



Pathlight Newsletter

COMPASSION | EXPERTISE | INCLUSION

The reviews are in! Let's Dance! is a smash hit

This year marked the triumphant comeback of **Let's Dance!**, featuring 11 talented dance teams comprised of Pathlight individuals and esteemed community members, including Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra of Northampton, and State representatives Lindsay Sabadosa and Shirley Arriaga. Watch the video of the entire show at pathlightgroup.org.

Together, **we successfully raised over \$70,000** to bolster enrichment programs for those supported by Pathlight, all through the transformative power of dance.

Do you want to be part of the fun? We are already thinking about Let's Dance! 2024, so if you want to be on that stage with a Pathlight dancer next year, send us an email at development@pathlightgroup.org!



"You can't find that kind of generosity and sheer joy onstage even on Broadway." —audience member

"With having a disability, through Pathlight I have gotten to do so many amazing things that I never thought I would be doing. I had the best night of my life getting to be my true self, getting up on stage and showing the crowd what I got. This was a night I will never ever forget!" —dancer Sydney Meininger

"Let's Dance is truly the most uplifting fundraiser there is. The connections between the dancers and coaches are beautiful to witness, and the chance to see so many individuals with disabilities claim their moment in the spotlight is something that never grows old." —audience member



Monthly donors make a difference



Eric, Sabrina and Sarah Aasheim

We are grateful for all our donors who help us achieve our mission in serving people with disabilities. More and more donors are choosing to spread the love throughout the year by making their donations monthly. **These monthly donations give us breathing room to think beyond immediate needs, and push innovation and advocacy for people with disabilities throughout Western Massachusetts.**

"Our daughter Sabrina has participated in Whole Children's Joyful Chorus since she was eight years old," said Eric Aasheim, who with his wife Sarah set up their donation to recur each month.

"It gives us great pleasure to be able to support the extraordinary programming at Whole Children with a recurring monthly donation. Giving monthly is easy, helps underwrite ongoing cash flow needs and allows us to give a more meaningful gift than if we gave a one-time donation at year's end," he added. "Please consider supporting Whole Children with a recurring monthly donation and feel great all year long!"

Our goal for 2024 is to double the number of supporters who make a monthly donation of any amount. Can we count on you to become part of this loyal and committed group? Make your donation at pathlightgroup.org/give24.



Festive highlights: Pathlight's return to holiday celebrations



After a three-year hiatus, the much-loved Pathlight Holiday Party made a return in early December.

The event brought together the incredible individuals served by Pathlight, dedicated staff, and caring caregivers for an afternoon of spirited dancing, delightful food, and heartwarming music.

Continuing the festive vibes, Whole Children's Joyful Chorus, accompanied by the Florence Community Band, rang in the season with a fabulous performance at Northampton High School. They sang a variety of songs and featured some powerful solos by chorus members.

It's good to be back and out in the community, spreading the Pathlight joy!



The holiday party included lots of dancing!

IN MEMORIAM: MICHAEL J. COOLEY

We were deeply saddened to hear of the sudden passing of longtime Pathlight board member Michael Cooley on November 14, 2023. As a board member with a disability himself, he offered a unique perspective in guiding the Pathlight mission. A generous spirit, Michael was an active volunteer at many local nonprofits in the Springfield area such as Grey House and the Golden Age Club. He began his career at local radio stations before joining the staff of the Registry of Probate where he worked for almost 20 years before retiring.

Audience members at Pathlight's Let's Dance! event will recall his enthusiasm and charm as a judge, a role he loved performing given his passion for dance. In tribute, next year Let's Dance will feature a Michael Cooley award. Michael leaves behind a loving wife, Leila Dahabi, a brother and sister (Larry and Debbie), an extended family and countless friends.



SENSORY-FRIENDLY FALL FUN

To ensure that all people are able to engage in the fun stuff, Autism Connections hosted a series of sensory friendly events this past fall, including a dance workshop, a day at the trampoline park, a Halloween party and a showing of *The LEGO Batman Movie*. There was also an ice-cream social to wind up the summer.

Sensory-friendly events generally mean that overwhelming sights, sounds and light are minimized to all people with sensory processing issues to participate in all events. Find out more about Autism Connections events and workshops at autismconnectionsma.org.

Learning and connections at Milestones

The Milestones day program is all about choice. Participants take a rotating schedule of classes, which they choose at the beginning of each season. Classes include **Dating 101**, **songwriting**, **cooking**, **hiking**, **puzzle club** and **so much more!** Participants also have the choice of events in the community, including grocery shopping, groups with UMass students and weekly trips to the library.



Get inspired at the Autism Conference

Autism Connections, the western Mass autism center serving families in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties, is hosting its **33rd annual Autism Conference on April 10, 2024**. Titled "A Whole Life: The Empowered Journey," the day-long educational conference at the Sheraton Springfield features expert speakers, a variety of breakout topics, and two floors of exhibitors. This event is for autistic individuals, families, and professionals. autismconnectionsma.org/conference24



Free workshops empower families

This fall, Family Empowerment, the family resource center for Hampshire and Franklin counties, hosted free workshops aimed at arming families with essential knowledge on a range of topics, including special education law, MassHealth, caregiver support, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Special education law took center stage, clarifying rights and the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. Families left with a practical understanding to better advocate for their children's educational needs.

Another session unraveled the complexities of MassHealth, offering families information on healthcare services and assistance navigating the application process.

The workshop on SSI demystified the process, equipping families with knowledge on eligibility, application, and ongoing support.



Annual report

Check out more highlights of the past year in our online Annual Report at pathlightgroup.org/annual-report23



Scan here or visit pathlightgroup.org/give to support the critical work of Pathlight, Whole Children and Autism Connections. Thank you!

We're social, follow us!



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