



## THE 2024 MIDGE KOVACS ANNUAL AWARENESS AWARD

### New Jersey Dysphonia Support Group Risa Clay

*In honor of her dedication in support group leadership and fundraising for Dysphonia International*

Since 1999 **Dysphonia International** has taken great pleasure in bestowing the **Midge Kovacs Annual Awareness Award**. Midge started one of the first SD support groups. She wrote a newsletter in order to share information about SD as well as experiences of people living with SD. She encouraged all of us with SD to think beyond our individual voice problems. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." (**Margaret Mead**)

In presenting the Midge Kovacs Annual Awareness Award, we honor the outstanding work of a Dysphonia Support Group. This presentation marks our 26th consecutive award. For her work over the past few years, this award is given to **Risa Clay** and the **New Jersey Dysphonia Support Group**. Truly, this dynamic leader follows in the footsteps of the late pioneering SD advocate, **Midge Kovacs**.

According to Risa, "I feel that I can do something constructive in our community and I've met so many amazing people along the way." In 2016, Risa was profiled in *Our Voice* where she shared about her dysphonia journey. She was featured in the quarterly Support Group Leadership meeting held in December 2023. She is a retired high school principal and currently serves as President of her local council. She quickly transitioned from the role of Area Contact Leader to the role of Support Group Leader. She became involved in our organization because of her participation in Walk for Talk 2022 and 2023. In 2023, she was the top fundraiser, with over \$12,000 raised. In addition, she received the highest number of sponsorships for Walk for Talk 2023. Risa has agreed to serve on the Planning Committee for Walk for Talk 2024. In her words, "Having SD has taught me so much about the value of support and empathy as well as the need to increase awareness."

Risa has lived with spasmodic dysphonia for 18 years. She has done voice therapy, continues to receive Botox injections, and has participated in a research project funded by our organization. She reflected: "Nothing takes the place of being able to share and support other people who walk my path. Through my connections with others who have vocal cord disorders, I have found a much greater sense of peace." **Dysphonia International** is grateful for the experience, dedication and commitment shown by Leader, **Risa Clay** of the **New Jersey Dysphonia Support Group**. She exemplifies these words: "You have the power to motivate and inspire. Let your enthusiasm shine." (**Author, JD Crighton**)