

# Pathlight Newsletter

COMPASSION | EXPERTISE | INCLUSION

## Essential and Thankful

Dear Friends,

Life changed for all of us in response to COVID-19, but it did not stop.

As you know, Pathlight is an essential business and our number one priority is the health and safety of the people we serve and our staff. Some staff are working remotely and supporting families by phone or through the miracle of Zoom, but many are on the front lines caring for individuals who live in our group homes and shared living homes.

Many of you made thoughtful donations or sent heartfelt messages of concern, and we're all so grateful for your generosity of spirit. We are deeply thankful for every kindness shown and the donations are critical to our work as we continue to operate and respond to new, emerging needs.

It's been inspiring to witness the Pathlight community, internally and externally, come together in service to the greater good of the most vulnerable among us. And so I'm pleased to share a few stories from our programs that shine a light on all that's still wonderful in our world.

Thank you again for making everything we do possible.

Wishing you a safe and healthy summer!



Ruth Banta  
Executive Director



## Helping Families In Need

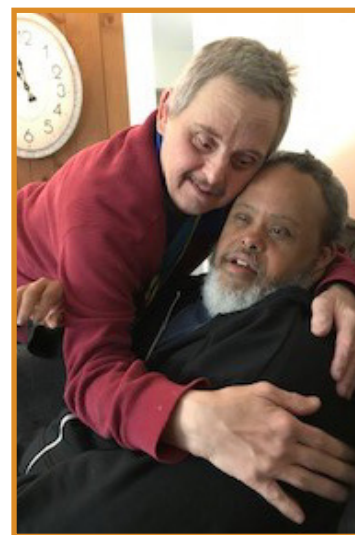


The pandemic starkly reminded us that an emergency can knock a family's finances off balance. Suddenly, essentials like rent, transportation and even food are in question. For other families, the unexpected expense of computers and Internet connection put them over the edge.

*The Radcliffe is the Reason and Arthur Too Fight for Autism* organization generously donated \$5,000 to provide emergency funds for those currently served by Autism Connections. Some families needed an additional computer

because they have multiple children vying for connection time; others needed different equipment to access specialized programs for special education purposes or therapies. With their new equipment came confident students and thankful parents.

Even in the best of times, transportation is a critical need. Autism Connections received an urgent request from a family whose car needed major repairs just when everything was shutting down and before any delivery programs were in place. Without transportation, they could not pick up school supplied meals, nor could they go to the grocery store or to the pharmacy. Autism Connections stepped in and funded a rental car for two weeks until the family's car got fixed. The outcome: one very happy and grateful family. When life throws us a curve ball, it's comforting to know that our community is there to step in and help.



*"We simply cannot thank you enough for supplying us with a chrome book . . . this is an invaluable resource! This will allow our children to complete school work and participate in Zoom lessons and therapy sessions. Thank you for all you do to educate and advocate for our children."*

# Pathlight Homes: Creative and Caring Adjustments

This stay at home period has been hard for all. For the five women who live together at Pathlight's Franklin Street residence in Westfield, it has been a huge change but also an opportunity to be creative.

The active and social women regularly go to jobs or day programs before Covid-19 required them to stay at home. They have not only made this huge adjustment to their routine work, with the help of Pathlight's residential staff, they are making it fun!

The staff have been creating activities to replicate the interaction and enrichment that would normally fill their days out in the community.

At home they are cooking, having game days, practicing yoga, luxuriating in home spa treatments, and doing arts and crafts. A special treat arrived when Program Manager Victoria Barsaleau delivered unfrosted cupcakes with everything needed to create their own delicious cupcake masterpieces.

The Franklin Street activities are just one example of the creative and caring adjustments that have been made at Pathlight's 30 residences. For all the residences, one of the hardest things has been restricting visitors. To keep connections

with family and friends, residential staff set up webcams in the homes for video chats, Zoom meetings and participating in virtual day programs and Pathlight's Whole Children's program. This video capability also means that residents can stay in contact with their doctors, and receive Telehealth care.

The commitment of some of Pathlight's residential staff has stretched beyond their usual work week. In addition to temperature checks and evaluation for symptoms several times a day for staff and residents, some staff who normally work in shifts have moved into the homes for two week periods. This has been a tremendous undertaking, as many staff members have their own families at home. These examples of dedication are just some of the ways that Pathlight has pulled together as a community to work to keep the individuals we serve safe, protect the wider community we live in, and enjoy each other's company during this time.



## Highlights From the Heart

### We are so grateful for:

- the **in-kind donations** you sent, including **arts and crafts supplies, bean bag chairs, lego sets, coloring books and crayons, karaoke machines and puzzles.** These brought joy to men and women who were staying home from work and day programs.
- the **mask makers** who made and donated 1,200 masks so staff could have personal protective equipment.
- **everyone who donated in response to COVID-19**, especially those who participated in *Giving Tuesday Now*, on May 5 when Pathlight received more than \$10,000 in gifts from individuals, families and businesses. Thank you!
- **gift cards** from The Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundation for Autism, Inc. which were used to purchase emergency food for families before public funding programs were set up.
- Pathlight's **creative and dedicated staff**, from the teachers at Whole Children who built online classes from scratch, to our nurses, support staff and care providers who continue to do whatever it takes to serve our vulnerable population.
- **Virtual learning resources**, including Zoom video conferencing, which allows staff to do all that they possibly can for families when circumstances did not allow them to have in-person visits. This is especially true for specialists from our Autism Connections/Family Empowerment programs as well as all our care providers in our Shared Living and Adult Family Care programs.

Our hearts will not forget what you have done. Thank you!

# A Reason To Get Up

By: Jody Santos, Whole Children Parent

My preteen son was just starting to find his place in life when the world suddenly shifted beneath him. His budding social life was reduced to glitchy video chats as the quarantine forced us all inside.

"What's the point of anything?" my son cried one day after his second camp was canceled for the summer. "There's nothing to look forward to anymore." And, yet, there is life right now in my living room, enthusiastic voices greeting my son and talking about golden bells, a villager named Elvis, and a DIY shell lamp. Whole Children's online Animal Crossing class has begun.

Our son was diagnosed on the autism spectrum at age three and has been taking a variety of classes at Whole Children since he was in kindergarten, including social skills, video games, gymnastics, and Pokemon. One highlight of last year was joining his Whole Children classmates at a Pokemon video game tournament.

The pandemic has been described as a kind of "perfect storm" gathering for young people with disabilities. Experts warn that social isolation, the absence of routines and outside support, and overall uncertainty can lead to regression and acting out. In my house, the days

sometimes drift from online schoolwork to halfhearted attempts at origami or a jigsaw puzzle, and we struggle to stay positive as the bright sun recedes into late afternoon. But then 4 o'clock arrives, and cuddly cartoon animals suddenly appear on my TV while a medley of young voices floats from my son's computer.

In Animal Crossing, you are the sole human villager on an island full of animals, and the game revolves around decorating your house and island.

Although Whole Children's class is virtual like the game, there is a real human connection among the students and their instructor, Amanda Kent. The students fly to each other's islands and gush over the latest price of turnips. "What? What's going on with your turnips? Your turnips are at 608?" one student exclaimed during a recent class. "Oh, my God. Oh, my God. I'm freaking out."

While the class is a blast and builds a sense of community, Amanda also uses the time to reinforce certain social skills. There are dos and don'ts in Animal Crossing that apply to everyday life. When visiting someone's island, don't trample on the flowers and water them if you can. Ask before picking someone else's fruit because resources can become scarce if



visitors grab too many at once.

It might sound like an exaggeration to say that Whole Children's Animal Crossing class has given my son a reason to get up in the morning, but in a concrete way, it has. Every day at 9 a.m. he checks the "stalk" market's fluctuating turnip prices in preparation for class later in the day. These small rituals with friends bring comfort during this time of uncertainty. Five days a week at 4 p.m., my son is not alone on his island, and that makes all the difference.

## The View From the Other Side of the Computer

*"I was nervous to start our online classes because I wasn't sure how they would translate on a video platform and I was curiously apprehensive about how the students would be able to engage with them. Now that we are 2 months (more?) in I can fully say, it has been as hard as it sounds! What I have found solace in, and this is what keeps me pushing through the frustration and anxiety, is the excitement and willingness I have seen from the students. The minute their camera turns on I see the flashes of joy but also relief and that reminds me that what we are doing is so important. Just creating a space for them to see each other, talk, hang out and have some small silver of normalcy is the most important part."*

*-Liana Marks, Whole Children and Milestones Teacher*

*"Some days are certainly better than others, and some days the Internet just decides to be a royal pain and cut out for 30-60 seconds at a time repeatedly over the course of an hour, but I continue to be impressed with how well the students are doing -all of them have had great days, and even their off-days are no different than at Whole Children."*

*-Kevin Cox, Whole Children and Milestones Teacher*



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## Pathlight/Whole Children Awarded Grants for Relief

We are very grateful to the Community Foundation of Western MA for its generous COVID-19 Response Fund Grant of \$65,000 to support low-income people with disabilities, the kindness of Health New England for its COVID-19 Mini Grant of \$1,500 to address and improve Internet connection issues for those in need, and the helping hand of Emily's Fund for its Stay Afloat Grant of \$1,000 to Whole Children. This response to the time-sensitive needs of the Pathlight community has lifted us all – thank you!

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