

Pathlight Newsletter

COMPASSION | EXPERTISE | INCLUSION



Ruth Banta Retiring From Pathlight After Nearly 20 Years

When her son was diagnosed with autism, Ruth Banta turned to Pathlight's program Autism Connections for help. The love and support her family received led Banta to make a career switch, and now after 20 years with Pathlight she is retiring as executive director of the agency.

"He was diagnosed when he was a toddler, and through a lot of support from people at Pathlight and his school he went on to graduate from college with a bachelor's in fine arts in film and video, and he lives in an apartment in Boston," said Banta, who started her career in finance and insurance but joined Pathlight in 2003.

"I first came to Pathlight as a mother and I had no idea what his outcome would be, but what I found beyond help for him was a community of professionals with heart, and I started to learn what outcomes individuals and families can have with our support," she said.

(Reprinted from the Springfield Republican, January 16)

Banta served 14 years as Pathlight's chief financial officer and vice president of administration. She was named executive director in 2016.

Established in 1952 and headquartered in Springfield, Pathlight provides services for children, teens and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout the four counties of Western Massachusetts.

"That can be anything from being able to communicate 'yes or no' which can be very big for some families, to helping people secure jobs or volunteer opportunities and helping them live the life they want to live," she said.

Under her leadership, Pathlight created the first program in this part of the state to serve an individual in a community residence who needed full-time ventilator support. Pathlight also acquired 13.5 acres of previously state-owned land to replace two antiquated

community homes with three modern five-bedroom homes for people with intellectual disabilities.

The Milestones day program, located in Hadley, grew by 55%, while there was a 100% increase in adult services through Family Support and Autism Connections. Banta also supported the development of an innovative sexuality and relationship curriculum through Whole Selves.

Most recently, Banta oversaw the purchase of a new building in Northampton to house programs in Hampshire County, including Whole Children, Milestones and Family Empowerment. She also supported infrastructure developments for remote services and work, electronic health records and online training.

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Going for the Gold!



Pathlight has recently been in the spotlight for receiving two awards for our work highlighting people with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Last year, as we headed into our second year of the pandemic, we asked our community to videotape themselves celebrating what "home" meant to them and more than 40 of you did just that! Communications Coordinator Ellie Levine remixed these clips into a rousing music video set to Philip Philips' song "Home". **The resulting video was recently announced as a gold medal winner in the AVA Digital Awards!** The AVA is a competition recognizing works by creative professionals around the world. Thank you to everyone who submitted videos and helped us achieve this award!

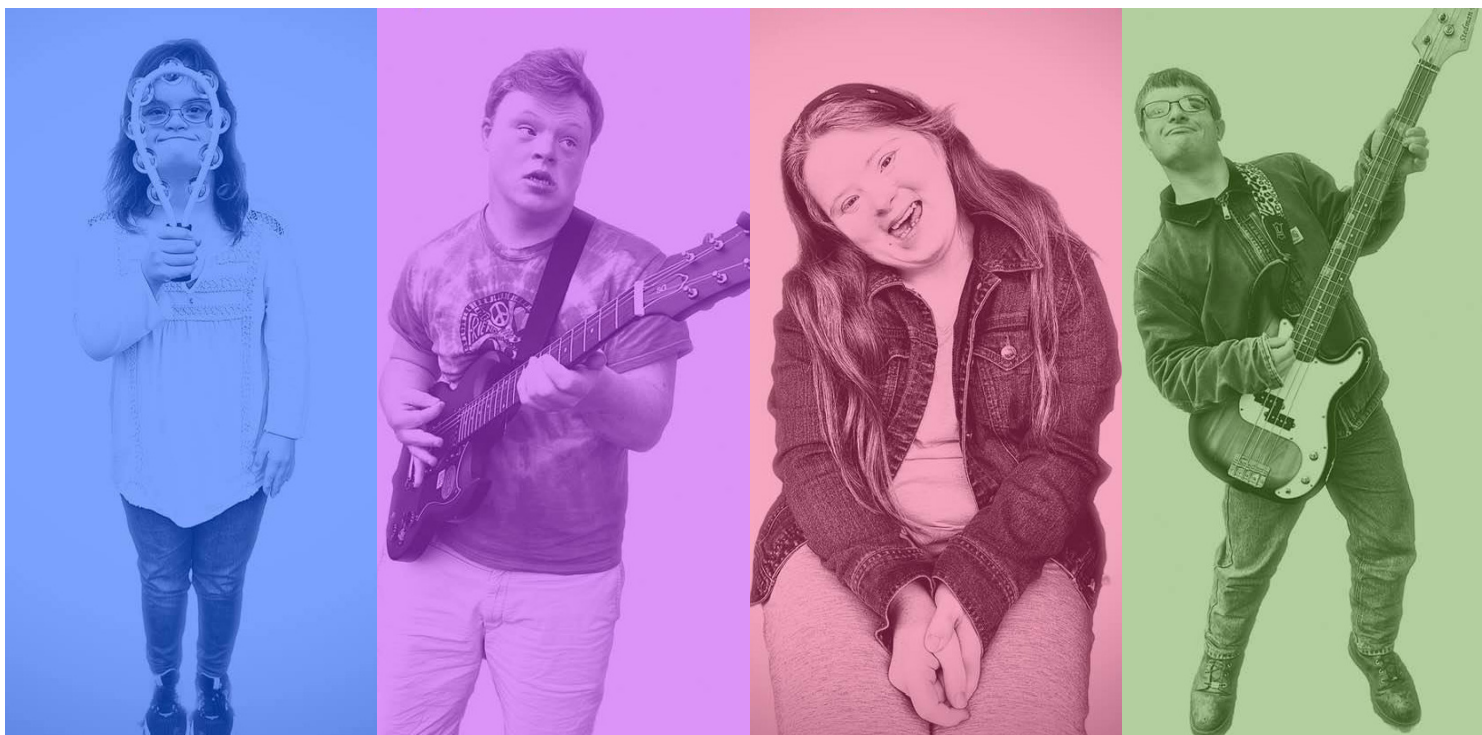


Our Portraits of Pathlight project was also recently recognized with a silver medal in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion category of the Anthem Awards. These awards honor purpose and mission-driven work from an international pool of organizations.

The project included 33 portraits by local photographers, which were turned into three calendars, starting in 2020. These powerful, person-focused portraits convey the strength, beauty, complexity and personality of people served by Pathlight. The photos have hung in several exhibits and raised over \$50,000 to support our programs. We'd like to give a shout out to all of our models and photographers, former Communications Manager Gina-Louise Sciarra, and current Communications Manager Alissa Serra for designing the layout.

Friendship Band Together Again

The band is back together and sounding better than ever! The group is hoping to start laying down tracks in the studio and getting out into the community to play some fun shows soon! Stay tuned for updates. Photos by Eddy Hougen.



Our New Home!



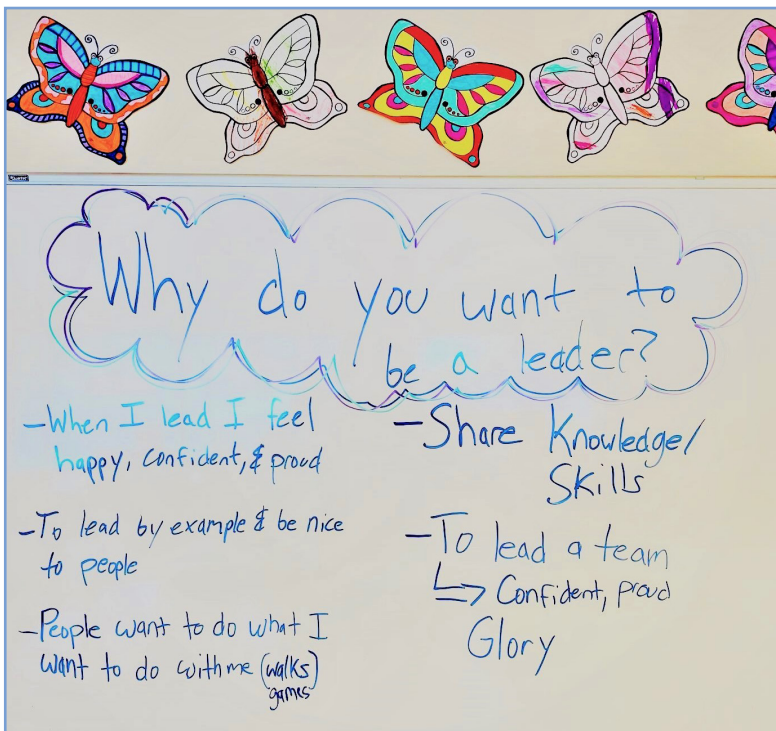
Pathlight finalized the purchase of 11 Village Hill Road, Northampton in January, and we are working with architects and builders to get it ready to house Whole Children, Milestones, Family Empowerment and Autism Connections, as well as the Communications team.

This is a gorgeous new building on the campus of the former Northampton State Hospital. It has big windows, lovely light, trees and a view of the mountains. It is two stories but completely accessible with an elevator.

With construction timelines so unpredictable these days, we don't have a specific opening date, but are hoping to move in this summer. In the meantime, we'll be holding spring classes at our building in Hadley starting March 28. Stay tuned for more information!

Building Leaders

The Milestones crew was discussing what it means to be a leader and why that's a goal of theirs.



31st ANNUAL
AUTISM CONNECTIONS
AUTISM
CONFERENCE
APRIL 28, 2022

A WHOLE LIFE: THE EMPOWERED JOURNEY

APRIL 28, 2022 | 8 AM - 4 PM

Please join us for this virtual conference for professionals, families, parents, caregivers, individuals with autism, sponsors and exhibitors, featuring two keynote speakers and 10 breakout sessions. **Get full access to all recordings until July 29, 2022 when you register!**

Register at autismconnections.org



JED BAKER, PH.D.



ALIX GENEROUS

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(Continued from page 1)

Banta said she is proud the organization has not lost sight of its mission even with changes in technology and a pandemic.

“What I am most proud of is that as we have grown and taken on more projects we have really kept our focus on enhancing the lives of the people we support,” she said.

Hank Drapalski, president of the Pathlight board of directors, has worked with Banta since her early days at the organization and said that she has a well-deserved reputation for her depth of knowledge and level of skill.

“Ruth has committed herself wholeheartedly to our organization and has accomplished many great

things during her career with Pathlight,” he said. “The entire board will miss her. Ruth has been wonderful to work with—and we all hope she will have many years of enjoyment ahead of her in retirement.”

Banta said there have been many challenges due to COVID-19, and she doesn’t see Pathlight’s adaptations going away after the pandemic.

“Disruption often brings a lot of challenges, but it also brings innovation, and we have seen that innovation in what we offer for remote services. We have had to figure out how to support the staff and the individuals that need in-person services by showing people that while this is hard work it is meaningful work. How often do you get to work in an environment where you have such an impact on people’s

lives?” she said.

As for her retirement, Banta said she is looking forward to improving her skills on the saxophone, an instrument she took up as an adult, and becoming a better gardener through the Western Massachusetts Master Gardeners course.

“I’m looking forward to spending time with my family and moving on to the next phase of my life,” she said.

Banta is scheduled to retire in March. Pathlight is actively recruiting for its next executive director.

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