

Mandy Clayton Named DESE March Employee of the Month

Mandy Clayton, School Support Specialist at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE's) Missouri School for the Blind has been chosen by a panel of her peers as the agency's Employee of the Month for March 2021.

"It's a humbling experience," said Clayton, when asked what being named the DESE Employee of the Month means to her. "I am part of a great team that accomplishes remarkable things, which is the real reason we are all successful."

Clayton began her career with DESE in March 2017. As a School Support Specialist, her responsibilities include providing resources and training to educators and families of students with visual impairment or deafblindness through the Missouri School for the Blind Outreach program.

Clayton started at square one, learning how to create and edit print materials to make them accessible, and then trained other Outreach staff members to do the same. When the need arose to shift to virtual training sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic, Clayton led the charge to organize, assemble and mail hundreds of boxes of training materials to families, participants, agencies and other national deaf-blind projects. Clayton took it upon herself to learn and manage the technical side of virtual trainings, coordinate national and statewide presenters, and train parents and participants on how to successfully attend virtual trainings. Her tremendous work behind the scenes resulted in highly successful events for participants. In addition, Clayton partnered with the Missouri School for the Blind and teachers of the visually impaired across the state to develop what will soon be the first statewide Virtual Braille Challenge.

"Mandy continually strives to learn," said her nominator, Jane Herder. "She keeps a positive problem-solving outlook and meticulously organizes a myriad of materials for professional development. Mandy's work with the many clients of the Outreach program is exceptional, as she always finds solutions and continually follows up to ensure everyone gets the help they need. What makes Mandy's perspective praiseworthy is that she never let the obstacles that COVID-19 presented lessen or cancel the objectives of the Outreach work."

For Clayton, the most rewarding part of her job is helping a family or educator find the resources needed to support a child. "I love working with our team at Missouri School for the Blind Outreach," Clayton said. "Each member of the team has a focus on improving the lives of the children we serve, and working with them is a great experience."

Originally born in Charleston, South Carolina, Clayton and her partner, Matt, live in downtown St. Louis with their cat. She enjoys sewing and quilting. She also loves playing online computer games with her niece and nephew since she doesn't get to see them often.