

DSSW
the last 20 years

Once upon a time, 1991 to be exact, there was a little PT clinic on the west side of Fort Worth. In this clinic there was a physical therapist named Brenda Seawell. Brenda, along with other individuals, recognized that many of the needs of those with disabilities were not being met by the current state programs. Together with advocacy groups and members of the legislature she authored the Community Living Assistance and Support Services program, known as CLASS. It became a pilot program and to serve it, Disability Services of the Southwest was born.

DSSW, as one of the first participating organizations, experienced both the joys and stresses of building a company to meet the needs of those who qualified for the new waiver program. In the beginning it was just DSSW and another company in Fort Worth. They both had 60 clients each. After a year or so the other company closed and overnight they went from 60 clients to 120. DSSW somehow managed to take care of all of them. Everyone had to be flexible and perform several different jobs including doing attendant care. With no computers everything was tracked and billed on paper. They had pagers instead of cell phones. If your pager went off when you were out of the office, you had to pull over and find a pay phone to return the call. Yes, a pay phone. Remember? It was the thing with the quarters and black receiver inside a big metal box.

Of course there were a few laughs along the way. The offices were in a large cinder block building on the ground floor. It was always hot so they would prop the front door open to let in some air. One day some employees walked in and there was a half dead squirrel behind a pillow on the couch in the reception area. Needless to say, since squirrels are such vicious and disgusting creatures, there was screaming and carrying on like you had never heard. Everyone ran out of the office as if it were on fire. Speaking of fire, another day an employee burned their toast so badly that it set off the fire alarm and the entire building was evacuated. The Fire Department even dispatched their trucks!

Over the years, DSSW continued to grow and open new offices across Texas as well as acquire a home health agency in San Antonio named LifeSpan. But success brought its own challenges and in 2004 there was recognition that DSSW's growth had strained the organization. LifeSpan and DSSW were struggling. A new team of leaders on both the Board of Directors and the executive staff made their priority the modernization of management systems,



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Meet Lisa our client for 15 years

Elizabeth De La Cruz is a gracious woman who has given us the pleasure of serving her since 1997. At 35 years old, Elizabeth, or Lisa to those who know and love her, enjoys the simple pleasures of life like listening to music, going out to eat and shopping. When you first talk to her you would never know what all she has been through to get to this place.

Lisa had a difficult childhood. At a young age, her mother left. Lisa would wake every morning and ask her dad, "Why did she leave us? I am her baby." This was very hard on her, but Lisa's optimism shines through the pain and she says, "I've been through a lot, but, I know deep down inside that she loves me, I'm her flesh and blood."

Eventually, her grandparents took her into their home. Surrounded by unconditional love from them and for them, Lisa graduated high school.



When you ask her about her grandparents, she becomes emotional and the words catch in her throat, "I am always going to be grateful for them."

Sadly, in 2008, Lisa's grandfather passed away. "You don't know what you have until you lost it," she says when asked about his death. Unfortunately, while her grandmother was in the hospital due to health issues last May, their house caught fire causing extensive damage. But Lisa's good attitude and positive smile never wavered.

Lisa is appreciative for everything she has in this life. Not only is she thankful for her family, but for the wonderful people in DSSW's Odessa office. She says, "If it wasn't for my grandmother and help from Diana, Lori, and Rolando I don't know how I would manage to get the help I am getting." Of course the feeling of appreciation is mutual, when asked about Lisa everyone in the Odessa office agrees, "She never meets a stranger and makes everyone feel welcome in her home."

Lisa from all of us here, thank you for welcoming us into your home .



THE SENIORITY REPORT

15+ YEARS OF SERVICE

TONYA BARRETT
(WAY TO GO TONYA!)

10+ YEARS OF SERVICE

FRANKIE WILLIAMS
DOLORES SAMANIEGO
LENA BROWN
DIANA RAY

5+ YEARS OF SERVICE

ROCHELLE BYRDSOONG
MARIA RODRIGUEZ
LARRY S. BAKER
CINDY FERGUSON
GRACE GARCIA
KAREN BIGGERSTAFF
LORI HOLLUMS
ROSE RODRIGUEZ
MANDY URBY
LAURIE LYSSY
SHARON HUNT
AMANDA SAMANIEGO

HELEN BAKER
SHEILA ROBINSON
WENDY BAKER
PAULA GARDINER
LARRY N. BAKER
THERESA MENDEZ
JULIA CLAUNCH
JAMES MERRIFIELD
DEBORAH STRAUSS
SARAH OEST
BRIANA COULTER
HEATHER FARLOW
TAMMIE YOUNG
BEVERLY QUINTANILLA

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better communication with clients and their families and investment in modern information systems. In other words, computers, software, and cell phones!!

On top of this, DSSW started having more interaction with the state and developed a better relationship. The offices were educated in the financial aspect of the business and became more independent from corporate. As the company grew larger, corporate gave financial bonuses and perks to the employees. The employees felt that their actions had an effect on the financial success of their individual offices as well as the company.

Success came quickly as each reform was implemented. According to CEO, Larry Baker, "All the elements were there, we just needed vision and commitment." Today DSSW has ten offices statewide and two other companies, LifeSpan and CDS in Texas. The story of DSSW is one of struggle and accomplishment.

On Saturday March 19th, 2011, DSSW celebrated 20 years of service to Texas. DSSW celebrated by honoring employees with recognition pins if they had been with the company at 5, 10, and 15-year increments. Of course, there was also cake, lots of cake. Mr. Baker thanked all of the employees for their commitment to helping the organization care for those who struggle with disabilities and other health issues. He stated that one person can make a huge difference and this organization, dedicated to the care and service of those with disabilities, fulfilled his lifelong dream of serving this segment of the population.

One of DSSW's longest serving employees, Janet

Nolte, said it best about why she loves this company, "My favorite thing is now and always has been, the lives that are changed by DSSW. In the years I've worked here, I've seen individuals with disabilities that previously were in a nursing home or that couldn't easily leave their home, get jobs or start school or just get out of their home and go shopping. Seeing how difficult life can be for some individuals makes me count my blessings and makes me appreciate having the opportunity to help make their life a little better.

With everyone's hard work and dedication Disability Services of the Southwest is sure to see another 20 years of growth and service. To all of the clients we serve: thank-you for letting us in to your homes and into your lives.



Our Founder

Brenda Seawell

Brenda was a housewife with 3 kids, 2 sons and a daughter. Her eldest son Jesse was a teenager when he was in a motorcycle accident. He suffered a head injury and was in a comma for some time. When Jesse regained consciousness, he had to re-learn how to walk, talk, eat, etc. He spent months in rehab. In an effort to help her son, Brenda decided to go to college to become a physical therapist. She was in her forties.

While Brenda was in school, her other son was in an automobile accident and lost his life. These tragic events shaped her outlook on life and bred a desire to help others.

Brenda worked at a local rehabilitation hospital before opening a PT clinic on the west side of Fort



Worth around 1989. The clinic was named The Well Mill. When the CLASS program first started, it was done as The Well Mill not DSSW. DSSW was started soon after as a separate company.

Brenda was instrumental in getting the CLASS program started, consulting with people at the state level on how to structure the program. She worked *continued on next page*

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hard to get things off the ground in both her PT clinic and for the CLASS program. Being the mother of a disabled person, her primary focus was on providing support and services to persons with disabilities and their families. She was not a “business person”, but did have expectations of her staff to do whatever it took to provide a service and help clients.

Today Brenda has 4 grandchildren who she has spent a lot of time with and really enjoyed. Her oldest granddaughter has graduated from college and her youngest is in middle school. Brenda has retired and she and her husband live on Lake Grandbury. She is still very active in her church and volunteers in community activities such as Meals on Wheels and Hood County Democrats.



DSSW, CDS in Texas, and LifeSpan would like to give a great big “Hooray!” to everyone who attended the rally in Austin on March 1st. For more information and upcoming rallies please check out our websites:

www.dsswtx.org

www.cdsintexas.com

www.lifespan.tx.com

If you would like to receive CARE, TX by email instead of paper, please send your name and address to caretx@dsswtx.org. We also appreciate comments and suggestions. Read past issues online at www.dsswtx.org/caretx.



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