

Messenger

Winter 2021



Eyes on the prize

Nathan knows what he wants—
and he's not afraid to go after it.

After a challenging year, hope for a brighter future

Greetings,

As I write this letter to you, I am mindful that we are nearing a full year of living with COVID-19. While it has certainly been a very difficult time for all of us, it has been exceedingly hard for the people we support. Safety precautions have limited normal activities and precious time spent with families. I am proud to say that from day one, our team has been there, connecting people we support with their families virtually, keeping them active and engaged, and working tirelessly to ensure their health and wellbeing.

Each day of this costly and deadly pandemic I am reminded that we can do what we do only because of the resources, prayers and support that you so generously provide. For that we are truly blessed.

While we are focused on COVID-19 today, we are also looking to a brighter future. We continue to review our operations in each state, especially where we face significant financial hardship made worse by COVID-19. We have had to make difficult but necessary choices, and some of our homes and programs have closed or been transitioned to other providers.

Yet our long-term vision is clear—to expand our reach to be able to serve more people with disabilities than ever before. This vision is already beginning to take shape. We are welcoming new residents to Bethesda Cornerstone Village in Minnesota, our innovative residential concept that empowers lives of integration and community connection. Soon we will expand this concept to many more states. We have begun providing financial services to help people with disabilities better manage their money. Our online events featuring high-profile Christian artists are raising spirits and bringing attention to important disability issues. And there is so much more to come.

As you read this issue of *Messenger*, know that you are a valued and loved member of the Bethesda Family. Please stay safe and healthy. God's blessings to you and yours.

Regards,



Mike Thirtle

Mike Thirtle, PhD
President & CEO Bethesda

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

- Galatians 6:2 NIV

Bethesda to celebrate National Developmental Disabilities Awareness

March is National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, a time when Bethesda celebrates all the achievements made by and for people with disabilities, as well as look to the future and what we have yet to accomplish. It's a time for deep reflection and big ideas—but it's also a time to remember all the little things we can each do every day to continue raising awareness about people with disabilities in your own community.



Share your personal stories

Sharing your experiences with disability, whether your own or that of a loved one, is a small act that can have big impact. Personal stories can demystify and destigmatize disability, as well as create space for others to ask questions or get involved in the conversation.

Educate yourself

There are so many ways to learn about and connect with the disability community, and all of them can provide you with new and valuable insights. Read an article about public policy. Follow a blog written by a person with a disability. Get makeup tips from beauty bloggers with disabilities. Ask a friend or family member about their experiences. Sign up for local and national organizations' newsletters. Nothing is too small.

Donate, support, and advocate

Yes, nonprofit organizations are always accepting financial gifts. At Bethesda, for instance, the government only reimburses about two-thirds of our total operating costs, so we rely on generous donors to help. But that's not the only way you can show your support—because you can also donate your time and your talent. Write a letter to your legislator about issues affecting people with disabilities. Volunteer to host a cooking class or read stories with a group home over Zoom. Collect art supplies or games to give to a local organization supporting people with disabilities.

Join us!

We have an exciting month planned, with exclusive concerts from Jessica Meuse, Johnny Cash's family and Crowder, plus so much more. Go to [IncludeAllAbilities.com](https://www.includeallabilities.com) for the full schedule and to see how you can get involved.



“God has been good to me.”

Bethesda brings comfort to mother and daughter

Looking back, Cheryl Hanks recognizes the great fortune that God has given her, and how blessed she has been throughout her life. She counts Bethesda among her many blessings.

She didn't always feel that way. Nearly 50 years ago, Cheryl lived in a small town in Indiana as a divorced parent of two very young boys and a girl, with all the challenges that presents. “I was just trying to keep it all together,” she remembers.

Add to that the fact that Renee, her daughter, had special needs.

“Two months after she was born, it was clear she wasn't doing what she should, such as lifting her head,” Cheryl recalled. A battery of tests revealed a devastating diagnosis—Renee had profound disabilities, with severe neurological and muscular diseases, and would be nonverbal.



A photo taken right before Renee's 3rd birthday in September 1975.

Naturally, Cheryl did all she could for her daughter. She found a program at Purdue University, and helpful videotapes for her at home. At about age 6 or 7 Renee started to walk, using braces, and she was able to use a modified wheelchair. In her teens she had her health, but then as she approached her 20s, her health deteriorated quickly. Sadly, Cheryl was no longer able to provide the right care on her own.

In the years that followed, Renee experienced a variety of living situations, including a group home and adult foster care, with mixed results. At one point she could no longer swallow, and lost a lot of weight, but couldn't tolerate a feeding tube. Working with a doctor, Cheryl was able to get Renee to swallow again. “She just needed such extreme care,” Cheryl said.

A fresh start with Bethesda

The family moved back to Minnesota following the divorce in 1979, where all of Cheryl's family lived. It was where Renee was able to come to Bethesda, a place she has called home for 20 years. “It has been such a positive experience,” Cheryl says without reservation. “This is her home. She is comfortable with the people she lives with.”

Over the years, Cheryl has gotten to know the people we support and staff at the home, making frequent visits and really becoming part of the family. Renee has thrived.

In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic that we are now experiencing made clear how special the family's relationship with Bethesda is. In-person visits became impossible for a while, but Renee and Cheryl were used to using Facetime facilitated by staff, so they were able to stay connected. “Thank God we live in this technology age,” she said. Meanwhile, Cheryl contin-



ued to drop off treats at the home, on the patio and out of Renee's sight.

During the pandemic, Cheryl appreciated the regular virtual town hall meetings with Mike Thirtle, President and CEO of Bethesda, to stay informed. "I appreciate that they are keeping my daughter safe—that is my No. 1 priority." Recently, Cheryl was also able to visit her daughter in person for the first time in months. "It went extremely well—it was an amazing experience for me. She was happy."

A lifetime of giving

In so many ways, helping people with disabilities has been Cheryl's life work. She has been retired for 13 years, having served as the assistant director of the public welfare department in Anoka County, Minnesota. She helped others in situations similar to hers, bringing special



Wearing Easter vests.

insight and tremendous empathy. "People just need to stand up for those with disabilities," Cheryl said.

Recently, Cheryl had saved some money for international travel. But with COVID-19 keeping her from getting on a plane, she thought of something more pressing. "It's in my DNA to give back, so I decided I'm going to make a substantial donation to Bethesda at this time," she said.

Cheryl recognizes that donations are essential to cover quality services. Both the group home and the local day program benefited from her generosity.

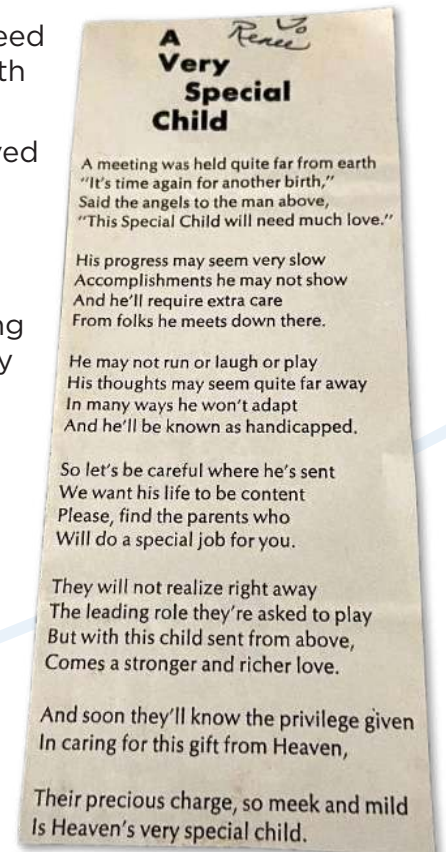
"God has been extremely good to me," Cheryl reflected. "We all have crosses to bear. I say do something to help, to the best of your ability—God will bless you."

Cheryl looks forward to seeing Renee in person again soon, and treasures the sound of "woo" that Renee makes when she's really excited. Having Bethesda in their lives allows Cheryl to let her daughter go and live her life—something that brings such great comfort.

"I just consider her my miracle child," Cheryl said.



Christmas 2018 at Renee's brother's home. She is looking at a family picture she is in that was taken that summer



A verse given to Cheryl shortly after Renee was diagnosed - it has helped Cheryl cope with difficult times and love Renee more with each passing year.



A selfie taken during a home visit five or six years ago.

Eyes on the prize

Nathan knows what he wants—and with Bethesda's help, he'll get it

When the first responders found Nathan, they weren't sure he was going to make it. He was malnourished, emaciated, and covered in bedsores, many of which were infected.

Nathan has cerebral palsy and, because of his disability, relies on others for most of his physical needs, like getting in and out of bed, eating and going to the bathroom. So when his mother stopped caring for him, Nathan didn't really have options. He just laid in bed, slowly growing thinner and sicker.

Finally someone from Nathan's school called the authorities and reported Nathan had stopped showing up and nobody could get ahold of his mother. A wellness check revealed neglect so severe Nathan was immediately removed from his home and brought to a hospital, where it took months to heal his ravaged body to the point he could be discharged; even then, it was almost a year before his bedsores had finally scarred over and his weight returned to normal.

Going through something like that would be enough to take down the strongest of people. But not Nathan. Because even though it took him time to physically recover, he never lost his joie de vivre. Indeed, it's impossible to spend time with Nathan and not come away with cheeks sore from smiling.

"He just has this joy inside him," says Wendy Liljenberg, Nathan's program manager with Bethesda.

In addition to his relentless positivity, Nathan has a strong sense of self. He relies on others for physical support, but when it comes to his life, Nathan knows exactly what he wants—and he goes after it fearlessly.



With Bethesda's help, Nathan decided he wanted to move into a host home and, after meeting Sukma and her sister Hilda, Nathan knew he'd found the perfect match. He moved in in 2018 and that was that—he was home. And, finally settled in a stable, loving home, Nathan turned his focus to his goals.

Nathan went back to school and graduated. He got a job painting pottery, something he can do from home. (And something Sukma is clearly proud of—just ask and she'll happily start showing off his creations.)

But Nathan still had one hurdle to overcome. Because while he was hospitalized, Nathan was assigned a guardian by the



Nathan and his host home family on a pre-COVID trip to South Dakota.

courts, a former teacher of his who volunteered for the role. And it was going smoothly until Nathan learned his guardian was planning to take him out of Sukma's home and away from Bethesda. That was unacceptable to Nathan and, to him, there was only one solution: he needed to be his own guardian—the only person in charge of making decisions for his life.

Again with Bethesda's help, Nathan petitioned the courts for his own guardianship. The proceedings were involved; Nathan has limited verbal ability, using mostly yes/no responses, so a speech therapist was brought in to ensure he understood what was happening and could respond to the questions put to him—which he did with 100% accuracy. And at the end of the process, Nathan was awarded his own guardianship.

Nathan is a testament to the strength of

the human spirit. Despite the heartbreaking circumstances that nearly took his life, he remains open, positive and loving. And he is also a shining example of how much people with disabilities can accomplish when given the opportunity and support—and especially when you have the love of people like Wendy and Sukma.

And you can rest assured this isn't the end of Nathan's story. With his tenacity, his ability to smile through difficult times, and the support of those who love him, it's hard to imagine anything could hold him back from accomplishing something once he sets his mind to it.



Nathan's painted pottery.

What is the Bethesda host home program?



The Bethesda host home program (also known as shared living or life sharing) matches people with developmental disabilities with people in the community who are looking for an opportunity to welcome them into their homes, lives and families.

Living with an individual or family allows people with disabilities greater freedom and independence, the chance to form strong, lasting relationships, and full integration within the community.

The program also provides incredible benefits for the host home provider, including a tax-free professional wage, 24/7 support, and the reward of helping a person with disabilities live their best possible life.

JOY OF GIVING

Bethesda Stewardship Annual Impact Report September 2019 – August 2020

Thank you for making this year amazing. Your support has brought so much joy and we are blessed by the people, congregations, organizations and corporations who made financial gifts to support our mission. Bethesda values the gifts of support from every donor and of every amount. The donors listed below reflect those individuals and families who have supported us with cumulative gifts of \$1,000 or more over the past year:

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- Trinity Lutheran Church Atchison, KS
- Trinity Lutheran Church Sterling, CO
- Mrs. Carol A. Tushaus
- Mr. & Mrs. Robert G. Ulmer
- Mr. & Mrs. George H. Ungeran
- Urban Link, Inc., DBA Resale With A Purpose
- Mr. & Mrs. Edward Urban
- U.S. Bank - (The Private Client Reserve of U.S. Bank)
- Mr. & Mrs. Dale A. Van Wulfen
- Victoria Lions Club
- Virtus, LLC
- Ms. Janet E. Visick
- Mr. & Mrs. Robert W. Vonderlack
- Mr. & Mrs. Fred C. Vorlop
- Waikoloa Lutheran Church Waikoloa, HI
- Danny & Cynthia Walker
- Mrs. Carol A. Wawrzyn
- Webber Family Fund
- Mr. Donald E. Weberus
- Mr. & Mrs. David Wegener
- Mr. & Mrs. Henry J. Weidler
- Mr. & Mrs. Raymond A. Weiss
- Ms. Susan M. Welter
- West Portal Lutheran Church San Francisco, CA
- Mr. & Mrs. William R. West
- Mr. & Mrs. Jon S. Williams
- Eric & Kathy Winkler
- Virginia Winkler
- WI Knights of Columbus Intellectual Disabilities Committee
- Rev. & Mrs. Steven L. Witte
- Mrs. Virginia E. Woerner
- Ms. Trulaine K. Woken
- Ms. Mary J. Wolfram
- Mrs. Karen Worthington
- Raymond & Kathy Yaeger
- Mrs. Lois E. Young
- Mr. Thomas J. Young
- YourCause (YourCause.com)
- Ziegler Investment Banking
- Mr. & Mrs. Ted B. Zimmerman Jr.
- Zion Lutheran Church Pierce, NE
- Zion Lutheran Church Fairmont, OK
- Zion Lutheran Church Bunker Hill, IL
- Zion Lutheran Church Hopkins, MN
- Mr. Erwin F. Zuehlke

Bethesda brings people together

COVID-19 has brought tough times. It's changed almost everything about the way we work, play, shop, socialize and live.



But more often than not, adversity brings about innovation—and Bethesda is no exception. In fact, 2020 brought us into some new and exciting territory we never thought we'd be exploring: live concerts.

In September we hosted The Power of a Vision, a star-studded virtual celebration featuring Grammy-winning lead singer of the Newsboys Michael Tait, along with singer/songwriters Adam Agee and Dave Stovall.

And the event was so well received we decided to do it again, this time with a cozy Christmas concert called Home for the Holidays featuring Dove award-winning Building 429, plus fun cameos of the people we support.



And while these were fun, cheerful events designed to bring joy and thanks to the people we support and all our supporters across the nation, they also served a bigger purpose. Because they gave us a chance to come together with our friends and loved ones over a common cause and united us during a time when we couldn't always be together. And, perhaps most importantly, they helped us spread our

message of independence, inclusion and community with a bigger audience, exposing thousands of new people across the country to our mission.

More of these exciting events are in the works, including for Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in March. So subscribe to our email, follow us on social media—and visit BethesdaLC.org often to stay up to date, because you won't want to miss this.

Special thanks to Billy Mauldin, President of Motor Racing Outreach, and Forest Hill Church in North Carolina for their dedication and support.



It's About Eddie

Why one woman gives to Bethesda

At Bethesda, we know we couldn't do what we do without the generous support of our donors. And this year, we recognized several of our donors with the Christian Stewardship Award as a way of saying thank you for all they've given us—financial support, of course, but also many years of love, friendship and prayers.

One of this year's amazing winners is Elaine Main.

This is her story.

In the 1940s, parents of children with disabilities typically institutionalized their children or kept them sequestered at home. My parents did neither. Eddie was a valued member of our family and was included in whatever we did.

Although Eddie lived with my parents for 35 years, they thought ahead and toured Bethesda. My father, an attorney, joined Bethesda's board of directors in the '70s.

When Dad had a directors' meeting, Dad, Mom, and Eddie would drive the 325 miles to Watertown and stay at the Heritage Inn. After Eddie became a resident of Bethesda's Dierker Hall in 1979, they continued this pattern for visits, and Eddie checked out of Dierker to join them for the weekend.

After Dad died in 1988, I stepped into the pattern of overnight visits with Eddie, and later, when my daughter was a toddler, she started joining us too. She must have wondered why her uncle was different and felt uncomfortable when patrons of Watertown's buffet restaurant watched us. Yet I can't help but think Eddie taught her a concern for others, which she continues today through her work.

Bethesda provides opportunities to people we'd like to see thrive, which Eddie did as a Bethesda resident. Bethesda exhibits values that are important to us and is willing to try new approaches to stay relevant. Bethesda is important to the people it supports and their families.

"From birth, we knew my little brother Eddie was different."

- Elaine



Make a Lasting Impression

2020 has made a lasting impression on all of us. COVID-19, isolation, lockdown, and fear of not only sickness but also what the future might bring have weighed on our minds.

For many of us, we've taken time to look at our plans; assess how we want to live our lives today and how we want to distribute assets after we're gone; and give direction when medical and financial decisions must be made.

At Bethesda, we've been blessed that many consider charitable gifts when these plans are made. Traditionally, a well-planned and up-to-date will has been the primary tool for disposition of assets—but that's not the only option.

Here are a few points to consider:

- **Giving through a will.** As circumstances and federal and state tax laws change, have your will reviewed to make certain your wishes are still correctly expressed. Consider a **codicil to your will** to add or make changes to charitable bequests.
- **Retirement accounts.** Retirement accounts are passed through a beneficiary designation rather than a will. Generally, retirement accounts are taxed as income for the person who receives them. But designating Bethesda as beneficiary is a charitable donation and is not taxed. If you're 70½ or older, you could also make a qualified charitable distribution (QCD), which allows you to contribute up to \$100,000 a year from your IRA without incurring income taxes. If you're 72, that gift can also count as part of your required minimum distribution (RMD).
- **Donor-advised funds.** A donor-advised fund (DAF) is a charitable investment account that provides flexible and efficient ways to manage charitable giving. DAFs have become more popular in recent years as they can provide benefits and also offer a donor the satisfaction of watching the impact charitable dollars make while still alive. Gifts can be made to Bethesda directly by notifying your fund manager.

Bethesda Lutheran Communities
600 Hoffmann Drive
Watertown, WI 53094
EIN: 39-0806446

Your consideration of Bethesda for your charitable dollars means so much to the people we support. As always, consult your estate and financial advisors when making decisions. Please contact us at Bethesda when you do so we may honor and recognize your thoughtfulness and generosity.

Lorene King

Engagement Vice President

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