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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Liberty ARC Direct Support Professionals Earn National Credentials**

**Amsterdam** – Liberty ARC held a graduation ceremony for 22 Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), who achieved National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) credentials, in November. This is the agency's second credentialed class to graduate as part of the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) credentialing pilot program.

NADSP is one of the nation's leading DSP associations, promoting excellence in direct support work. As a member of NADSP, Liberty ARC has the opportunity for our direct care staff to earn credentials through the NADSP E-Badges Academy. This is a nationally-recognized credential with different levels (DSP-I, DSP-II, DSP-III, FLS). Each E-Badge earned challenges the DSP taking the module to expand their knowledge and apply it in situations with the people they support. The coursework included a rigorous 100 hours of online classwork as well as demonstrated application of the principles learned.

"The staff we are recognizing have shown tremendous dedication to the field and the people they support by putting in many hours on the weekends, evenings, and around their busy schedules to earn these credentials," said Liberty ARC CEO Jennifer Saunders. "We all know that direct support work is multi-faceted and draws on knowledge and skills from many disciplines, as well as interpersonal skills such as empathy, compassion, and communication. We are so proud of our graduates for demonstrating these skills and willing to further their own education to better serve the people they support. They represent the best of what it means to be a direct support worker."

Liberty ARC announced their membership with NADSP and inclusion in the statewide OPWDD Pilot Program in the winter of 2023. While Liberty ARC's first class was only open to DSPs, the agency was pleased to expand the program to frontline supervisors (FLS), including managers, so they could also receive the national certification to expand their knowledge of how to lead teams and provide the best supports to people with disabilities in 2024.

Graduates of Liberty ARC's second class are Cortney Ball, April Buboltz, Hope Buboltz, Karen Cardona, Monique Cardona, Carmen Cruz, Samantha Fetter, Karissa Fitzgerald, Amy Fonda, Angela Funk, Kim Jones, Lisa Mulvaney, Bethany Nitsky, Jennifer Payst, Stacey Rhodes, Shannon Schuyler, Krystal Shear, Allison Smullen, Allison Snell, Sarah Snell, Amy Stearns, and Raechelle Valenti.

Amy Stearns, Liberty ARC's Manager Mentor and current Residential Manager when she began working through the NADSP E-Badges program, spoke to her fellow graduates at the ceremony. Stearns received her FLS credentialing.

"The academy has taught me about elevating the quality of supports we provide each and every day, while we go through the process of discovery to assist each person to live a life that is meaningful to them," Stearns said. "Since I started working at Liberty ARC in 2008, there has been a huge shift in our careers. We have gone from basic caregivers to 'Direct Support Professional.' We are pushing the lines in the health care world to be accredited and certified nationally. As time advances, so does our vision for strengthening the system and advocating for each person on a level that engages them to fight for what is important to them."

"Our field is at the beginning of a major shift towards credentialing, which will benefit the people we work with to get the best supports and demonstrates to the world the skills a DSP needs to perform the job well," said Candace Opalka, the Chief Operating Officer at Liberty ARC. "What each one of our graduates have done with earning these credentials is demonstrate the tenacity, heart, and knowledge needed to succeed in our field and provide the best services to the people you support. You are all at the cutting edge of disabilities services, not only in our county and state, but throughout our country."

New York State Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara, Ryan Cox, Director of Workplace Development at OPWDD, Chief Strategy Officer at The Arc New York Kathryn Jerian, and E-Badge Coordinator for NADSP Brian Geld also attended the graduation ceremony.

### **About Liberty ARC**

Liberty ARC, a chapter of The Arc New York, is a not-for-profit agency that provides top-quality supports and services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Montgomery and Schenectady Counties. We are proud of our six decades of bringing these innovative and valuable programs to those most vulnerable in our community. While staying committed to our framework the agency has grown our employment, residential, day supports, family support and health-related programming throughout the years. Our mission- *Together we support people with disabilities to achieve a quality of life each person values* - together with our *Values* make up the foundation on which our culture is framed. We are extremely proud to be a pioneering agency, which coupled with a dynamic workforce and our person-centered mission makes Liberty ARC a stand-out in our field.

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