



# Pathlight Newsletter

COMPASSION | EXPERTISE | INCLUSION

## Celebrating 70 years of breaking barriers

In late 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected president, Dr. Jonas Salk developed the polio vaccine, and audiences flocked to see movies such as *High Noon*.

That was also the year that five mothers of young children with developmental disabilities came together to form an organization that challenged the prevailing notion of the day that people with disabilities should be separated from their families and placed into institutions. **That organization became Pathlight.**

“From its inception, Pathlight broke barriers in serving the needs of people with disabilities.”

These women saw a future where their children could receive support to thrive in their communities and reach their full potential. Pathlight was the first organization in Hampden County dedicated to serving individuals with intellectual disabilities. Our other notable firsts through the decades:

- The first nursery schools for children with developmental disabilities
- The first language development programs in Springfield and Westfield
- The first privately run developmental school in Massachusetts
- The first group home for people with developmental disabilities in Massachusetts
- The first program in Massachusetts to recruit families to open their homes for children and adults moving out of institutions (now the shared-living model)

From its inception, Pathlight broke barriers in serving the needs of people with disabilities. We continue that spirit of innovation today, developing a sex ed curriculum, an afterschool program that focuses on social skills and opportunities, and expanding our family support options.

**Executive Director John Roberson has a comprehensive vision for Pathlight. “I look forward to expanding external connections in the community, advocating at the state level, and looking at new ways to support people with disabilities,” he says.**

We are grateful for your support as we maintain the legacy of innovation our founders began 70 years ago.



# Gearing up for the Autism Conference

32nd ANNUAL  
AUTISM CONNECTIONS  
**AUTISM  
CONFERENCE**  
APRIL 27, 2023

**T**his year's Autism Conference on April 27 is embracing a hybrid model to give access to all who wish to attend. As in the past few years, the online version will be presented through the Socio platform. For those who wish to attend in-person, we'll be back at the Sheraton Monarch Place Hotel in Springfield.

**This day-long educational conference brings together individuals with autism, professionals, families, parents, caregivers and exhibitors to learn, inspire and make meaningful connections.** Presentations run from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. They will be recorded and available online until June 30 for all who register.

Keynote speakers this year are Jennifer O'Toole and Andrew Arboe. Jennifer is a bestselling author and the "autism expert" on the Netflix hit *Love on the Spectrum*. Andrew has worked for several autism organizations

with a focus on empowerment and is the founder of Driving with Autism, an online driver readiness program.

Participants have a choice of breakout workshops that include sessions for families, professionals and people with autism. Sessions include topics such as promoting independence, diagnosing autism, transition to adult services and sex education.

The exhibitor showcase includes a host of resources and information to learn about options for housing, work, therapies and more.

You can learn more and purchase tickets at [autismconnectionsma.org](http://autismconnectionsma.org).



## THE BIG QUESTIONS ANSWERED

What makes a healthy relationship? What makes you feel proud? What's your dream date? At Whole Selves we ponder these questions and more with students in our classes. The answers we get are always insightful, original and often hilarious! Follow us on Instagram at [@wholeselves](https://www.instagram.com/wholeselves) to watch.



## Family Empowerment heads north

**F**amily Empowerment became the family support center for Franklin County two years ago and immediately began serving 250 families of that community. Today the program has been in its physical space (101 Munson Street, Greenfield) for about a year with two full-time and two part-time family support specialists, one of whom provides Spanish-speaking support.

As the program has expanded, a variety of programs have been added, including Friends Out & About social group, Magic Wings excursion, movie night, game night and dinner outings. Outdoor offerings have added mini-golf, family picnics and StoryWalks®, where families follow a trail and visit the laminated pages of a book posted along the route.



A big part of Family Empowerment's mission is to provide information and resources to the individuals and families they serve as well as anyone in the community with questions. One of the ways in which this is accomplished is through monthly in-person and remote webinars. Additionally, **the first annual Franklin County Transition Fair will be held on Thursday, March 30 from 5–7:30 p.m. at Greenfield High School.** The fair features local organizations that help connect high school students and their families to resources for building successful lives after school.

As a recently added benefit, Family Empowerment is working with Sweet Pickle Tours to provide all-inclusive three- or four-day escorted vacations for travelers with disabilities and special needs, ages 17 and up. Family Empowerment helps arrange the funding for the trips, which include all activities, accommodations, meals, transportation and tour staff. Five individuals are receiving support for trips this spring.

## New face in Pathlight fundraising



**C**aroline Carpenter is the new Development Manager at Pathlight, working at the Inclusive Community Center in Northampton. Originally from Florida, she has an M.A. degree in English. She recently moved to western Massachusetts from the Boston area. She has worked in the fundraising field for 25 years, primarily in grant writing, for organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association and

Massachusetts General Hospital. The work of Pathlight in helping people with disabilities and autism is very personal for Caroline as her son Alex has autism, and she herself is hard of hearing. Outside of work, Caroline enjoys playing modern board games and reading fiction. She can be reached at [caroline.carpenter@pathlightgroup.org](mailto:caroline.carpenter@pathlightgroup.org).



“Everybody can be great because everybody can serve.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

**Come be great at Pathlight**

WE'RE HIRING!  
[PATHLIGHTGROUP.ORG](http://PATHLIGHTGROUP.ORG)

Check out all the life-changing opportunities at [pathlightgroup.applicantpro.com/jobs](http://pathlightgroup.applicantpro.com/jobs)

## The show is going on!

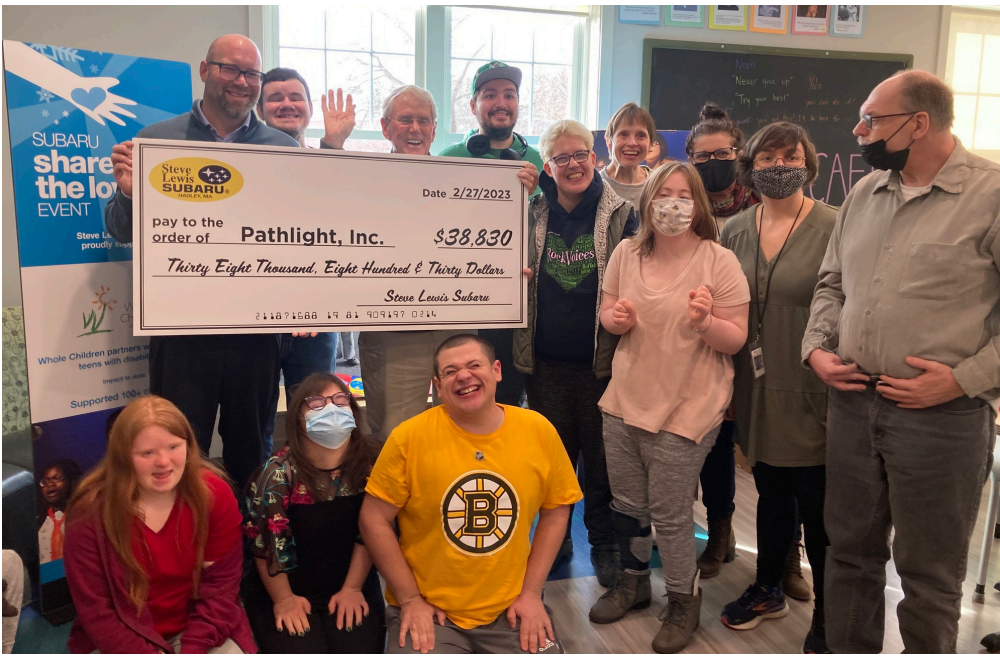
**T**hor, Veronica Pepper and Superb Man walk into a theater class. . . . **The Whole Children theater workshop's original play *WonkAvengers* is back!** Actors are working on blocking, learning lines, and perfecting their singing and dancing. You won't want to miss this wacky, original production! Stay tuned for information about the late spring performance.

## Artist spotlight: Sheila Gelinas

**W**alking the halls of Pathlight's Springfield office, you'll see many of the staff cubicles decorated with various crafts, notes and photos received from the individuals we've served over the years.

**One of the more prolific artists is Sheila Gelinas. Sheila is part of Pathlight's Adult Family Care program, living with her care provider Evelyn and her family for the past 12 years.** Although Sheila works with several artistic mediums, she is best known for her latch hooking, which she started about ten years ago. She has regularly gifted her latch hook artwork to her care providers and doctors and says it typically takes her two days to finish one piece. The design she chooses depends on the person she plans to gift it to. When she's not working on one of her art creations, Sheila enjoys spending time watching Western and classic TV shows, being a dog whisperer to Evelyn's 17-year-old chihuahua, and catching up and going out with her best friend, Dottie.





## Steve Lewis Subaru shares the love

**O**ur friends from Steve Lewis Subaru in Hadley surprised us with a check for \$38,830 to support the programs of Whole Children and Milestones. This is in addition to a donation they are pledging from their annual Share the Love campaign!

This is a huge boost to our programs and the hundreds of children, teens and adults who take classes here! Thank you to Steve Lewis and the amazing crew at Steve Lewis Subaru!

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