

# Outstanding Business Award Nomination

## **Award Description:**

**The Outstanding Business Award will be presented to a Kansas business which has demonstrated notable and continued support of individuals with disabilities. (i.e. supported employment, volunteer work, donations, etc.)**

**NOMINEE:** Dara's Corner Market

**ORGANIZATION:** Big Lakes Developmental Center

Provide a narrative including answers to the following questions. You may also attach a maximum of three letters of support. Additional information may be attached if necessary.

- What support was demonstrated?
- What was the amount of support?
- What is the size of the business?
- What is the nature of the business?
- How has this support had a positive impact on the lives of individuals with disabilities and their community?
- How long has this business been supportive of individuals with disabilities?
- Additional information.

**NOMINATION NARRATIVE:** Dara's is a family-owned local company that owns and operates eight gas stations and convenience stores around Manhattan. Dara's has an extensive delivery system, a restaurant, and a central warehouse. The convenience stores offer delicious pizza, biscuits and gravy, homemade desserts, and more.

Two and a half years ago Dara's contacted Big Lakes to see if we had a client who could fill a position at their Tuttle Creek Dam location. Shortly after that, Chris E. was hired, and Dara's staff quickly developed a supportive and caring relationship with Chris. Dara's worked with Chris's Employment Training Specialist to create supports for Chris to have autonomy, independence, and choice in his work tasks. For example, the staff and Chris' ETS developed a group of pictures of all the tasks that Chris is responsible for; he is able to choose from the pictures which tasks he performs and in which order he performs them. The Dara's team adjusted their communication style to communicate with Chris as he is hard of hearing, which can create some communication barriers for him. When Chris celebrated his one year of employment with Dara's, the staff coordinated with his ETS to have a little party for him, inviting Big Lakes staff and the manager who oversees several stores with which Chris had built a special bond. Team members brought treats for the occasion. Dara's highlighted his achievement on the marquee outside the store and celebrated him on their social media page.

Dara's asked Chris's ETS if there were more clients like Chris that they could hire because every one of their locations could benefit from an employee like Chris.

The following year, Dara's hired Brent J. at their Kimball location. Brent set the bar high after a few short months at Dara's. Because of his outstanding cleaning, Dara's set better cleaning standards for the rest of the team to follow. When Brent was hospitalized due to health concerns, team members visited Brent, and he proudly hung the 8x10 photo in his hospital room of himself with three of his teammates. Dara's held this position for months while Brent recovered. He worked with his ETS to come back to work at his own pace. Dara's expressed how much they missed Brent and would love him back at the store, even if it was for just thirty minutes at a time. During this time, Brent's one-year anniversary came, and they coordinated with his ETS to celebrate him even though he was not back to work yet. Brent was so excited to return to work when he recovered enough and has since returned to work completing 100% of his duties.

Glenn B. was hired for the perfect job just shy of a year after Brent at another Dara's location. Glenn wanted to do more kitchen work than cleaning, and within three days, he was trained, valued, and welcomed by managers and co-workers.

The whole Dara's team treats all three clients as valued team members and includes them in their employment goals, training, and daily tasks. Each client has an individualized checklist of tasks they complete with their supervisor and a buddy system if they need assistance during the work day.

Outside work hours, Dara's includes the three clients in team-building and family activities like barbeques and holiday parties. All three clients were a part of the team on the Dara's float in the city parade and have been featured on Facebook and in the company newsletter.

Dara goes above and beyond, not just for our clients but also for all their employees and the community of Manhattan. They have created a welcoming environment where our clients feel like family, and they have shown the community the true potential of our clients in a workplace setting. Dara's has proven to be a reliable and hardworking member of the community, and we are proud to be associated with them.

Not only does Dara's employ three Big Lakes clients, but they have also shown financial support to our Foundation by adding us to their monthly rewards system, where a portion of the proceeds is donated to Big Lakes.

We are incredibly grateful for Dara's team. We are excited to see what the future brings as our relationship grows.

**NAME OF PERSON MAKING THIS NOMINATION:** Liz Holle

**ORGANIZATION:** Big Lakes Developmental Center

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*I have reviewed and agreed to the criteria for filming the awards video.  
I have obtained approval for this nomination from the submitting agency's Executive Director.*

Send this form via email to [mshreve@interhab.org](mailto:mshreve@interhab.org)

**The deadline to submit award nominations is June 7!**

June 4, 2024

InterHab Awards Nomination Committee  
700 SW Jackson St. #1100  
Topeka, KS 66603

Dear InterHab Awards Nomination Committee:

It is my honor to recommend Dara's for the Outstanding Business Award for the 2024 Annual InterHab Awards. Dara's unique business model, which prioritizes the inclusion and empowerment of individuals with IDD, sets it apart from other businesses. For the past two and a half years, we have had the pleasure of our clients being part of this exceptional company.

We have three different clients who work at different Dara locations in Manhattan. Each client is employed with a job that fits their skills and job interests, from cleaning, cooking, and stocking to customer service. They make sure that our clients feel like they are part of a team and have been able to develop working relationships with their co-workers and meet new people (customers). Dara's has done an excellent job making accommodations as needed to assist the client to ensure they succeed. Our clients are achieving the goals of being independent.

The three of our clients who are employed at Dara's have been provided with great opportunities to learn new skills and enhance their current skills, which will make them successful in their employment. Our clients are able to be independent and have a full and meaningful life with their job in the community. Our clients are part of a rather big company that makes them feel important and shows that individuals with IDD are capable of much more than people know. Dara's has made it a fun and enjoyable work environment for the clients, and they love going to work each day.

Sincerely,



Karen Mitoska  
Employment Services Manager  
kmitoska@biglakes.org

