

Care Provider Spotlight

Diana Graybeal, Gold Hill

Diana started out in homecare by taking care of her father when he fell ill, and then later cared for her grandmother. "I realized it was something I loved to do—taking care of people," Diana said. "It seemed to be my calling." Diana has been a care provider for 9 years now and says, "It's a passion of mine."

Making that personal connection with her clients/consumers means a lot to Diana. One of her most gratifying experiences was taking on a client who had suffered for an extended period of time with constant infections requiring multiple hospital visits. Under Diana's watch, her client's health quickly improved, and she didn't require another hospitalization for over a year. Her doctor even commented on how Diana's quality care had been

essential in turning things around.. To see her consumers happy and healthy is Diana's greatest reward.

Improvements in the lives of consumers and care providers since Homecare workers joined 503 have been nothing short of life-changing

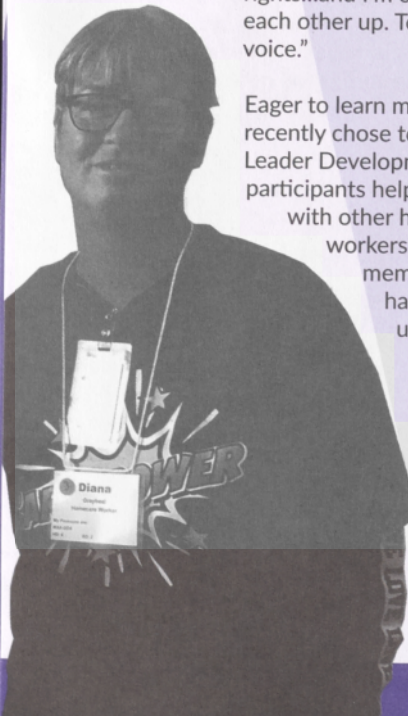
"The more I learned, the more I realized... WOW, this union really does fight for worker rights...and I'm one of those workers! I love what the union stands for. The work we do is so important, we have to stand together and know our worth.

- Diana Graybeal, Homecare Worker

for both. "My first introduction to the union was at the new employee orientation. I didn't know anything about it," Diana said. "I decided to get involved and started going to monthly union meetings so I could understand more. The more I learned, the more I realized...WOW, this union really does fight for worker rights...and I'm one of those workers! We lift each other up. Together in our union, we have a voice."

Eager to learn more about her union, Diana recently chose to participate in SEIU's Member Leader Development Program (MLDP). MLDP participants help build our union by connecting with other homecare and personal support workers about the value of union membership. "Many don't realize half the things our union does for us, how we fight for each other."

Married for 12 years, Diana and husband Thom live in Gold Hill and are raising their 6-year-old grandson. They enjoy fishing, crabbing and going to Oregon Ducks games.



Patty Falkenstein, Tigard

"I first became a Personal Support Worker so I could care for my daughter, Katina, who has Down Syndrome. Few can advocate better than a parent because they simply know more about their own family member. Katina attends a large group daycare program one day a week, but is much happier making choices about how she spends her time. Getting out into the community and having interests has decreased her wandering significantly.

When Katina graduated from High School, I left my career as a therapist so I could be her full time Personal Support Worker. This had a huge impact on our finances. We were relying on social security disability payments to get by, and barely making it. We went into foreclosure and almost lost our home. When the union came in, it literally changed our lives. For the first time in years I had access to healthcare and could see a doctor.

After Katina turned 21, I was able to get respite care so I don't have to do this all by myself since she needs full time supervision. We became financially secure enough to get off social security and support ourselves with my wages as a PSW. I'm even able to put a little money away for our retirement. We have an emergency fund now, which is something we never imagined before. Finally, we have a vision of stability and Katina is getting the 24/hr a day care that she needs.

"Care providers are often isolated from each other, caring for loved ones in homes, but through the union we have built a powerful community of support and are working on ways to communicate better among ourselves, the union, and the state. We're in this together, and we can do anything when we stay united."

- Patty Falkenstein, Personal Support Worker

While SEIU 503 has changed the game for care providers, we still have a lot of improvements to the system we have to work on. The payroll system for HCW workers is still antiquated and has issues that result in people not getting paid and running the risk of being evicted. Now that we have come together as homecare workers I know we can fix these problems.

I would encourage everyone who is a care provider to get active in our union. Caregivers deserve the dignity and respect that is afforded other industries, especially now that the boomer population is booming."

