

Leanna Gardner



Hometown: Waterloo, Iowa

A few words about my work: I have been a CNA for 22 years. I have worked in Nursing Homes and Hospitals. Both are very challenging in different ways. Working on every unit in the hospital from rehab to Labor and Delivery. Working 5 years now on a Chemical Dependency Unit taking care of adolescence to elder adults.

Recent Accomplishments: Earning a scholarship 3 years in a row to the ICA Conference, completing the Leadership Program, and being selected to be on the Direct Care Worker Leadership Council, attending the Day on the Hill at the State Capitol. Escorting the Lt. Governor Sally Pederson, attending a ICA board meeting. Spoke at the ICA 2006 conference.

My first job: I started out delivering newspapers in my neighborhood when I was 9 yrs old. I have been working ever since in various jobs such as a Babysitter, Wife, Mother, Waitress, Valet and Hostess at a hotel, PSA agent for an airline, CNA, Secretary and in Staffing/ Scheduling.

My favorite part of caregiving: I love to help others. When I go home at night and know that I have made a difference in someone's life it just makes me feel soooo darn good. Knowing they are resting comfortably or have the best quality of life possible for as long as possible.

The toughest part of caregiving: Wishing I could split myself in to two people so I could do more. The days are long and the pay and help is short.

Something I'd like to change about the caregiving industry: I would like to see the health care coverage for direct care workers improve. Benefits such as The Family Medical Leave Act need to be adjusted to include the in-laws such as mother and father of spouse. I just cannot see a husband giving personal care to his mother or vice versa.

How caregiving will change in the next decade: We need better training and benefits for the direct care professionals if we expect them to stay in the position. I believe longer and extensive education with more hands on in the field. If more people are going to be cared for in the home longer we need well educated and trained direct care workers that can do an exceptional job without constant supervision.

What advice would you give to employers about what they need to do to recruit and retain direct care workers? They should have more initial class and clinical training, it is a profession not just a job. Maybe they should offer a sign on bonus that they will receive after 2 years of employment. Have a Mentor assigned to the new direct care professional so they are all trained in the same professional manner accustomed to their facility. More workshops or continuing education to keep up on their skills. You get more busy bees with honey instead of vinegar.

Something else I'd like to accomplish: Be a great public speaker, then I could comfortably tell the world about the ICA and the Better Jobs Better Care program and my experiences.

Someone I admire: My husband, he respects me and my profession, supports me and my interest in the ICA. He makes me whole without him I would not be complete.

My outside interest: My family, horseback riding, gardening, crafts, and I love to watch the green grass grow.

About my family: My husband Ken was in the military and has been a machinist for 28 ½ years. We have been married for 18 years. Together we have 5 children: 3 boys, 2 girls and 3 grandchildren: 2 boys and 1 girl.

Favorite vacation spot: Well we have been to Florida, Ohio, and Mississippi. We have taken a 10 day road trip from Iowa to Las Vegas and back. So I would say Hawaii would be a dream vacation.