

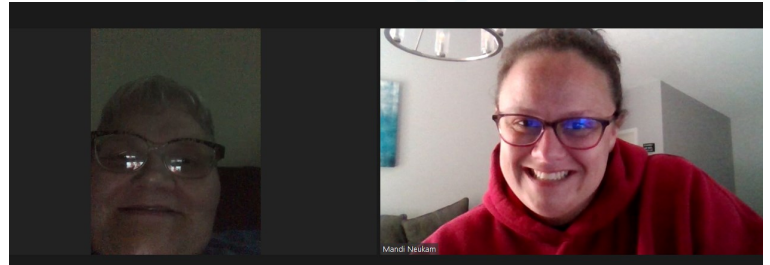
Mission Moments

Made Possible By YOU!

Edition 68, November 2021

The Beauty of Friendship

Posting the volunteer position felt a little like building a dating profile. “Tangram is seeking volunteers to be virtual buddies with individuals with disabilities. Must be familiar with Zoom, have a variety of interests, be able to make conversation, and want to build a friendship with someone.”



Connie (left) and Mandi (right) chat during their weekly Zoom session.

In spring of 2021, Tangram’s Zoom Buddies program was brand new and no one knew what to expect. The intention was to match some of Tangram’s clients with volunteers to help combat isolation and loneliness—side effects of the pandemic. There was the added benefit of improving client technology skills and educating them on internet safety (Tangram supplied participants with a Kindle Fire tablet so they could access Zoom). When the volunteer position went live on various volunteering platforms, applications flooded in, and surprisingly, most of the applicants were from outside of Indiana.

Tangram’s Director of Mission Advancement, Lindsey Hill, interviewed applicants to help find the best matches for the pilot group of clients that were selected. “I interviewed people from Ohio, Illinois, Colorado, North Carolina, New York, and Indiana—probably some other states too! Everyone I interviewed had prior experience with disability—either through work or volunteerism or personal experience, which is sort of rare for us. But the most interesting thing is that most of the people I talked to also mentioned that they were feeling lonely and felt like this would be a good opportunity to give back while also connecting with people in a safe way,” she recalled.

Getting the program up and running took a bit of time, but by May, ten clients were matched with volunteer buddies and starting meeting regularly over Zoom. Through the summer months, buddies developed their own schedules and enjoyed learning more about each other with each session. Some buddies played virtual games, others cooked together, some just talked and caught up.

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Connie is a Tangram client and one of the participants in Zoom Buddies. The program was important to her because, prior to the pandemic, she was matched with an in-person buddy. The pair had a great relationship, but her volunteer wasn't able to continue volunteering for personal reasons.



Mandi and Connie were finally able to meet in person in September.

Connie was understandably upset that her friend couldn't spend time with her anymore and frequently asked if she could get another buddy. Then, the pandemic hit and in-person volunteering was placed on hold.

When Connie joined Zoom Buddies and was matched with Mandi, she told Lindsey that she liked seeing Mandi via Zoom, but would really like to have a buddy she could see in-person.

Unbeknownst to Connie, Mandi was one of only two Zoom Buddies who lived in the Indianapolis area, and she had also inquired about potentially visiting Connie in-person.

"It was so serendipitous for Mandi to come to us and for her to be a good match for Connie—like the stars aligned," Lindsey explained.

Mandi completed some additional training and, in September, was finally able to visit Connie at her home. They still meet weekly on Zoom, but now they are also meeting in person every other week when their schedules allow. "She is so much fun to hang with," Mandi exclaimed.

We love seeing the connections that have been made through this program and plan to expand it to more clients in the coming months. If the pandemic taught us anything, it's the value of human connection and friendship. In this season of gratitude, we give thanks for our Zoom Buddies volunteers and for the gift of friendship!

Your donations make moments like this one possible. Support more successes by donating here: www.thetangramway.org/donate. For more information on Zoom Buddies or to inquire about open volunteer positions, e-mail Lindsey Hill at lhill@thetangramway.org.