

It Can Begin With You



A Lifeway study said that 65% of family members of someone with mental illness believe local churches should do more in talking about mental illness openly. I myself have met several people who silently wait week-after-week for their

leadership to publicly address the issue of mental illness. However, an increasing number of congregants are learning that change doesn't always have to begin with the clergy. Anyone can start sharing their story. Anyone can take the initiative to ask their leaders to publicly preach and pray about mental illness. Real change doesn't have to begin with already busy pastors. It can begin with you.

Contact Dave Eckert, Chaplain and Director of Intersect (215) 540-2150, x1286 DEckert@accessservices.org

Job Opportunities

Full Time Lifesharing Coordinator in Lehigh Valley

Assist individuals in choosing a Lifesharing provider home that meets their individual needs and preferences.

Contact Joyce (215) 540-2150, x1272 JMoeller@accessservices.org

Charity Event Highlights

Thank you to everyone who sponsored Sip, Savor & Support, the 2019 Access Services Charity Event.

Genesis Asset Protection
CliftonLarsonAllen
Rob and Judy Reid
Philadelphia Insurance Companies
Arlington Heritage Group

Charles and Sue Steege
Windsor Financial Group
Binji
Benecon
Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney, PP
Emerald Realty Group
Office Basics
Systems Solution, Inc.

Contact Linda Wasilchick, Director of Resource Development (215) 540-2150, x1357 LWasilchick@accessservices.org



ACCESS SERVICES

Creating better ways to serve people with special needs

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Program Highlights

Access Services and ALTEC Services Affiliation

We are excited to announce an official affiliation with ALTEC Services (ALTEC). This partnership builds upon a long-standing relationship between our organizations.

ALTEC Services offers employment and day services which are highly regarded and sought after by individuals and families in southeastern Pennsylvania. ALTEC has a strong reputation in the field and are known for the Community Participation model of delivering quality services both in and out of the facility. ALTEC is led by Deb Kunsch, Co-Founder and Executive Director.

These services complement our commitment to provide community-based children and family services and adult behavioral health services across 10 counties in eastern Pennsylvania.

Rob Reid, President & CEO shares, "I have personally known and worked with Deb Kunsch, the ALTEC Executive Director, for close to 40 years. I have such high regard for her leadership and dedication to those they serve. The ALTEC staff are also mission minded and committed to quality services. Our respective organizational missions are aligned and the approach we use to support people and families is reflected in a high degree of customer satisfaction."

Deb Kunsch echoes this, "As Co-Founder and CEO of ALTEC Services I have been exploring options that would sustain our work into the foreseeable future. I decided that affiliating with a like-minded organization, being run with the highest degree of humanitarian standards, would best serve the needs of the individuals we support, their families and my staff. I have worked with the leadership of Access Services for almost forty years. The mission and values they hold are aligned perfectly with ALTEC. The outstanding reputation of Access Services and their leadership team are recognized state-wide."

This partnership will enrich both organizations through greater service and support offerings, expanded geographic locations, and enhanced talent.

Contact Janice Knowlton, Vice President of Autism and Intellectual Disability Services (215) 540-2150 x1279 JKnowlton@accessservices.org

We Are Expanding



Many of us struggle to find our voice and advocate for ourselves. At Access Services we celebrate when those we support learn these skills, allowing them to live more independently.

Donna has been attending the Allentown Life Program since last February. Since starting, she has grown tremendously. She has

worked hard on communicating, specifically to share her wants and needs. Becca, the Program Specialist shares, "Donna independently asks to meet with me when she has an issue at the program that she wants to address. She has exercised independence by working with her peers and staff to reach her goals. She follows up with her team to get updates on her funding so that she can make sure her process is moving forward. In addition, she asks to meet with her support coordinator to ensure that her needs are being met."

Donna's ability to find her voice has allowed her to grow leaps and bounds in independence, which she so greatly desires. She is an excellent example of what it means to be a self-advocate. We are extremely proud to see how far Donna has come and look forward to continuing to watch her meet her goals.

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ACCESS SERVICES

Creating better ways to serve people with special needs

Access Services, a 43 year-old nonprofit organization, operates in ten Pennsylvania counties, offering services for children, adults, and families. The mission of Access Services is to empower and serve people in need of specialized supports by providing innovative services that improve their ability to live fulfilling lives in the community.

July 2019

Empowering Those We Support



Advocacy is for everyone. Last year, in the March edition of this newsletter we explored this idea, the idea that advocacy is a right we all have and can use to influence our elected officials.

Today, we continue

the discussion of advocacy for everyone, focusing on how we can support and empower those we have the privilege to support to advocate for themselves.

A vital part of what Access Services programs strives to do is empower. This is very different from simply providing a support or service; this is what helps set us apart as a provider. We feel that self-advocacy is critical. Typically, when we use the term "empower" or "empowerment" we are referring to supporting someone to be stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights. This is exactly what is done, and the stories you will read in this newsletter help to illustrate just two of the many examples of how this is done each day.

You will learn about Alice and Eli, who through the support of the Chesco LIFE program were able to navigate the educational evaluation and language barriers they faced. Or Donna in the Allentown Life Program learning skill and tools and being encouraged to use them to self-advocate. Donna found her voice and has learned to use it. Advocacy permeates Access Services and helps us live out our core values and hope that all individuals can live a rich and fulfilled life. Advocacy is for everyone.

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Advocating for Eli

Alice knew her son Eli was struggling. At twelve years old he continued to display childlike behaviors, resisted being involved in extracurricular activities and was easily frustrated at school and church. Earlier tests had indicated that Eli was on the autism spectrum, but without a formal diagnosis, Eli was not able to receive the additional supports he needed.

Alice and her husband Joshua had additional barriers as a Spanish speaking family living in Chester County. They struggled to advocate on behalf of their son in the school, where he was falling behind in his classes. Alice fought feelings of shame and embarrassment over the situation and did not know how to approach the conversation with her church community around Eli's differences. She needed help.

This help came from Chesco LIFE, a family support program in Chester County. Sheila, a Family Support Specialist, came alongside Alice and her family to advocate on behalf of Eli. First, Sheila and Alice requested a more comprehensive educational evaluation from the school. Mom had struggled to write this letter due to the language barrier. Sheila, and a Spanish speaking staff at Chesco LIFE, worked with her to submit this. At the same time, Sheila worked with mom to get an appointment at CHOP for an additional evaluation and formal diagnosis. It was determined that Eli had both learning disabilities as well as high functioning autism.

Receiving this formal diagnosis empowered Alice and Joshua to accept Eli's disability and take steps to speak up on behalf of him. They were able to secure additional supports at school. Alice took Eli's diagnosis to her church community, an important part of her family's life, and explained why Eli acted a little differently. Alice is also working to establish a support group for Hispanic families who have children with special needs in Chester County. In addition, Joshua has grown more open to communicating Eli's needs to his community.

Before receiving additional supports, Eli was refusing to participate in after school activities. He knew he was different from the other children and acted very shy around his peers. Sheila invited Alice and Eli to connect with a recreation program in Phoenixville. Sheila called the program director before their first visit to explain Eli's specific needs, to ensure a smooth welcome.

Sheila shares, "The program director welcomed Eli with open arms, and helped educate the other children around Eli's differences. The other children were very accepting of Eli and he now participates in soccer at the recreation center. He's even thinking about trying basketball!"

The Chesco LIFE program works to build strong, resourceful families and resilient children by sharing knowledge, resources, direct support and training with a focus on building a culture of parents and youth as mentors, developing partnerships within the community and supporting the system of care philosophy in Chester County. Learn more by visiting <http://www.accessservices.org/services/chesco-life-program/>.

*Please note that names were changed in this story in order to protect client privacy.

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