds of videos and music that everyone will enjoy, not just me. I now make sure to ask the participants what they want to do for workouts. I think individuals enjoy these recreation events because it gives them the chance to meet new people, have fun, and it gives them a place to relieve stress from work/the pandemic/ and life. These events are important because they give individuals a chance to socialize and have fun doing different things. It also gives individuals something to look forward to every week!

### ***Paige shared:***

I like being a host for a recreation event. I like that I am the boss of my recreation event. I had to overcome my time at night. I had to change my night schedule on Tuesdays. I had to learn how to share my screen and sound. I think that people enjoy these recreation events because everyone can see each other after a long day. I think these events are important because it is a great way to meet new people and have fun.



## **What have Case Managers heard from parents and people we support?**

### ***One shared:***

I just want to let you know that the virtual recreational groups have made such a positive impact on a few of the individuals on my caseload.

One of the guy's states that he looks forward to joining the group each time and loves to match his zoom background to the theme of the group. His parents report that it has made such a positive change in his life. He can be social and interact with others while still following Covid protocols. They report that due to the family being immune-compromised and unable to get out of the house very often due to Covid restrictions that the virtual group has been amazing for their son. They are very pleased with the group and hope it continues.

### ***Another shared:***

I am a case manager in New Haven. One of my individuals is a huge fan of you and your programs. She loves participating in Zoom-based programming. She has set aside her days to make sure she is available for all the groups. Speaking with Mom yesterday, she couldn't be happier either. Just wanted to let you know and say Thank You!

## **Community Members participate and enjoy these events as well!**

My name is Ann Marie Charest, and I am a retiree from DDS in the state of CT. I often teach music privately, in a variety of settings. I was introduced to Corinne Jackson a little over a year ago, she asked me if I would like to host a musical event for her recreation program. I agreed and now have the pleasure of hosting her program twice a month. The individuals who attend are quiet in the beginning, but often get more involved during the second half of the program. Everyone looks forward to coming together to sing, dance, and have fun. I will continue hosting for as long as they request it. I have donated my time for this program and feel very grateful to have these individuals in my life.

**In closing**

Corinne's recreation program is now in its second year and going strong. Corinne is planning to begin hosting in-person events this Summer but due to the success of her virtual programs, will continue to offer the fun, active, very needed virtual groups through DDS.

This story was written through a collaboration from Self-Determination in all of the regions.