



In hard times, we look to the heroes

By Jamie Reed

Much has been said about the human experience during these days of fighting the novel coronavirus or the resulting disease called COVID-19. In the isolation of “stay-at-home” orders, people discovered the importance of being around others and the many ways it enriched their lives. Phrases like “in this together” and “healthcare heroes” suddenly became commonplace.

At Starkey, direct support professionals have been celebrated as heroes for the hands-on work they do every day, but the pandemic took that work to a new level. Suddenly, workers were at risk of being exposed to the virus. Their family members, in turn, were at risk from the virus they could bring home. They were deemed “essential” in many of the same ways hospital workers and first responders were, but with a very different group of people.

In mid-March, Starkey’s leaders made the decision to offer all services exclusively in its homes, in order to abide by the governor’s stay-at-home order and to reduce exposure for a high risk group of individuals who, in addition to intellectual disabilities, often have physical disabilities or underlying health conditions that could make them more vulnerable than the average person.

Receiving services in the homes was a monumental change, one that will have lasted the better part of three months by the time Starkey’s reopening plan is fully realized in the summer of 2020. By design, it kept individuals served at Starkey and their staff together as small groups, thereby lessening risk of exposure to people with