

# Innovative Applications for Technology

By Karen Craven,  
DDRB Community Resource Specialist

The direct support professional (DSP) workforce shortage has been a brewing crisis for several years. DSPs are the people who provide direct care and are crucial to the success of people with developmental disabilities. The shortage, in large part, is due to Medicaid reimbursement rates that don't cover the cost of the service and curtail wages an agency can offer. As a result, DSPs quickly leave the profession when wages don't provide a living wage and aren't commensurate to the skills and responsibilities required of the position.

At the same time, technology has been opening doors for people with disabilities for years. Lately we've witnessed the surge of assistive technology expanding into the lives of those with and without disabilities making this technology widely accessible and more affordable. Now companies are embracing inclusive design in products that are affordable and provide individuals with disabilities greater independence and access to their communities.

Recently a team of innovative thinkers coupled the possibilities of assistive technology with solving a slice of the direct support crisis while enhancing the personal freedom of an individual here in St. Charles County.

David Gould is an active, out-going man who resides in his condominium in the community

and receives individualized supported living services from direct support staff through the



*David Gould pictured with his emergency alert button system.*

Medicaid Comprehensive Waiver. David is his own guardian, an active member of his community, and is employed.

Until recently David had support staff in his home overnight for safety. Fiercely independ-

ent, David often sent his overnight support staff home. This created a few concerns, first being David's safety as he would have no assistance in the event of an emergency. Second being that his support staff were experiencing a loss of income with the unexpected shift cancellations.

David and his team met to discuss how to accommodate David's wish for alone time, while ensuring his safety. The team investigated several options and decided an alert call button would best meet his needs. The call button dials the monitoring agency that employs multiple staff who communicate with David to assess the situation, contact appropriate assistance and make notifications to his personal contact list.

This simple change has given David the privacy and dignity he desires while saving a whopping \$45,000 annually. And that's not all, a portion of these savings were then reallocated into David's budget for other necessary supports.

While this doesn't solve the workforce crisis in direct care, this innovative solution attained the rare achievement of benefitting both the person and the support agency by allowing the agency to re-assign staff to where they're most needed. Congratulations to David and his team!