

# down syndrome

community connections

September 2020



*Joseph and Bella Borcyk  
enjoy the spoils from their  
DSAF Virtual Sprinkler Party kit.*



## president letter

give to lincoln day gratitude

Dear Friends and Allies,

THANK YOU! I can't begin to describe the relief that we feel as an organization from the outpouring of support, both financially and emotionally, that you have provided during this COVID-19 pandemic. We've received calls from friends, donors, sponsors, and partners checking in on us and asking how they can volunteer.

Financially, your efforts to give and help spread the word generated nearly \$14,300 for DSAF in May's Give to Lincoln Day campaign. That is by far the most ever raised and will support people with Down syndrome staying safe at home from coronavirus.

On top of that, generous donors and business sponsors of the Lincoln Community Foundation allowed DSAF to receive a \$6,750 COVID-19 Relief Funding grant to be put toward the "Not So Bummer Summer" programming that took place from June 30-August 13.

And because of incredible partners like the Global Down Syndrome Foundation, we were able to provide a \$1,000 grant to Ashly, a DSAF single mom with two young daughters, to help her bridge the gap while times were tough due to COVID.

So, thank you again for walking hand in hand with us along this crazy journey we've all been experiencing the last several months. Our friends and loved ones with Down syndrome, now more than ever, need our support so please join us for the 2020 Step Up for Down Syndrome Walk on October 10 as we raise funds and awareness for Nebraskans with Down syndrome. Knowing that we've got your back and you've got ours certainly makes the future look bright. Please stay safe and healthy!

With Gratitude,

*Liz Echterkamp*  
Liz Echterkamp



**COVID-19  
Emergency Relief  
GLOBAL Grants**

DSAF was one of 42 Down syndrome organizations in 23 states and four countries to receive \$5,000 from GLOBAL's COVID-relief grants to offset operational costs and provide food, medical care, shelter support, and other critical assistance to individuals with Down syndrome facing crises during the pandemic.

# member spotlight:

## dexter drbal:

*dsaf's first self-advocate board member*

Sunny skies and the final days of summer call for a warm welcome of DSAF's newest board member, Dexter. Dexter is a proud resident of Lincoln, Nebraska, and one of DSAF's very own self-advocates (a person with Down syndrome).

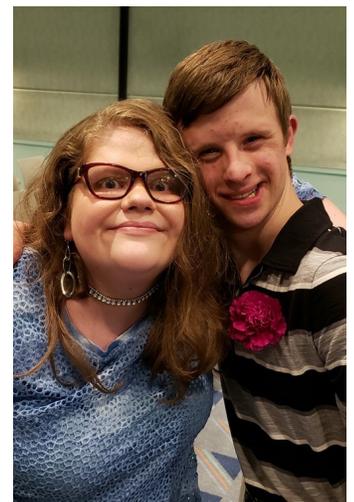
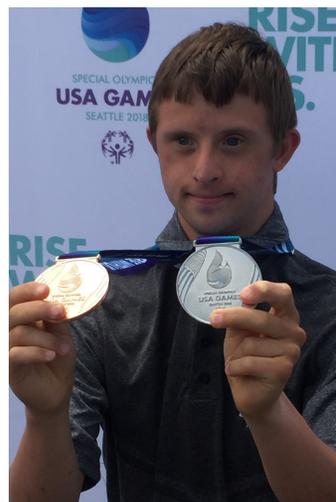
His favorite activities include watching monster trucks on YouTube, binging different TV series, and spectating football. He strongly dislikes vegetables and having unexpected visitors in his room but fully embraces making new friendships when attending DSAF events.

Dexter's decision to become a DSAF board member was inspired by his passion to learn more about the organization, and he hopes to build connections with other members while sharing his likes and dislikes along the way. After attending virtual meetings, Dexter feels DSAF's board creates the opportunity for people to connect by hosting events and sharing information concerning Down syndrome. As he continues to serve on the board, he dreams of one day moving out of his parents' house and into an apartment with all of his friends.

Welcome Dexter and thank you for serving on the DSAF Board of Directors!



“DSAF's board creates the opportunity for people to connect by hosting events and sharing information concerning Down syndrome.”



# THE IMPROVANEER METHOD

Picture a room filled with laughter, with people smiling and talking to each other, with learning and self-confidence increasing. Can you imagine that in the world we are living in now with reminders of COVID-19 all around us? It doesn't seem like it could be possible anymore, right?

But it is happening! On a weekly basis for DSAF members. And it is all because of supporters like YOU!

Thanks to a successful Give to Lincoln campaign and a generous grant from Lincoln Community Foundation's COVID-19 Response Fund, DSAF is using technology to stretch out a helping hand to those isolated at home and offering virtual educational programs for our brilliant self-advocates.

The most recent virtual program focuses on the art of improvisation and is known as the "Improvaneer Method." It is brought to DSAF through a partnership with Stand Up for Downs (Medina, OH) and Down Syndrome Alliance of the Midlands (Omaha, NE).

During a one-hour Zoom session, participants are challenged to utilize their creativity and listening skills in a series of fun activities. Each activity requires attendees to listen to

a question or statement and generate a logical, impromptu response.

As described by Dexter, DSAF's newest board member and Improvaneer, plays and skits are utilized during the course as a way for him and his classmates to "use their voices to communicate better."

The original in-person program was created by Rob Snow, the founder of Stand Up for Downs, to increase social and workplace opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities, but the impact extends far beyond that.

"What was a bit surprising [about creating the online courses] was that we uncovered an even more valuable benefit that this program created for those taking the classes – connection," said Snow. "That need for our loved ones with Down syndrome to

connect with others is so huge, and these classes provide that in the best possible way. We are thrilled that DSAF was able to understand the importance of this program and bring it to their families – and we've met many new improv stars in the process!"

DSAF's Education Specialist, Dawna Daily, describes the course as having "improved members' self-confidence, quick



“That need for our loved ones with Down syndrome to connect with others is so huge, and these classes provide that in the best possible way.”

- Rob Snow, Founder of Stand Up for Downs

thinking, voice projection, eye contact, problem solving, teamwork, listening and focus—life skills that are fully transferable to other environments.” As self-advocates continue to learn, they simultaneously embrace each other’s company while the pandemic continues in the background. Joke-telling, wide grins, and words of encouragement are frequently shared among members who boldly present their creative, and at times, hysterical perspectives with the class.

While much fear continues to circulate throughout the world, the Improvaneers embody a fearless spirit by being open to personal, educational, and professional growth. As spoken by the Improvaneers at the end of each class, they truly are the “no fear Improvaneers.”



THANK YOU for your support of fundraisers, like the upcoming Step Up for Down Syndrome Walk, which make “connection” during COVID-19 still possible for DSAF self-advocates! [ds-stride.org/dsafstepup](http://ds-stride.org/dsafstepup)

**Stand Up for Downs** presents... **THE IMPROVANEER METHOD**

Using Improvisation to greatly increase the social and workplace opportunities for those with special needs

**Improvisation teaches...**  
Quick Thinking, Teamwork, Listening, Focus, Problem Solving, Change Adaption

**Imagine The Possibilities!**  
Stronger communication skills, growth in self-confidence, increased social and workplace opportunities, minds blown & perceptions changed.

**Bring The Improvaneer Method to your community!**  
Disability organizations, schools, corporations, theatres and more are scheduling this program all over the country.

Go to [www.standupfordowns.org](http://www.standupfordowns.org) to learn more or contact us at [rob@standupfordowns.org](mailto:rob@standupfordowns.org)

**"Game Changing!"**

**"Ground Breaking!"**

# all the best superheroes are adopted

paraphrased interview\* by mary sweeney

"Teddy is sunshine," describes mom, Melanie Kirk. "He has this ornery little giggle...and is sassy, bossy, and absolutely hilarious."

Stanley and Melanie Kirk along with big brothers, Logan (14) and Oliver (9), welcomed Theodore "Teddy" (3) into their family last November 2019 on National Adoption Day.

Many families, mine included, struggle initially with receiving the news that a child with Down syndrome is entering their lives. For the Kirk family, though, there was a much different sentiment the day that Teddy officially became theirs.

Melanie shared that after months of fostering, they were thrilled Teddy was joining their family! "We decided that the theme for Teddy's adoption celebration would be 'All the best superheroes are adopted.' Like the Kents (as in Clark Kent – or Superman – for all you non-superhero people), our home has been entrusted with the care of an amazing life that we didn't bring into this world, but who we adore as though we did. And we are charged with helping him grow into the amazing person he is meant to be. In the immortal words of Stan Lee, with great power comes great responsibility."

Recognizing the gravity of that responsibility, and that the joy of getting to know Teddy and his bundle of curls is also a somber occasion for his biological mother who is missing those moments, the Kirks make sure Teddy knows his birth mother loves him and she still has contact with him.

Teddy is thriving! He loves learning about Minecraft from his oldest brother, Logan, and getting into wrestling matches with Oliver. The family has participated in the Step Up for Down Syndrome Walk for the past two years and other DSAF programs. Melanie and Stanley find much comfort and support within the Down syndrome community.

"It is so amazing to be able to speak with other parents and families [within DSAF] who understand the experience of being blessed with a child affected by Down syndrome. It's more than a shared diagnosis. It's a shared experience."

When asked for any final parting thoughts, Melanie wanted other moms and dads raising, fostering, or adopting a child with Down syndrome to know, "You are not alone. It's okay to be scared and feel a sense of loss when you realize that your child's life and your life will be different than you had imagined. Different isn't less. It's just new. Please consider opening your heart to children in the child welfare system as a foster parent. There are so many children who need support and love..."

Spoken like a true superhero's mother.

\*Read the complete interview at [dsafnebraska.org/blog](https://dsafnebraska.org/blog)



For more information on fostering or adoption, visit the Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parents Association at [nfapa.org](https://nfapa.org) or National Down Syndrome Adoption Network at [ndsan.org](https://ndsan.org).

# SPECIAL EDITION!

**NEW YEAR!**  **NEW VENUE!**  **NEW DATE!**

## Meet the Staff...



### MEET ALISON VAZQUEZ

Alison is a 2nd-year Step Up Walk social media committee volunteer who helps to highlight teams and promote the Walk. Alison got involved because she is a Speech Language Pathology graduate student and had an interest in working with individuals with Down syndrome. "I wanted to be a part of a community that gives back to individuals with special needs." She most likes being involved with the Walk because she enjoys collaborating with different people that share the common goal of advocating for Down syndrome awareness.

Thanks, Alison, for volunteering your time!



### MEET AMIE LOVEGROVE

Amie is the new Step Up Walk Event Coordinator who manages the planning and logistics for the Walk and provides Team Captain encouragement and support. She oversees the Step Up Walk Planning Committee volunteers, ensuring everything from décor to signage to food is ready to go for a fun and successful event. Amie, who has a 6-year-old with Down syndrome, was interested in becoming the Event Coordinator to learn more about Down syndrome and understand how the Walk details all come together. When asked what she's most excited about, Amie replied, "The new venue at Lancaster Event Center!"

Welcome, Amie!



### MEET JARED NIELSON

Jared Nielson is a member of DSAF's Fundraising Committee. He helps to drive awareness and assists in donor cultivation and sponsor outreach all throughout the year, but especially at the time of the Walk. Jared's 5-year-old daughter, Hadley, has Down syndrome and is his inspiration for volunteering. What he likes most about being a volunteer for the Walk is knowing that "...in volunteering, I'm playing a small role in supporting and empowering individuals with Down syndrome and their families. I know whatever time I'm putting in is benefiting an organization with a great mission." And what does Hadley like most? The donuts and coffee at the Walk!

Thanks, Jared, for your support!

# STEP UP FOR SYNDROME

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

### When and Where:

October 10, 2020 – 9:00am. Lancaster Event Center – 4100 N 84th St., Lincoln, NE.

### What to Expect:

In-person and virtual engagement opportunities like music performances, free food, balloons, raffle and silent auction items, Fact Posters and more!

### Don't have a team?

YOU can create a team too! Start a team, recruit people to support the mission, and make an impact in the lives of people with Down syndrome.

### Become a Sponsor:

It takes a village – and a lot of resources – to put on an event like this. You can support a worthy cause and gain great exposure for your business by becoming a sponsor of DSAF.



## WHAT IS NEW?

### Check out the NEW 2020 T-shirt Design!

For just \$3 more per shirt, you can add your TEAM NAME to the back!



### THERE IS STILL TIME!

Visit [ds-stride.org/dsafstepup](https://ds-stride.org/dsafstepup) to start a team, donate, or become a sponsor!

# DOWN ME WALK 2020

## CONSIDERING COVID

We understand some people may feel uncomfortable attending this year's Walk with COVID in our lives, so here are a few options for you:

1. **Attend in Person** – This year's Walk will have a similar feel to year's past, but with a social distancing "flare" added – think masks, lots of hand sanitizer, and plenty of distance between people.
2. **Attend Virtually** – Put on your walking shoes to enjoy the fun while you choose your own 1-mile loop to walk! Watch via Facebook Live and share pictures or video with #DSAFStepUpWalk so you stay part of the action.
3. **Make a Donation** – You can stay safe at home and still support the people you love with Down syndrome by making a donation in their honor.

Whichever option you decide on, additional virtual opportunities will be held as well, like weekly Team Captain incentives leading up to the Walk, an online silent auction, and a final Team Captain Zoom Orientation held on September 30.

## IF IN DOUBT – STAY HOME!

DSAF is working hard to create an environment at the Walk where all attendees can feel safe. Please remember to do your part, though, and only attend if you are feeling healthy. Should you have COVID-19 and/or any of its symptoms, please keep our members and allies safe by choosing to stay home. **Thank you!**

**JOIN** the **Step Up Walk Facebook Event Group** to stay up to date on all future announcements!

## DATES TO REMEMBER

- **August 31:** Corporate sponsorships deadline
- **September 6:** Last day to qualify for a Fact Poster (Team Captains only)
- **September 13:** Last Day for guaranteed T-shirts
- **September 18:** Last Day to submit STARS Bio Sheets (Team Captains only)
- **September 30:** Final Team Captain Zoom "Let's Get Ready to Walk!"
- **October 7-8:** T-shirt pickup at Nebraska Farm Business, Inc.
- **October 8:** Last day to qualify for 'Top Teams'
- **October 10:** Step Up for Down Syndrome Walk!





## a glimpse into the supportive and loving down syndrome community

by kevin miller

*Kevin Miller, former Treasury Sales Officer with First National Bank, is proud to share how his experience with the ABLE Act and DSAF have impacted the life of his daughter Ashtin, who has Down syndrome. Kevin reveals below how resources like DSAF and the Enable Savings Plan have empowered Ashtin to be the star of her own show!*

I find it difficult to believe that it has already been 12 years since receiving the Down syndrome diagnosis of our youngest daughter, Ashtin. I still remember vividly the weight of that news. The unknowns seemed countless and daunting...how would this affect her? What can I do? I had a lot of questions that I knew only time and patience would be able to answer.

I quickly realized there was a lot of support and comradery within the Down syndrome and special needs communities and we have been active participants each year in the annual Step Up for Down Syndrome Walk and Family Festival.

Today, Ashtin is healthy and very active in school as well as extracurricular activities. As I look forward and think about the next 10 years, those initial fears and concerns have become thoughts of joy and optimism. It is reassuring to know that there are resources throughout the various stages of her life to help meet the needs of all of us. The understanding and acceptance of individuals with special needs continues to grow and evolve. I am especially encouraged by the passage of the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act in 2014. This Act opens the doors for Ashtin to be able to set aside funds in an Enable Savings Plan account that will provide her the ability to pursue the life experiences that she desires without jeopardizing needed resource-based benefits in the future.

Thank you, Enable Savings Plan (above) and UBT (opposite page), for your commitment as Shooting Star Mission Partners. Your continued support of DSAF and its members is beyond commendable. Learn how you can become a Mission Partner and help advance the important work of DSAF all year round. Visit [dsafnebraska.org/sponsor](https://dsafnebraska.org/sponsor)

# Your money has hometown proud people

Like Chris, who steps up to support the Down Syndrome Association for Families of Nebraska. He cares for the community just as much as he cares for his customers, and he's a great example of what a family-owned local bank is all about.



**UBT**  
Union Bank & Trust.®

#ubtcares | [ubt.com](http://ubt.com)

**REMEMBER** - Walk with us at the 2020 Step Up for Down Syndrome Walk! October 10 @ 9:00 a.m. [ds-stride.org/dsafstepup](https://ds-stride.org/dsafstepup)

## upcoming events

be on the lookout for future member opportunities

### august

- 24: Young Adult Stars Virtual Bingo Night
- 27: Fall Semester Young Adult Book Club Begins via Zoom

### september

- 10: Mom & Dad's Night Out at Deer Springs Winery
- 13-19: Lil' Stars Virtual Art Show
- 15: DSAF Ed Series: Intimacy and Relationships
- 19: Circles Boundaries Training
- 30: Step Up Walk Team Captain Zoom: *Let's Get Ready to Walk!*
- TBD: Young Adult Stars Virtual Painting Night with Moore Art Omaha

### october

- 4: Pumpkin Patch Trip to Roca
- 10: Step Up for Down Syndrome Walk
- 28: Young Adult Stars Virtual Halloween Movie Night

**Please Note:** As COVID-19 makes each day a little uncertain, be sure to visit the DSAF Facebook page for the latest event information or check online at [dsafnebraska.org/events](https://dsafnebraska.org/events)



Mark your calendar!  
 The Annual Holiday Brunch will be:  
**Saturday, December 12, 2020**

## thank you mission partners!

Please consider supporting the companies working with DSAF to provide a positive vision of the future for all people with Down syndrome in Nebraska.

