

Three Colorado Navigators Awarded ‘National Navigator Awards’ at National Navigator Exchange June 11, 2024

Blake Dowling, Lia Weiler Gallagher and Robert Morris II were all recognized for their leadership in ‘navigating’ employment service system responses for job seekers with disabilities at the June 11, 2024 National Navigator Exchange meeting. Seven Navigators and Disability Resource Coordinators from across the country received recognition in six different categories. Blake, Lia and Robert all operate in unique roles in American Job Centers in their communities, operating as natural networkers for both systems and job seekers.

These awards were established to recognize the valuable community leadership provided by our champions in the field, and to also recognize the extraordinary leadership demonstrated by the namesakes of these awards to make these accomplishments possible. As a result of the contributions of this year’s awardees and the individuals for whom the awards were named the spirit of this work continues. We take great pride in the vision of the leaders in each of the workforce systems that ‘keep the faith’ in the value of this role in supporting job seekers with disabilities in meeting their career objectives through the full support of all of the expertise available in every workforce system and community. (from the award nomination form)

Blake Dowling received the Randee Chafkin “Heart” Award, describes as follows:

Randee represented the heart of the Navigator and the DEI initiatives, working to see that no good deed or effort goes unrecognized and was totally dedicated to seeing that others recognize the human value of this initiative which goes beyond the funding and reporting requirements that are necessary to operate any initiative. To sustain something, it must be something that adds to value and enhances quality – and Randee saw this value and quality before others – and helped everyone around her to recognize that value and quality. Randee was not ashamed to wear her heart on her sleeve and through her example we were all a bit stronger but at the same time more sensitive to the difference that is made by good work.

In Blake’s nomination for the award, it was noted:

Her ‘caring’ nature with professionals and job seekers alike sets her apart in consideration for the Randee Chafkin “Heart” Award. She is committed to the success of each job seeker with whom she engages, and her sensitivity to their personal objectives, interests, and overall well-being are qualities that support both the person served and the teams that come together to help them meet their career objectives. Blake worked with an individual with a disability, participating in a training program and providing support to other family members. The individual lost funding for tuition and was faced with a need to drop out of the training program. Blake engaged expertise and resources from other programs, including vocational rehabilitation services. The team developed a support network and braided funding for tuition that allowed the individual to successfully complete his training program.



Lia Weiler Gallagher received the Judy Emery “Genesis” Award:

Judy Emery was the Lead for a Colorado ‘systems-change’ grant with RSA which began around 2000. Judy and her team piloted the establishment of a “Navigator” in workforce systems through this initiative, which inspired Alexandra Kielty with the Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration to expand on this model nationally in 2003. Judy’s vision and approach with workforce systems in alignment to strengthen the inclusion of people with disabilities in employment services was the genesis of a national phenomenon that continues in many workforce systems and states without federal grant support. Judy’s generosity in sharing her insights and leadership with the Navigator state leads established through ETA’s initiative continued over the decade of the implementation, as Judy attended national meetings to strengthen the growth of the navigator role in effective employment services.

Noted in Lia’s nomination:



I’m excited to nominate Lia (Weiler) Gallagher for the Judy Emery “Genesis” Award. Besides the fact that Lia operates in the Arapahoe/Douglas Workforce Center, where Judy Emery operated and created the model for Navigators that ETA would later take and establish nationally in the early 2000’s, this recognition is reflective of Lia’s initiative in creating and implementing new ideas in her role as a Navigator. A perfect example is evident in her collaborative leadership in an effort to simplify service connections and support from the perspective of the job seeker. Lia has an engaging personality that draws people with whom she works into efforts to improve the overall results for shared customers. She is the embodiment of Judy Emery’s spirit in this role, and we’re pleased to make this nomination!

Robert Morris II received the Jim Downing “Go Where No Navigator Has Gone Before” Award:

Jim Downing is one of the key individuals who envisioned the role of the Disability Resource Coordinator, along with Alex Kielty. In the development of the Navigator initiative, Jim worked tirelessly to assure that navigators understood their roles and opportunities, and that non-navigators understood this also. Jim was significant in his leadership role in demonstrating the value of navigators in response to the needs of people with disabilities on the gulf coast, who survived Hurricane Katrina. This exercise demonstrated the value of the emphasis in preparing individuals to be networkers and problem solvers within and without systems and services. This recognition could also be called the “Git ‘er Done” award in honor of Jim. Navigators/Disability Resource Coordinators nominated for this award will reflect bold measures of project initiation that pay off in effecting positive change for individuals with disabilities.

Robert’s nomination included the following:

Robert is new to Colorado and one of our newest navigators, but that hasn't stopped him from finding a need in Boulder. He is every bit what the designers of the role had in mind when the initiative was established in 2003 and re-established by the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, Workforce Development Programs in 2021. Robert's dedication to his new role as a navigator and his commitment to helping those with disabilities. He has a talent for problem-solving and a genuine desire to make a positive impact on the community and has excelled in his position. *In her nomination Colorado's state lead,*



Robin Bauknecht shared an example of Robert's commitment to making a difference by sharing a report that he made to her re: his work in developing community partnerships to expand support to individuals with brain injuries so the review committee could see Robert's character as shared in his own words!