

## An Epidemic & Experience



Many are hearing about the current opioid crisis. As a faith leader, it's tempting to see this crisis as just one more social epidemic. However, in my own faith community I've heard multiple people share about their family's struggles with addiction. I've listened to wives, mothers, sisters and sons each wrestling with this issue in their families. It turns out this addiction crisis isn't just another epidemic but an experience. Take a moment today to ask what your faith community can do to engage a crisis impacting people both outside our congregations and inside them as well.

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

## Job Opportunities

Part Time Direct Support Professional in Schuylkill, Carbon & Berks Counties

Guide and assist program residents in learning to live and function as independently as possible in the community.

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

## Child Development Foundation



Access Services is fortunate to receive support from private foundations. The Child Development Foundation (CDF) has partnered with Access for many years, enabling us to offer additional respite care options to families in Montgomery County.

Thank you, CDF, for helping care for the caregiver! Pictured at the CDF Grant Award Reception: Melissa R. Dzedzic, Director of Respite and Host Family Recruitment and Sue Steege, Senior Vice President/Chief Operating Officer.

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

### Dedicated and Compassionate Professionals



A Direct Support Professional's (DSPs) role often includes that of teacher, life coach, mentor and advocate – sometimes all in one day. These professionals work within our intellectual disability and autism programs, providing an individualized approach to care.

Recently, we had an opportunity to ask three of our dedicated professionals why they got into the field

and what motivates them to come back to work each day.

Lindsay shares, "I became a DSP because I wanted to do something more meaningful. I wanted to try and make a difference in someone's life. What brings me back to work every day is our consumers, they make every day new! In the six years

that I have been at the Life Day Program, I have not had two days the same."

Susan shares, "I became a Direct Support Professional because I have a niece and nephew with disabilities, and I wanted to help them achieve a wonderful life and know that people care about them. Some of the rewards of this position are giving someone confidence and learning things together. I enjoy getting to help and assist with personal goals and showing compassion."

Patricia shares, "I became a DSP to make a difference in someone's life. To be able to assist someone with an intellectual disability be able to realize their goals both personally and within a group of their peers. Some of the rewards of being a DSP are seeing the joys of our consumers interact with their peers and work in the community."



On September 8th we start Direct Support Professional week, a time to recognize the dedication and compassion of professionals like Susan, Lindsay and Patricia. As an employer of over 250 DSPs, we would like to join service providers across the country in saying thank you!

Nicole Smith, Assistant Director of Life Programs (215) 690-0886  
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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.

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## Raising a Family, Again



“Grand families” is used to describe a household where grandparents are raising grandchildren, acting as the primary caregiver and guardian. Grandparents have found themselves in this role for reasons such as;

substance abuse, abuse/neglect, incarceration, mental health challenges, death, or their children becoming parents at a young age. Although grandparents are providing stable and nourishing homes for their grandchildren, they need a break. Taking on the primary role of raising a grandchild often times comes with physical, emotional, financial, social, and legal challenges that were not present while raising their own children. Grandparents who are in this primary role are often unable to fit into their “peer group” of friends who may be retired, traveling, and enjoying time with their significant other.

This lifestyle may not be possible for grandparents raising their grandchildren. However, respite care can provide them the short-term relief that will help them relax, enjoy themselves, and recharge. Respite care provides a short-term break from caregiving responsibilities, which takes place in one of our approved and trusted respite homes.

Are you wondering how you can help? Consider opening your heart and home by providing respite care. You can try respite for a day or a weekend; there is a lot of flexibility. If you would like to learn more about becoming a respite care provider, please feel free to reach out by calling one of our regional offices and requesting to speak with the Host Family Recruiter.

**Melissa Dziedzic, Director of Respite and Host Family Recruitment**  
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## Who Cares for the Caregiver?

In Pennsylvania there are an estimated 80,000 grandparents raising their grandchildren. On a national level, this number increases to more than 2.6 million children being raised by grandparents and other extended family members and close friends. In our leadership column, Melissa Dziedzic discussed this growing population, known as “grand families.” (Bucks Family Lawyers)

Children who are unable to remain with their parents do best when raised by relatives. Grandparents have often been this source of caregiving, as they are able to provide the stability, permanency and sense of safety and belonging that children need. But who cares for these caregivers? Often times, grandparents in this role are coping with their adult child’s inability to parent, leaving them with custodial and legal issues, their own grief, financial struggles and potential mental health issues to battle. In addition, studies show that these caregivers are experiencing increased social isolation and depression. (Generations United)

At the state level, the Department of Health and Human Services recently launched KinConnector, a helpline staffed by “Kinship Navigators.” This resource was created to connect grand families and other, similar households with resources including financial and legal services. They will also help families locate services, find support groups and connect to other relevant services.

At the local level, services like Access Services’ Bucks County LIFE continue to support caregivers. Bucks County LIFE is a family support program which mentors parents, grandparents and caregivers whose children are at risk and may struggle with emotional, behavioral, social and/or learning challenges. Michaela Smith, Director of Family Support Programs discussed this growing population of caregivers and how they’re supporting them.

“One of the initiatives in Bucks County is to track trends. We have parents and caregivers that seek out assistance from Bucks County LIFE. One trend we noticed is the increase in grandparents raising children, often because of the rising opioid epidemic. This has impacted our services through advocacy for these grandparents. We recently assisted two grandparents set up a grand families support group in Bucks County. We are sitting at the table on behalf of grandparents who need to have that voice and representation for the best interest of their children within Bucks County.”

This support group is facilitated by grandparents for grandparents and other relatives raising the children of loved ones. It offers an opportunity to build support, talk through challenges, celebrate successes, broaden areas of knowledge and educate others through lived experience. They also offer speakers. Beth Jester and Roberta Edgar, the founders of the Bucks County Grandfamilies Support Group share, “Our support group is a safe place where everyone in the room understands each other’s daily lives. No judgments. The children learn that they too are not alone.”

This group meets the first and third Friday at 6:30pm at Lenape Valley Church in New Britain, PA. Babysitting and meals are provided at no cost to the grand families. Registration is required by email at BCgrandfamilies@gmail.com. To learn more about resources available throughout Pennsylvania please visit <https://www.grandfamilies.org/>.

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