



# Pathlight

COMPASSION

EXPERTISE

INCLUSION



## An Extra Room, A “Sisters” Home

Amy Sullivan and her 11-year old daughter Madi welcomed Marie Guilmette into their Belchertown home last fall through Pathlight’s Shared Living program. Now, Marie is living the dream as she discovers all the things she loves to do. Whether a spa day or camping in Vermont, dancing the night away or shop-till-you-drop trips to the mall, family movie nights on a big screen or horseback riding, Marie and her new family are doing them together and they are having a blast.

“We are an active family and having Marie with us has made everything we do more fun. She’s added happiness to our family,” said Amy. Marie chimes in, “That’s what friends are for. We are sisters.”

Amy learned about Shared Living through her work at The Consortium

where she is a self-advocacy and human rights coordinator. “I love working with this population and decided to look into it. I researched organizations and chose Pathlight because of its reputation as a Shared Living pioneer.”

Marie, who is 31 years old, had been living with another care provider, but it was clear she was ready to grow into the next phase of her life. This fortuitous timing brought Amy and Marie together.

Dennis LaFleche, a placement coordinator at Pathlight said, “Marie has blossomed. You can see the difference in her because of these new opportunities.”

While Marie works at MicroTek, where she helps to assemble wire harnesses, Amy is considering opening her home to another

individual. “I grew up hearing ‘You have an extra room, you fill it,’ I only wish I’d known about Shared Living sooner.”

Pumping her fist, Marie punctuates the conversation by adding “I’m a grown woman and I love my sisters!”

Shared Living creates opportunities for people with developmental disabilities to live in private homes and develop meaningful relationships while learning to be as independent and integrated into their community as possible. If you’d like to open your home or learn more about Shared Living, please call 800-652-2201.

# Reorganizing and Reaching Out

There's no doubt about it—2017 has come in with a bang. I think the two words of the year so far are “historic” and “uncertain.” But here at Pathlight, we keep our mission front and center at all times and as our new name says we want to be a beacon to families no matter where they are in their journey or what the year brings.

Pathlight's new Development and Communications team has lots of exciting plans to stay connected with our community. This team of pros has been together only since March of last year and in that short time we renamed and rebranded Pathlight and Autism Connections, launched a new website, created a 2017 calendar highlighting our programs, hosted several events, and produced dozens of new videos. And there's lots more to come!

Pathlight serves hundreds of people with intellectual and developmental

disabilities every day—in day programs, homes, afterschool, work—just about every facet of life. And every day we hear powerful stories about that work—



from big triumphs like a solo trip to the market or landing a job, or small victories like a full day without eating sugar.

Most often these stories happen under the radar, but we think they add up to the stuff of life.

We want to be sure that these stories are told and these achievements heralded. So we are launching this newsletter and have beefed up our social media presence, so be sure to look for us on Facebook (and the pages of our programs Family Empowerment, Autism Connections, and Whole Children). There you can learn about our events and programs as well as hear the stories large and small that make up the vibrant community we serve.

And we want to hear from you, too! Please share your own stories with us either by emailing us at [development@pathlightgroup.org](mailto:development@pathlightgroup.org) or post it on any of our Facebook pages.

Together, let's make this a year to remember!

*Valle Dwight*

Valle Dwight, Director, Development and Communications

## The Pathlight Challenge

Pathlight was conceived 65 years ago by five mothers who wanted a different life for their children with developmental disabilities. That forward-thinking spirit laid the foundation for many Pathlight innovations. We were the first to:

- offer a developmental day school in western Massachusetts
- create community homes in Massachusetts
- develop the pioneering Shared Living model in the country
- open an autism resource center funded by the state

It's in Pathlight's DNA to be at the cutting edge of service refinement and expansion for people with intellectual disabilities, which is why we are happy to report that we have joined with Valley Venture Mentors (VVM)—a Springfield-based business that supports startups

with intensive accelerator and mentorship programs—to create the Pathlight Challenge.

“It's a great partnership,” Ruth Banta, Pathlight's Executive Director, said. “We're tying our history of innovation and our passion for the people that we serve to entrepreneurs' passion for innovation and breaking barriers.”

The Challenge began in the autumn with a national call to entrepreneurs to develop technology aimed at increasing independence for people with intellectual disabilities. The prize is two coveted spots in VVM's Accelerator program.

In November, Pathlight employees, board members, and stakeholders interviewed the top six applicants chosen from a pool of over 30.

Our winners are: Galactic Smarties,

which is working on a Personalized Smart Fire Alarm System, and Habit Stackr, a company developing an Executive Functioning Coach App.

Underway now, the Accelerator Program is a four-month intensive program that connects entrepreneurs to experts (that's us!) and investors as they craft their products. In May, the Pathlight fellows graduate from the Accelerator, at which time their technologies will be unveiled.

“To our knowledge, this challenge is the first of its kind,” said Paul Silva, Chief Innovation Officer at VVM. “There are hundreds of accelerator programs in this country running every year, but I haven't run across any that are focused on assistive technology.”

We look forward to sharing the results of these collaborations and next steps for innovation at Pathlight.



# Donor Highlight

Jon D. Lumbra, CFO and Vice President of Administration at The Dowd Agencies, jumped in with both feet to support the mission of Pathlight and its programs. In just a few months, Jon demonstrated what a motivated volunteer can accomplish, starting with helping to secure a leading sponsorship for one of our premiere galas and serving as a spokesperson on local television for the event, then becoming the newest member of the Pathlight Board of Directors. We asked Jon to talk about what motivated him to support Pathlight's mission and how others can get involved.



Jon and Pattie Lumbra at Stepping Out for Autism

This year when the annual ask went out I approached the Dowd Agencies Board of Directors and made a pitch to be a Diamond Sponsor. It didn't take much to convince them that this was the right thing to do. Our service areas are alike, our philosophy on giving back to the community is alike, and at the end of the day we at the Dowd family want to be role models for other successful businesses to step up and help those at home who need it in some way.

## **What are some parting words for other local business leaders to get involved?**

I remember that moment, as if it was yesterday, when the doctor said that Sophia had autism. My wife and I are fortunate that we have a great support system in place, full of family and friends. Both of our employers are generous to us, not only allowing us the extra time needed for IEP meetings, follow up medical appointments, and therapies, but also with their financial support to such great organizations like Autism Connections and Pathlight. A little funding can go a long way when we all pull together. If you operate a business in the valley and are making a profit, consider giving some of it back to the community that purchased your goods and got you that profit to start with. The best sales tool any successful business person can have is "Goodwill."

## **When did you first learn of our program(s)?**

Six years ago when our oldest daughter was first diagnosed with autism at UMass Memorial Hospital, the doctor gave us the contact information for Autism Connections.

## **Describe what it meant to you and your family?**

Our introduction to the program was a little overwhelming at first as we were still processing the diagnosis. Our first encounters were about getting us educated on this new world and what was available to us. As time passed we have used Autism Connections to find support groups and alternative activities for Sophia.

## **I know your daughter is also participating in some programs at Whole Children in Hadley—how has that experience been?**

We have participated in the Monday night Gymnastics classes for the last three sessions. While it's clear to us that Sophia loves the one-on-one attention she gets there, the bigger take away for us is the importance of the outside-of-school peer interactions and the time it gives us to discuss current issues and events with parents who may be in a similar situations. Sometimes just being able to vent to a person who has walked in your shoes is comforting.

## **You were able to get your company involved with one of our signature fundraising events supporting Autism Connections. What do you feel helped you make your case to support our mission?**

Since first learning of Autism Connections we have tried to attend the Stepping Out gala to show our support and help in some small way to raise much needed funding dollars.

## **Pathlight Board Officers**

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Mark Your  
Calendars!  
May 2 is Valley  
Gives Day.

# Mark Your Calendars

## **Sprout Film Festival**

**February 26, 4-6 pm  
Eric Carle Museum  
Amherst, MA**

The Sprout Film Festival's mission is "to inspire audiences, promote inclusion, and support transformative film making as an integral part of social change."

All of the Sprout films highlight the lives and experiences of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

By embracing differences and encouraging acceptance, Sprout aims to "make the invisible visible."

Join us! Purchase tickets at [wholechildren.org](http://wholechildren.org)

## **Pathlight to Making Dreams Come True**

**March 26, 1-4 pm  
Baird Middle School  
1 Rooney Road, Ludlow**

Join us for a second screening of short films from the Sprout Film Festival that feature people with intellectual disabilities.

And if that's not enough, come along for Carnival Fun—from face painting to origami, storytelling to ping pong.

This is a fundraiser to support the Darren FUNd, which allows people in our Family-Based Living programs to take trips, go on adventures, do whatever it is that makes them happy!

More info at [pathlightgroup.org](http://pathlightgroup.org)

## **27<sup>th</sup> Annual Autism Conference**

**April 11, 8 am-3:30 pm  
Log Cabin, Holyoke MA**

Join parents, self-advocates, and professionals at this educational and informative gathering. Speakers this year:

**Dr. Karen Levine**, co-founder of Boston Children's Hospital's Autism Program and author of *Attacking Anxiety*, her guide to treating anxiety and phobias in children with autism.

**Ron Suskind**, author of *Life Animated*, a story about his family's journey connecting with their son with autism.

More info at [autismconnectionsma.org](http://autismconnectionsma.org)



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