

WESTMORELAND  
COUNTY'S  
LIFESHARING  
COALITION

Having a  
place to go is  
HOME,

Having  
someone  
to love  
is  
FAMILY,

Having both  
is  
A  
WONDERFUL  
LIFE!

**GET  
INVOLVED**

PA Lifesharing Coalition  
Meeting: February 21,  
10:00 AM @ Giant (3301  
Trindle Road, Camp Hill  
PA 17011)

Westmoreland Lifesharing  
Coalition Meeting: April 9,  
2014 10:00 AM @ Panera  
Bread (300 Greengate  
Circle, Greensburg)



# Lifesharing; What's it All About?

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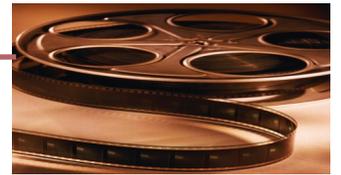
## WHAT'S NEW

### Coalition



The coalition said farewell to two members who had moved out of their agencies. Samantha Delloso of WCSI and Kristyne Geyer of the Arc of Westmoreland will be missed as they brought a lot of enthusiasm and dedication to the group! However we look forward to meeting their replacements. Dawn Brown (pictured at left) joined WCSI in July 2013 and is the new point person for Lifesharing there. She tells us a bit about herself: A change in career direction recently brought me to WCSI after 26 years working with adolescents in residential care in Pennsylvania and California. Working with the IDD population has been a new experience and is offering a lot of opportunities to learn. Lifesharing is one of those opportunities and I am looking forward to being able to help educate and promote Lifesharing with the clients we serve.

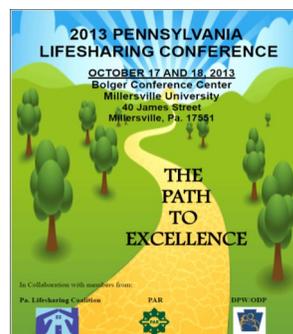
### Lifesharing DVD



The ODP and the PA Lifesharing Coalition have jointly developed and recently released the *Lifesharing in Pennsylvania* video as a resource to promote awareness and educate about the service option. This video provides uplifting testimony to the relationships born and nurtured through this option. It also describes the basic requirements and steps to participate in Lifesharing. Offering an overview of the potential benefits of Lifesharing to those who open their doors to an individual with intellectual disabilities, this 20-minute video provides a nice overview of the Lifesharing program and is appropriate for anybody and everybody who would like to learn more about it. *Lifesharing in Pennsylvania* is close-captioned and available at the ODP Consulting website

([www.odpconsulting.net](http://www.odpconsulting.net)) under Featured Stories > Lifesharing in Pennsylvania.

### Lifesharing Conference



The 2013 Lifesharing Conference was held October 17 and 18 at Millersville University in Millersville, PA. This month was chosen for the conference as State Representative Thomas Murt, in 2012 and again in 2013, designated October as Lifesharing Awareness Month in Pennsylvania. The conference was entitled "The Path to Excellence". Training sessions were available for the supported individual, the Lifesharing family, and the Agency, Support Coordinator, and the Administrative Entity. Each session was informative and challenging. The awards presentation was the best part of the two day conference. The stories shared by the individuals and their Lifesharing families brought some tears but mainly a lot of smiles to those in attendance. Congratulations to Dave McKee from Fayette Resources for being the winner from the Western region. The conference was worth the time spent in traveling and the venue was very organized and well planned.

## Did You Know...

- Lifesharing started in PA in **1982**, while the first group home was opened in the **1970's**. Prior to that, individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) and their families had few options (institutions/living at home).
- There are currently **4** vacancies (4-NHS) in our county and **4** in neighboring counties (2 NHS, 1 Passavant, 1 New Light Inc.)
- In PA, there are over **1600** individuals benefiting from this residential service.
- Lifesharing is a great way to offer a **choice** of where to live to the individuals with ID that you support.
- While there is a longer, more extensive matching process with Lifesharing, it has proven to result in a better **quality of life** overall. (As reported in IM4Q data.)
- You can do your part by sending this newsletter on to people not involved in the ID System. Think **outside of the box** (church friends, community groups, and family members). You never know who could benefit or who would like to open their homes to someone with ID.
- **Anyone** with an interest in Lifesharing is welcome to join Westmoreland County's Lifesharing Coalition.
- If you are interested in **providing** Lifesharing, the first step is to call any of the numbers listed below!
- If you are interested in learning more about **living** in a Lifesharing home, the first step is to contact your Supports Coordinator. Don't have a Supports Coordinator? Contact Westmoreland Casemanagement for intake information. (724.837.1808)

## In addition...

### Learning from Katie\*

By Stephanie Wincik, RN,  
CDDN

Is an inspirational short story about a woman and her quest to provide the best Lifesharing support to a young woman named Katie.

The story tells how Katie is able to communicate, educate, and make meaningful decisions. One decision enlightens her caregiver and inspires a new and improved focus in her life. Please take a few minutes to read this story and please, pass it on when finished.

Written by: Margie Grieser,  
RN, CDDN

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## What is Lifesharing? Find out More!

|                  |  |                |  |
|------------------|--|----------------|--|
| Jamie Boehme     | Westmoreland County<br>LS Point Person | (724)830-3944  | <a href="mailto:boehmej@westmoreland.swsix.com">boehmej@westmoreland.swsix.com</a>             |
| Dawn Brown       | WCSI<br>LS Point Person                | (724)837-1808  | <a href="mailto:dbrown@wcsi.org">dbrown@wcsi.org</a>   |
| Ian Legeion      | NHS Human Services                     | (724)600-0120  | <a href="mailto:ilegeion@nhsonline.org">ilegeion@nhsonline.org</a>                             |
| Katie Warrick    | Passavant<br>Memorial Homes            | (412)820-1010  | <a href="mailto:kwarrick@passavant.org">kwarrick@passavant.org</a>                             |
| Kristie Hoyle    | The Arc of Westmoreland                | (724)837-8159  | <a href="mailto:khoyle@achieva.info">khoyle@achieva.info</a>                                   |
| Sharon Roskovich | Community Living Care                  | (724)836-8747  | <a href="mailto:s.roskovich@communitylivingcare.com">s.roskovich@communitylivingcare.com</a>   |
| Joni Zarnick     | Lifesteps, Inc.                        | (724)283-1010  | <a href="mailto:jzarnick@lifesteps.net">jzarnick@lifesteps.net</a>                             |
| Cathy Wargo      | Pennsylvania MENTOR                    | (724)228-2423  | <a href="mailto:catherine.wargo@thementornetwork.com">catherine.wargo@thementornetwork.com</a> |
| Christy Markel   | Milestones Centers, Inc.               | (412)371-7391  | <a href="mailto:cmarkel@milestonecentersinc.org">cmarkel@milestonecentersinc.org</a>           |
| Jane Minich      | New Light Inc.                         | (814) 226-6444 | <a href="mailto:jmini@newlightnewlife.net">jmini@newlightnewlife.net</a>                       |

**The Mission of Westmoreland County's Lifesharing Coalition is to increase awareness, so that Lifesharing is a commonly recognized concept for providers, Supports Coordination Organizations, individuals and the community as a whole. We aim to encourage people to expand their family circle by inviting others to share their homes, their families, and their lives.**



### Do you have something to say?

Any suggestions or questions,  
please contact Jamie Boehme  
724.830.3944

[boehmej@westmoreland.swsix.com](mailto:boehmej@westmoreland.swsix.com)

**We would love to hear from you!**

# Learning from Katie

By Stephanie Wincik, RN, CDDN

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, the residential care facility where I worked as a nursing supervisor was seeking host families to participate in a Life Sharing program. Life Sharing matches a family with a developmentally disabled individual currently residing in a large facility or group home in an effort to provide him or her with a less restrictive living situation. My mother had recently passed away, leaving me her large, fully accessible home. With my children grown, I was feeling the sting of an empty nest. Life Sharing seemed like the right thing to do.

The young woman matched with my husband and me was 33 and had been institutionalized for many years with diagnoses of Down syndrome and autism. Unable to communicate verbally, she was proficient in making her needs known through a combination of body language and facial expressions. Although I was a bit anxious at first about taking on such a huge commitment, I convinced myself that it wouldn't be a problem. After all, I was an experienced nurse. How hard could it be?

## Rough start

One of my first mornings with Katie answered that question. Through an arrangement with my kind and flexible director of nursing, I'd adjusted my work hours to accommodate Katie's day program schedule. I'd help Katie get ready in the morning,

drop her off, proceed to work, and pick her up on my way home. This plan worked for exactly 2 days. On the third morning, Katie refused to leave the house. Despite my attempts to reason with her, she preferred to linger at the kitchen table, enjoying the morning sun streaming through the window. Frustrated, I excused myself to the bathroom and burst into tears. I hadn't called out or been late to work in more than a decade, and now this stranger was disrupting my carefully constructed (okay, rigid) routine.

But then an amazing thing happened. Somewhere in the middle of my tantrum, a thought hit me—a sudden realization that this woman was not a child I could simply bend to my will. She was an adult with her own preferences. Even though she couldn't tell me in words exactly what those preferences were, her nonverbal communication made it clear that they weren't the same as mine.

Yes, she was "supposed" to attend a day program, but who'd decided that for her? A team of professionals who determined what was best for Katie's life based on their own life experiences. Choices made on her behalf were only a reflection of someone else's personal values and standard of living. If Katie could communicate her thoughts, chances are she'd choose an entirely different life than the

one laid out for her by her well-meaning caregivers.

That morning, I realized to my dismay that in 30 years of working with intellectually disabled individuals, I'd never treated these men and women with the respect they deserved. Certainly I was giving great clinical care, but that wasn't enough. Deep down I saw them as children in grown-up bodies needing my guidance, instruction, and protection.

Katie and I both ended up making it to work that day, just a little late. I waited a few more minutes, leaving her alone to enjoy the sunshine, then asked her again and she agreed to go.

### **New perspective**

Having Katie in our family has transformed the way we look at people with intellectual differences and, at least for me, has helped change the way I look at life in general. At work, I'm more understanding when a harried staff member is late bringing a patient to an appointment or misses wiping up a bit of lunch left on an individual's shirt. I find myself worrying less about routines and schedules and spend more time just being. I was always taught that people with Down syndrome and autism insisted on keeping strict routines—now I wondered if perhaps I was the more “disabled” one.



In Katie's mind, everything can wait while you enjoy the sunshine. She truly lives her life moment to moment, savoring each experience as it comes her way. Because of her, I'm seeing life through a wider lens. Although I'm not quite there yet, I'm definitely learning to separate what's important from the

small daily irritations and anxieties that only *seem* important but will soon fade away. ■

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Stephanie Wincik is associate director of nursing/health services at Erie Homes for Children & Adults in Erie, Pa.

The author has disclosed that she has no financial relationships related to this article.

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