

Pathlight Newsletter

COMPASSION | EXPERTISE | INCLUSION

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and games including soccer, capture the flag and even competitive boat racing, which Stuart laughs about as he goes on. Stuart tells me that, “[The capture the flag event has] got very light horror elements to it, in the way that *Nightmare*

Before Christmas is horror.... It can be scary especially if you’re younger.”

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Stay tuned to hear more about the Minecraft tournament soon!

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Thank you to the Thunderbirds Charity Team for supporting Autism Connections!



Dave Grossi, Nathan Costa, Doug Dawson & Ken Ventura

Renew Window Gives Back



Jacob Rosazza & Jake Edwards

Every year when we're reflecting on the support we've received from our community, we like to chat with a Pathlight donor about why they give back to our nonprofit. This year, we talked with Renew Window Cleaning. Renew is a local family-owned, worker-owned and -operated window cleaning company that's been around in various incarnations for over 20 years. They primarily do residential cleaning but also commercial. "We like to think what sets us apart from our competitors

is that we really have a focus on being a part of our Pioneer Valley community," says Madeline Levine, Office Manager.

Each year, Renew donates a percentage of their earnings to customer-selected nonprofit organizations in the valley. At the end of the calendar year, they send around a survey to their customers to ask where they'd like to see their money go. The profits are then divided up amongst the highest-voted organizations. "It's nice because it feels a lot more like a collaborative approach to giving back to the community that is allowing us to succeed," Madeline adds.

Madeline describes how important Pathlight's service in the community is and she sees its impact every year in a very tangible way. "It's interesting because the fact that we've donated

to Pathlight in the past means that it was one of a few very popular organizations among our customer-base which is about 1000 people. So, in order for us to donate it meant that enough people could agree that this was an organization that was doing work that was important enough to them that they wanted to support it."

On the topic of giving back in general, Madeline adds, "**We rely as a small business on our community therefore, we want to uplift them, support them in return.**" Thank you, Renew for your loyal support over the years. To learn more about Renew, visit <https://renewwindowcleaning.com> today.

Walking for Down Syndrome

By: Alissa Serra, Communications Manager



Alissa and her family

The annual Buddy Walk, organized by the Down Syndrome Resource Group of Western Mass (DSRG), is a time for family, friends and the community to celebrate the many abilities of and accomplishments for people with Down syndrome. The event also raises money to support people with Down syndrome in our community.

I had always heard it was a fun family event and an inclusive environment

and I was excited to go for this first time this past fall. I brought my family to the event and we were instantly welcomed by a man dressed as Captain America spreading cheer and we noticed that there were families already on the dance floor. After a year of being apart, everyone was instantly welcoming, and joyful to be together to celebrate. Over 200 people turned out for the first walk since the pandemic.

The park was buzzing even before the walk began with tables set up, where participants could scoop up some swag from the event, make donations to the DSRG, join in on the fun raffles and grab some snacks for the one-mile trail.

We met many teams and families, some who have participated in the Buddy Walk numerous times since it began over 20 years ago and others who were attending for first time. Stanley Park was a beautiful setting for the walk but what was special was seeing the bond everyone had. Teams were making jokes with each other

while on the trail, each pacing it at their own speed, all while just enjoying one another's company and having fun.

Heading towards the finish line, the teams who had completed the walk lined up to cheer on those crossing the finish line.

The Buddy Walk was complete and it was time to hit the dance floor once again, this time in full celebration of its success.



Spectrum-Inspired Photography



Doug Flutie and Connor Thompson

Each year at Pathlight, our New Year's card features original art from a member of the Pathlight community.

This year, we shine a light on the incredible nature photography of Connor Thompson and his piece, "Berries and Cream (House Sparrow with Red Berries)." Connor is on the autism spectrum and is a long-time member of the Whole Children/Milestones family. He also studies music and photography at Berkshire

Hills Music Academy and has won multiple awards and acceptance into several prestigious juried shows.

"What really inspired me to get into photography was going to a class at my school," Connor said. "My instructor was always proud of me for it. It seemed to work pretty good."

"Berries and Cream" was taken in the backyard of Berkshire Hills Music Academy in South Hadley. "It took

only five seconds to take this shot in broad daylight. I don't really know what inspired me to take this photo," Connor said. "I found inspiration from watching this movie called *The Big Year*. It stars Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson as a trio of bird watchers who enter a contest to see who captures the most birds. I also found inspiration from another bird movie, *Fly Away Home* starring Jeff Daniels and Anna Paquin who cater to a flock of Canada geese giving birth to 700 chicks."

"I'm glad you like my pictures and it makes it all worthwhile to get nice comments when it comes to my work. I'm very proud of you using my photos as end of year cards."

Thank you, Connor for sharing your art with the Pathlight community!

To learn more about Connor's art, check out his website at spectruminspired.wordpress.com

Autism Conference 2022



Join Autism Connections for the 31st annual Autism Conference, *A Whole Life: The Empowered Journey* on April 28.

Autism Connections believes that educational resources, support and a connected community are essential to improving the lives of all people on the autism spectrum, so each year we host a one-day conference packed with information, resources and inspiration.

Headliners for the day will be our two keynote speakers, Alix Generous and Jed Baker. Alix Generous is an advocate for advancing mental health reform and institutional treatment of

autistic people. Alix has had five years of professional experience working in behavior analysis but a lifetime of experience living as an autistic person in a neurotypical world.

Jed Baker, Ph.D. is the director of the Social Skills Training Project, an organization serving individuals with autism and social communication challenges. He is an award-winning author of eight books and has been featured on ABC World News, Nightline, the CBS Early Show and the Discovery Health Channel.

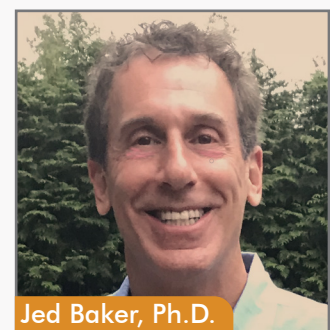
The conference will be online again this year, making it accessible and safe for educators, family members, social workers, professionals, caregivers, siblings and people with autism. In addition to dozens of information-packed breakout sessions, attendees can visit our exhibitor showcase, make connections with other attendees and leave with bagsful of information.

Registration is \$50 for families

and people with autism; \$100 for professionals. **We promise you a day of education, inspiration and connection! Register starting in early January at autismconnectionsma.org.**



Alix Generous



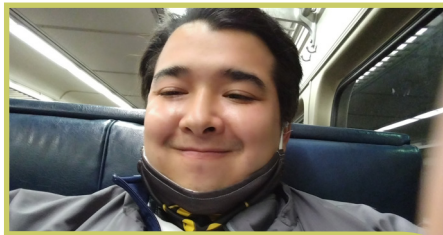
Jed Baker, Ph.D.

On the Road Again

Ned, 25, lives independently in an apartment where he gets support from Pathlight staff. He works at a gas station in West Springfield and saved up his money to move into an apartment and to take trips to see new places and things.

Aside from being a traveler, Ned is an avid Nascar, video game, TV and baseball fan with a wide collection of memorabilia.

Recently he planned a solo trip to Providence, RI and sent these photos from his adventure. This is not the first trip Ned has taken—last year he visited Boston and earlier this spring he made a trip to Ohio all on his own.



Ned takes off on his adventure



Visiting Dunkin' Donuts Center

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