

Author and Motivational Speaker Named Student Success: Featured Alumnus

Waubonsee Community College alumnus Amy Chally has faced many challenges over her lifetime, but has persevered to turn those challenges into an opportunity to help and motivate others.

Chally was born with spastic quadriplegia cerebral palsy that causes her muscles to be constantly tight and contracted, making it a struggle to move or control movements in her arms and legs. While she can walk with a walker, Chally uses a power chair and service dog for greater independence and mobility in her daily life.

Today, Chally is an author, motivational speaker and social worker seeking the right opportunity for her next career move. She recently worked with students at Geneva Middle School North, substituting for the social worker on maternity leave, where she said she had an amazing experience with the staff and kids. But when that temporary assignment ended, Chally wasn't going to just sit by and wait for what's next and has launched a new career as an author and motivational speaker.

"I am a social worker by trade but I have struggled on and off to find permanent employment in the years since I graduated," she said. "So now I am trying to start a second career as an author and motivational speaker while I wait to find my niche in social work."

Chally recently published "Making Independence Happen, One Paw at a Time" a two-part memoir told from two very different perspectives. Part one is her first service dog Yazzen's adventurous tale of his journey from a tiny pup to her invaluable partner in life. Part two is her story, about how she got started on her journey of receiving a service dog and also "how courage, faith and love helped me get through the obstacles I face in life."

Her beloved service dog Yazzen passed away in 2014 and she currently has a new companion, Portland.

During her time at Waubonsee, Chally was a Gustafson Scholar and said she enjoyed the community service and other requirements necessary as part of that scholarship. She said that the staff at the Access Center were helpful at Waubonsee and remembers a number of instructors like Dr. Murphy in psychology and Sara Quirk in English.

After graduating from Waubonsee, Chally continued her education at Aurora University, earning both her bachelor's and master's degrees in social work. She was drawn to the field after an encounter with a social worker at the age of 13. When Chally was facing an upcoming surgery, a social worker approached her and offered her support. "I wanted to be able to use my experiences to help them, not because I knew what it was like to be them, but because I knew what it was like to be me as a person with a disability."

In addition to her book, which is available for purchase on Create Space, Barnes and Noble, and Amazon, Chally is serving as a motivational speaker for a broad range of audiences. She has focused on school assemblies, employee training and disability awareness education.

"I have been both a keynote speaker and a panelist at diversity/disability awareness events and have spoken to parents, teachers and special education majors about the benefits of inclusion at local schools," she said.

Outside of work, Chally enjoys going to the gym, spending time with her family and her Canine Companions for Independence service dog Portland.

Chally is driven to succeed by her faith and passion to help others be all they can be. For future Waubonsee students she has one simple piece of advice. "Follow your heart, believe in yourself, and don't ever give up on your passion," she said.

For her perseverance, desire to help others and can-do attitude, Waubonsee is proud to recognize Amy Chally its Student Success: Featured Alumnus for October 2016.

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