

## A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE: THE FROSTING ON THE CAKE

By Jeffrey Symes  
One Sky

Before she punches in to begin her shift at Hannaford, Sarah Portrie walks the entire store, front to back, visiting each department and greeting every co-worker by name. She reminds each one that they are “amazing” or “beautiful” and thanks them for something they offer, whether it’s their hard work and helpful ways, or a nice smile.

Portrie demonstrates every day why “disability” means “different ability.” What she offers to both customers and fellow employees at the Hampton market extends beyond its walls and touches the larger Seacoast community.



SARAH PORTRIE WITH HER MOTHER KATE.

As a seventh grader at Hampton Academy, Portrie organized a community fundraiser with her church to gather donations of infant and toddler items for families in the Seacoast area. That was a decade ago. This April 7th will mark the 10th Annual Baby Shower Benefit at the First Congregational Church in Hampton. It will also mark Portrie’s last as a host and organizer for an annual event that has drawn upward of 150 people. After this year, she hands responsibilities to Laurel Brindamour and her family to keep the annual event going.



SARAH PORTRIE WITH HER DIRECT SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDER NANCY KELLEY AT THEIR WORKPLACE AT HANNAFORD IN HAMPTON.

“It started because Sarah loves to plan parties,” says her mother, Kate Portrie, who has worked the Baby Shower Benefit right alongside her daughter. “The need was so great, but we thought it would be a one-time thing. It’s just been a win-win in our community.”

The items are used to stock and benefit the non-denominational mission, “God’s Baby Closet,” which operates year-round at the church. Everything from diapers and clothing to books and toys are offered free of charge to Seacoast families who need them for their infants and toddlers.

Kate Portrie estimates that diapers alone cost the mission \$800 each month to meet the demand. “That’s how big the need is,” she says.

And it has been the Portrie family who have gone every Saturday for the past 10 years to pick up the diapers and bring them to the church where Sarah bags them and stocks the shelves. Hannaford was also an early supporter of the Baby Shower Benefit, partnering with Portrie and donating cash and goods years before Portrie became an employee there. And there are still former teachers of Portrie from Hampton Academy and Winnacunnet High School who attend the event every year.



SARAH PORTRIE TAKES INVENTORY AS PART OF HER JOB IN THE BAKERY AT THE HAMPTON HANNAFORD SUPERMARKET.

This year’s Baby Shower Benefit has special meaning to Sarah because it falls on her grandmother’s birthday. Nana Betty died in 2013, but Sarah follows in her footsteps in her own way. After the shower, Portrie will sit down and write Thank You notes to everyone who donates something - it’s usually about 200 people. “My mother was all about love and Sarah takes after her,” says Kate.

Nancy Kelley is not surprised by either Portrie’s thoughtfulness or her drive. She has worked as Portrie’s direct support provider for the past 15 months. She describes Portrie as a “remarkable young woman,” and that working with Portrie gives her “pure joy and happiness.” But while Kelley may have the official role of an aide in their relationship, she says it is Portrie who offers support and inspires those around her.

Retired after some 40 years as a dental hygienist, it wasn’t long before Kelley was looking for something to do that was more than just keeping busy. Her own experience with two nephews who have autism led her to look at One Sky Community Services. She saw an ad for a support worker there that described someone who sounded very familiar - Portrie had been a patient of hers for more than 10 years. Still, she recalls the interview in the Portrie home and high

expectations in having to answer the 10 questions Portrie had written down the night before.

During the interview, Portrie confided to Kelley that one of her dreams was to own and operate a bakery. Kelley smiled and shared that more than 40 years ago, she took a cake-decorating class as a hobbyist’s interest and that she’s been doing it ever since.

Through the self-directed services program at One Sky, the family hired Kelley as Portrie’s job coach to work with her in the bakery department at Hannaford where Portrie boxed and bagged baked goods. But with a bigger goal in mind, the two teamed up on the side, working in the kitchen with Kelley instructing Portrie in the cake decorating arts. Portrie was an earnest and hard-working student, practicing at home until she was ready. With Kelley advocating, Hannaford gave Portrie a chance and started her decorating cupcakes. Now, after more instruction and practice with Kelley, Portrie decorates cakes as well.

For Kelley, working with Portrie has been inspiring. “This experience has been tremendously rewarding to me,” she says. And there is more work to do.

Though Portrie is ending one chapter and moving into another in her life, she has no plans on curbing her ambitions anytime soon.



*Incorporated in 1983, One Sky Community Services has been dedicated to providing a comprehensive array of services, supports and programs to individuals and families with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as acquired brain disorders. A private 5013C nonprofit organization, it is the designated area agency serving the following communities: Brentwood, Deerfield, East Kingston, Epping, Exeter, Fremont, Greenland, Hampton, Hampton Falls, Kensington, Kingston, New Castle, Newfields, Newington, Newmarket, North Hampton, Northwood, Nottingham, Portsmouth, Raymond, Rye, Seabrook, South Hampton and Stratham. One Sky works with nearly 1,200 individuals and families on a yearly basis.*