



# Messenger

Serving people with developmental disabilities

## A historic step **forward**

Bethesda to become AbleLight



# Letter from Cesar

## AbleLight: **A game-changer for people with disabilities!**

Friends of Bethesda,

When Bethesda first came to be more than 100 years ago, we were a small Wisconsin organization serving just five people. Since then, with the help of our loyal supporters, generous donors and a dedicated team, we have grown to a national nonprofit that's benefited the lives of tens of thousands. And we're just getting started.

Today, we're choosing to undergo an ambitious but necessary transformation that will allow us to deliver new, life-changing services – all while reaching more people than ever before through our Christian mission.

Why are we doing this? After careful consideration, we've realized that there is far more that can be done for people with disabilities, and we're building on our strong tradition as a leader in the field to push the boundaries even further. Simply put: We believe the world shines brighter when people with intellectual and developmental disabilities achieve their full potential.

Our services are more essential than ever before. And our unique approach to supporting the whole person and our drive to continuously improve the world for people with disabilities are what sets us apart in the disability field.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am excited to share that with that renewed commitment comes a new name to fully represent who we are and where we are headed: AbleLight. In the pages of this special edition of Messenger you will learn how we chose this name and, more importantly, why it matters. You will see how we are building on our rich history as we light the way to a brighter future.

I hope we inspire you and give you confidence in our mission going forward. Please know that we need your help to continue this important work.

Regards,  
Cesar



Cesar Villalpando has served on the Bethesda Board of Directors for the past four years and has been chairperson since 2019. His expertise is in health care leadership.

Cesar is the former Corporate Senior Vice President, Enterprise Shared Services at Kaiser Permanente, the nation's largest integrated health system. During his 29+ years with Kaiser he oversaw a broad range of services, including hospitals, pharmacy, construction, support services, and financial and strategy divisions.

# A Special Night to Shine Bright



**On Thursday, Sept. 23, Team Bethesda was invited to a special event to learn about and celebrate our new name – AbleLight!**

Our employees and the people they support were front and center as we welcomed Christian artist Building 429. Our emcee, Megan Alexander of “Inside Edition,” was joined by Interim President and CEO Dave Sneddon.



We were joined by Bethesda College students for the “big reveal.” Broadcast live from Hales Corners Lutheran Church in Wisconsin, this was a special night celebrating our history and looking forward to an even brighter future.

If you would like to see the announcement event, go to [www. BethesdaLC.org/Shine](http://www.BethesdaLC.org/Shine)



# A rich history and a bright future

## Our next chapter begins

Transformation has been a constant for Bethesda and our field

It all started in 1903 – a donation of 40 acres of land nestled along the Rock River in Watertown, Wisconsin. A year later, the organization that came to be known as Bethesda came to be.

What a wonderful journey it has been these past 117 years. From a rural enclave in the Midwest, and then expanding nationally, we have lived our mission, to enhance the lives of people through services that share the good news of Jesus Christ.

And this journey continues. While many may reflect on the Bethesda of the past as constant and unchanging, the truth is we have transformed many times over the years, to better meet the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Many of you will remember the large campus and facility in Watertown, where we cared for hundreds at a time and thousands over the years.



## Through the Years: A Timeline from Bethesda to AbleLight

1903	1904	1923	1940s	1960s
40 acres of land along the Rock River in Watertown, Wisconsin, were donated to Bethesda.	Bethesda was founded as The Society for the Training and Care of the Feebleminded and Epileptic in Watertown, Wisconsin, by concerned Lutherans, and opened its doors to five people. The school focused on Christ-centered training and Lutheran education while providing people with a loving, supportive home.	The school adopted the name Bethesda, taken from John 5:2-9 and meaning "House of Mercy."	Bethesda entered a period of expansion, which began with renovations to campus buildings in Watertown, Wisconsin.	The first Bethesda thrift store started in Watertown.

“We were known across the nation as the place Lutherans would send their loved ones who couldn’t care for themselves,” said Dave Sneddon, Interim President and CEO. “But over time, expectations of people with disabilities and their families changed, and Bethesda needed to change as well.”

Like most providers of services to people with disabilities, we began to accept Medicaid funding as a way to fund the cost of providing quality support.



Over time, we adopted a group home model that created more opportunity for independence and real connection to communities, and we closed the Watertown residential campus when it could no longer be sustained.

**Today, we’re approaching the future with open arms, and bringing new friends into the mission.**

We continue to embrace our Lutheran family, and cherish our role as a Registered Service Organization of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, but are expanding our circle to include even more people.



**The potential upside is incredible**

We can move from around 2,000 people in homes and traditional services and a small (but fiercely loyal) supporter base to transforming the lives of more than 7 million Americans with disabilities through innovation, embracing all, and a business-minded approach driven by Christian love. What a time of promise for people with disabilities! ■



**1961-68**

**1970s-80s**

**1974**

**2006**

**2014**

**2021**

Bethesda started occupational therapy, speech therapy and physical therapy departments.

Bethesda began expanding its services across the United States.

Began shift to 300+ small programs in many states; Medicaid funding begins, start of services to faiths beyond Lutherans.

Good Shepherd affiliates with Bethesda, in California, Colorado, Oregon and Washington, doubling our size overnight.

Turnaround needed, with the organization losing millions a year, on track to go out of business within 2-3 years.

After careful consideration, decision made to change our name to AbleLight, reflecting a commitment to our mission and urgent need to impact millions of Americans with disabilities.



## How it all came to be: Inside our new name and logo

We listened, learned and created an identity as unique as the people we serve.

The name “Bethesda” has served this organization well for nearly a century. You may recall days gone by in which most Lutheran church congregants would have an instant idea of what Bethesda is and who it serves, by name alone. “Bethesda Sundays” were commonplace.

Yet as we looked at where we are today and where we need to go tomorrow, a few things became clear. Many people outside the Lutheran faithful didn’t know what Bethesda was – there are other “Bethesda” organizations out there, including churches, a city in Maryland, and a computer gaming company.

So much confusion! In fact, in the communities where we provide services **there are more than 575 organizations that carry the name Bethesda!**

To discern our path forward, we needed to consider the views of a variety of important stakeholders, including:

- ✓ Present and future people supported, and their families
- ✓ Our employees
- ✓ Our current and prospective donors



“Over the course of the last year, we connected with hundreds of individuals in these categories and asked what was important to them,” said Cindy Moon-Mogush, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer. “For our longtime donors, a connection to faith was paramount. For donors we hope to join us in the future, making progress toward supporting the whole person was at the top.”

**Balancing these valuable perspectives as our starting point, we undertook a thorough and thoughtful process to determine our new name and how we communicate more effectively.**

We considered our history and our plans for the future. From there, we identified and vetted a new name – AbleLight – from more than 1,000 choices. With approval of the Board of Directors, we moved forward with a rebranding process in earnest this past summer.



**Our logo: Celebrating past and present**

At first glance, the logo AbleLight certainly appears different than the Bethesda logo, yet there is continuity with our past – by design.

In particular, take a close look at the figure of a person surrounded by light.



This works in two ways. First, it represents the services we provide that embrace the “whole person,” not just meeting some of their needs, but surrounding them with loving care.

Second, you may also notice that the light surrounding the figure recalls many images of Jesus that have been created for hundreds of years. In this way, we proudly reaffirm our Christian roots and mission.

**Not changing quite yet**

While we will soon be AbleLight, we are not there yet. The legal name change will take place in January, and there is a lot of work for our team to complete before that happens. Until then you’ll begin seeing our name pop up in a few places, including our website and social media channels.



As our name changes, it’s important to reflect on what’s not changing. We are here to serve the disability community through our Christian mission.



We are the same people serving the same needs. While we will look and feel a bit different going forward, the mission continues, stronger than ever! ■



# Coming full circle: Care that serves the whole person

While we may be changing our name, do you know the names we're really excited about? Emma. Paul. Chris. These are among the people we support in new and exciting ways. With the help of our team and our generous donors, we will be able to do much more for many more in the near future.

As we considered the needs and how we would be able to address them, we landed on five "impact areas" where we felt we could encircle a person with loving care.

## Safe and Loving Homes

A great life starts with a great home. We offer a variety of housing options to meet every need, including group homes, supported living and host home arrangements.



Just ask Chris, who has a mild intellectual disability and lives in a host home in Colorado. With the love and support of his host home family, Chris stays on track with his personal care, money management and taking his medications. Because of his safe home, Chris can hold down a job and live more independently, pursuing his love of video games and sports. Most importantly, he is loved.

Our latest innovation in homes is Cornerstone Village, a first-of-its-kind residential community uniting individuals with disabilities with people of all abilities in a loving, welcoming environment. Housing options such as these help people live as independently as possible while maintaining a meaningful connection to their community.

See how we're empowering people to live their best life – **for their whole life.**



## Financial Security

Managing money can be stressful for anyone, but for a person with a disability and their family, it can be daunting. We provide one-on-one consultation and support to help people navigate the complex world of benefits and achieve their financial goals. This includes rep payee services, Medicaid redeterminations, Social Security reporting and ABLE account support and training. We are working on even more helpful tools and support in this area.





## Independence and Wellbeing

We make it possible to achieve joy in daily living. As just one example, through our emerging Behavior Supports area, we provide individualized treatment plans for people with disabilities and their families to promote positive behavior change. This has made a world of difference in helping people achieve their life goals.



Our one-on-one support guides the transition from school-based services to independent living, and from adult living skills to on-the-job support. Take Emma, who lives at Cornerstone Village in Minnesota. She receives one-on-one support with her job, and is adding on supported living services to help her complete day to day tasks. She is thriving!

### >> Expanding our college reach

For young people leaving high school, **AbleLight College builds life and work skills in young adults**, getting them ready to dream big and accomplish more. Today there is a campus at Concordia University Wisconsin, and we are excited to announce a second campus opening at Concordia University Ann Arbor in Michigan, planned for next fall!



## Innovation and Technology

We innovate for good, researching and developing new technology to improve all aspects of life for people with disabilities, and we provide customized solutions to meet individual needs. Assistive smart home technology is deployed in a growing number of our homes, including Cornerstone Village, promoting safety, security and independence.



### >> Our bustling technology hub

Have you heard of the **AbleLight Innovation Center**? This newly launched research and technology hub is located in downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin, near university and corporate partners. From here we develop and launch assistive technology that can help make independence a reality.



## Community and Faith

A strong connection to the community is key to a life well lived. We make that connection through day programs, virtual programming, faith connections, and volunteering options that bring people together. A wonderful example is Paul, a Bethesda volunteer in Oregon, who leads Bible studies for people in our homes, including prayer and singing worship songs in English and Spanish. Paul has contributed his time and talent to many conferences over the years and is a real blessing to our organization and the people who call him a friend.



Together, these impact areas enrich the lives of people with disabilities – from childhood to older adulthood and everywhere in between. Serving the whole person through their whole life. What a blessing to be there for them when, and how, they need us. ■

# Your generosity is more important than ever



We hope you have been moved and inspired by the AbleLight story. We are pleased that you are among the first to learn of this exciting change. There is so much potential before us to better serve people with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the country.

“Donors have always been a critical component to our mission, and that is more true now than ever,” said Dave Sneddon, Interim President and CEO. “As just one example, we rely on our donors to help fund the residences, technology and activities of Cornerstone Village, our innovative residential community. Creating this truly welcoming and inclusive environment requires resources, both financial and personal, and we are blessed to have benefited from our donors’ generosity to make Cornerstone Village reality.”

Please rest assured that while we create new services, we are maintaining others that have meaning and value. This includes our group homes in multiple states, which serve people who often cannot live on their own.

As our donors know so well, we do not receive enough Medicaid funding to fully pay for the high quality services we are committed to providing in our homes. Our donors help fill the gap.

We always welcome the opportunity to connect with our donors to answer questions, share updates and help understand how they can make a difference. ■

To learn more and make a donation, visit [BethesdaLC.org](https://BethesdaLC.org).



# Frequently Asked Questions

Our name change might have you asking a few questions. We thought we'd answer a few that are on people's minds.

---

## **Q. Why are you changing Bethesda's name to AbleLight?**

A. "Bethesda" has definitely served us well over the years, as we have supported people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and delivered upon our Christian mission. But, in our research, we found it also presented limitations as we've worked to expand our reach and impact the whole nation. More than 7 million Americans with a disability need our help! AbleLight will build upon our treasured history and positions us well for a transformational future.

## **Q. When will the name change?**

A. Our name will legally change in January 2022. However, between now and then we'll begin introducing the name. You'll see it on our website and social media channels, in addition to the pages of the Messenger.

## **Q. Have you been acquired by another organization?**

A. No, we continue to be our own organization, independently charting a brighter future for people with disabilities.

## **Q. Are you still a Christian organization?**

A. Absolutely. We continue to be guided by our Christian mission. We welcome, serve and love every person. We are proud to continue to be a Registered Service Organization of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. We cherish the opportunity to improve lives and humbly accept our responsibility to lead by example – just as Christ would.

## **Q. Do you still need donations?**

A. Yes! Our mission is bigger than ever, and we need resources to be successful. There are many ways that our donors can help, such as monthly or yearly giving, an estate gift, or other creative options. We welcome the opportunity to partner with our donors in a meaningful way.



# We're just getting started – stay in touch!

As of January, AbleLight will be our new name, and we are thrilled to share this news with you today. Over the next few months we will begin letting the world know about our new identity and renewed purpose. In January, our new name will be more visible on our signage, our website and beyond.

Here are ways to stay in touch:



Subscribe to our newsletters and our blog at **BethesdaLC.org**



Visit **BethesdaLC.org/AbleLight** for information during the transition.



Visit our social media channels list



For more information, scan this QR code with your mobile phone



**Thank you for being part of the Bethesda Family and  
welcome to the AbleLight Family!**

Bethesda to become AbleLight

