

**Lanette Brown's Reflection: "A smile can make anyone's day better."**

I'm writing to wish you happy holidays and tell you that it has been a true pleasure working with the Self-Direct Personal Care Assistance Program—first as a manager, supervisor, and facilitator, and now as the Senior Expert Advisor and Trainer. This program empowers consumers to live in their own homes, apartments, or with family members, supported by caregivers of their choosing. It offers not only essential assistance but also a sense of independence and dignity.

Over the past 17 years, I've had the privilege of supporting Independent Living Specialists and providing guidance to consumers needing ramps, wheelchairs, walkers, canes, bathroom remodels, nursing home transition support, and help maintaining Medicaid eligibility.

The programs at LIFTT exist to ensure that people with disabilities—whether known or not yet identified—have the tools and support they need to be active, valued members of their communities. When individuals thrive, our entire world becomes a better place.

It has been an honor to help bring a bit more independence into the lives of our consumers and to see the difference it makes. *"A smile can make anyone's day better."*

If there's anything I can do for you, please contact me, Lanette, at 406-294-5184 or [lanetteb@lifft.org](mailto:lanetteb@lifft.org).

## **Pamela Ramirez's Reflection: "Every day is a meaningful journey of purpose, growth and connection"**

It's important to me that you know what an impact working with you through LIFTT has had on me, and why this mission inspires me every day.

Working at LIFTT has been more than a job, it has been a meaningful journey of purpose, growth, and connection. Every day, I witness the power of advocacy, independence, and community, not as abstract concepts, but as real outcomes that change people's lives. Being part of an organization that stands firmly on the belief that individuals with disabilities deserve control, choice, and respect has shaped the way I show up both professionally and personally.

What stands out most to me is the heart of our mission: empowering people to live the lives they choose. At LIFTT, we don't prescribe solutions we walk alongside individuals, offering tools, support, and encouragement so they can build their own paths toward independence. I've watched consumers gain confidence as they learn new skills, navigate systems, and discover options they didn't know they had. Moments like these remind me why this work matters.

Should you need any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at (406) 294-5189 or [pamelar@liff.org](mailto:pamelar@liff.org).

## **Eileen Rodriguez's Reflection: Building a Brain Health Community**

For several years, I've dreamed of starting a Brain Healthy community — a place where people not only learn what supports cognitive wellness but also truly experience what it's like to live it. Throughout that time, I kept a journal filled with ideas about how I might bring that vision to life. When I started working at LIFTT, I tucked the journal away, not knowing when, or even if, those dreams might become a reality. It wasn't until a few months ago, as I flipped through its pages, that I realized many of those plans I once hoped for have now become possible at LIFTT.

My vision included teaching Brain Health Classes that offer hope to people who have been told there is nothing they can do to prevent memory loss. I wanted to teach the key lifestyle components needed to protect cognitive health. At LIFTT, not only have more people attended these classes than I imagined, but they bring their friends, saying, "You need to hear this too." I am energized by the conversations we share, stories of small changes people are making, and the meaningful benefits they notice to their daily lives.

In my journal, I wrote about offering Lunch and Learn classes to help people tackle the challenge of implementing a healthy diet in their busy lives. Through LIFTT's partnership with Erin Gregory from MSU Extension Service, that dream has come to life. Erin has created classes that give people practical skills to prepare simple, healthy meals. When participants share that their thinking feels clearer and their memory more reliable because of dietary changes, I know the impact I once imagined is becoming real.

Exercise was another essential part of my vision, since it is one of the most powerful tools in maintaining and improving brain health. Being able to offer strength training classes called Staying Active and Independent for Life (SAIL) has been such a gift. I have

enjoyed seeing the community of laughter, friendships, and lighthearted stories that we share as we work together to build balance and strength. Those moments of connection are just as important as physical gains.

Knowing that stress management is also critical for brain health, I eagerly embraced the opportunity to become a Tai Chi leader so the classes could be included in the Brain Health Community I dreamed of. Through LIFTT, I have had the opportunity to become a Board-Certified instructor through Dr. Lam's Tai Chi for Health, with its ongoing training and opportunities for growth. I continue to be amazed by the number of people interested in Tai Chi. The class is dedicated to meditative movement, and, at the end of each class, we take time to share the benefits people are experiencing. Many participants comment that it not only eases stress but leaves them feeling more energized.

When I joined LIFTT a year and a half ago, I could not have imagined that so much of my long-held vision would begin taking shape so quickly. I feel deeply blessed to witness the Brain Health community I once dreamed of, now beginning to come together.

If you are interested in learning more about or becoming part of our Brain Health Community, please contact me at (406) 294-5185, or [eileenr@lifft.org](mailto:eileenr@lifft.org).