



FAVARH - THE ARC OF THE FARMINGTON VALLEY

Spotlight on Staff

JENNIFER COOK

FAVARH DAY DSP

Jennifer Cook (a.k.a. Cookie) is a DSP with the Favarh Day Program. She started with Favarh in 2010 and returned to Favarh in 2019 after taking time to help support her aging parents at home.

Jen grew up in East Granby. She attended Hartford College For Women and the University of Hartford majoring in Women's Studies and History. After school, she moved to Washington DC and lived there for 10 years where she held a long list of jobs. She eventually moved back to East Granby and started her professional relationship with Favarh's Day Program as a DSP.

Jen's talents led her down a unique path this past year as the single Favarh staff person who runs the daily online activities for Day Services. Every morning and every afternoon, Jen can be found in a Zoom meeting interacting with up to ten Favarh individuals at a time.

"Being a creative person, this job fuels that part of my nature," Jen says. Jen's position evolved in a creative direction thanks to the flexibility in Favarh policies which encourages staff to share their passions, interests and gifts with the individuals they support. For Jen, theater played a big part in her upbringing and her life. She relies on these skills now as she interacts with her individuals.

"My mom was music teacher at East Granby High School. I grew up helping to make theater sets in grade school. When you grow up doing something, it stays with you," says Jen. She feels her background in theater helps her ability to connect with individuals over the internet.

The biggest challenge Jen's faced in life was caring for her parents in their last years. "It's a strange thing to commit to, helping your parents

pass their final days. Making sure they are well cared for and that their death is a good death. It's a big accomplishment. My dad was diabetic. He became septic and ended up in the hospital. It was quick. My mom had Alzheimer's and she was on hospice for almost 2 years." Jen knows she fulfilled her goal of making their days and their deaths "good."

In her work with Favarh individuals, Jen sees a direct parallel with her parents' care. "My goal for Favarh is offering recreation therapy and making every day a good day. I learned about that growing up with my mom and caring for her as she aged. Our goal every day was to taste something she liked, listen to the music she liked, hear the voices she knew and loved, making every day a good day. At Favarh we are making sure people have joy every day. That's my goal, bringing joy to individuals and making every day count."

Thinking of the moments in her work that give her satisfaction, she tells a story of her afternoon dance parties on Zoom, when someone predictively requests the song Gangnam Style. "As soon as they hear the song, all the boxes on the Zoom are moving and dancing," she says laughing.

Jen lives in the East Granby home she grew up in with two cats and her dog Agnus who has her own Favarh fan club thanks to Zoom meetings broadcast from Jen's home.

About her Favarh colleagues, she affirms, "It's a good crew of people." And to those who aspire to work for Favarh, she says, "We're here for the individuals. Even if you don't like the song Hokey Pokey, we're playing the Hokey Pokey. You've got to figure out a way to have fun!"