

*Support, Guidance,*

*and*

*Empowerment*

Community Access  
Summer 2023



**ACCESS  
SERVICES**  
*unlocking potential*



# *Lifesharing Legacies*

There are people who come into your life and completely change it simply by being who they are. Two such people, Joe Vitelli and Frank Grimes, blessed our Lifesharing program for many years, leaving cherished memories behind with all those who knew them. Our Lifesharing program provides a unique opportunity to share your life with an adult with intellectual disability or autism who needs support in your community. Every person and their needs are different.

## *Joe*

Joe Vitelli lived on his own and with his sister into his fifties before he came to stay at the home of Ed and Ann Leight, Access Services Lifesharing providers. Ann shared, "Right from the start, we knew Joe was a great fit with our family. He was a very happy guy, super appreciative. He loved life. He loved visiting with his family, attending events, parties, and holidays."

Joe was also a part of Altec, a division of Access Services, for many years in a variety of ways. Cindy Smith, Director of Altec, shared, "I knew Joe for over 15 years. He started out in our Altec workshop when he was still living with his sister before he moved to Lifesharing with Ed and Ann. Joe also served on the board of Altec for several years. He was always advocating for himself and others regardless of what he was going through." Joe was known for many phrases. One of them, "It's another great day!" stood in stark contrast to some of the things that Joe experienced. He never complained even when days were tough, he chose to focus on the positive.





"I used to work with Joe years ago and take him swimming. When we reconnected at the Altec day program, he remembered, and told me how much fun he had when we went. He had a way of never forgetting and making everyone around him feel good. We all miss him so much."

~ *Richelle Bunczek, DSP Topaz Program*

"Joe had a way of making sure you knew that you were his friend, no matter what. He would talk to anyone. He wanted to be friends with everyone and get to know them regardless of their communication abilities. He was loved by everyone and had so many friends at the Altec day program. Joe was also a prankster. He would tell us, "You dropped something," but then you'd look and there wouldn't be anything there." ~ *Deanna Stock, Assistant Director of Topaz Program*

"Joe loved all our projects (at Altec day program) but he got especially excited the day we made flower arrangements. He couldn't wait to bring them home to Ann. He also loved when Drew, a DSP with the Altec program, would do drawing classes, especially superheroes. Joe was a good artist, a really good artist! He was the nicest man you would ever meet." ~ *Karen Weniger, DSP Topaz Program*

Because of Covid, they couldn't celebrate Joe's 70th birthday in 2020. Then in 2022, Joe got his wish for a surprise birthday party celebrating this milestone and the two he had since then. Joe's passing was a surprise to everyone. Even though he had health struggles, everyone believed him when he said, "You're only as old as you feel, and I feel young!" It felt like he would be here forever.

"Losing Joe showed how much he impacted our lives. My kids and grandkids have great memories of Joe."

~ *Ann Leight, Lifesharing Provider*



# Frank



Frank Grimes was born in Bethlehem, PA and lived at home for part of his life until he was transferred to Pennhurst State School and Hospital. In 1982, he was released and transferred to a community residential living home. This proved to be unsafe, and the county reached out to Access Services in the fall of 1984 to ask if we would provide respite care for Frank until another group home could be found to meet his needs. The respite provider bonded with Frank and asked if he could stay with them through Lifesharing. On November 6, 1984, Frank officially became part of the Lifesharing program. He was with his initial providers for many years until their deaths. One of his later providers, Carmen Casillas, had him for twelve years.

His final Lifesharing provider, Sandra Figueroa, met him 6 years before he came to live with her while he was with Carmen. She shared, "When Carmen had an accident, she had to go into surgery, and she asked me to apply to Lifesharing to take Frank into my home. At first, I said no, but then I decided to take him in for respite for 30 days. After that, he was mine, he never left. He made a huge difference in our lives. Frank was such a nice guy and became very close to my children. My oldest son and him were best friends."

Frank attended a day program for over 30 years. His favorite days were cooking on Thursdays and movie days on Fridays. At first, Frank was primarily non-verbal, but by the end of his life, he grew comfortable using words and hand motions to make sure he was understood. Sandra threw a big party for Frank for his 90th birthday and many people came out to celebrate.



Frank with his provider, Sandra, at his 90th birthday party.



"Frank loved to travel. He went to Florida and Puerto Rico with us. Everywhere we went, he went. He was very spoiled both at our home and the day program! When they put Frank on hospice, I took him home, and I told my job I couldn't come in until whatever happens, happens. I just kept telling him that he was going to be okay wherever he went next. I didn't think I was going to do this (Lifesharing), but when you meet them, you get attached. I miss him so much!" ~ *Sandra Figueroa, Lifesharing Provider*

"I was Frank's coordinator for only 6 months or so, but in that time, I grew to love him. He was honestly just the sweetest man. Everyone that knew him loved him. It was a pleasure to be his LS coordinator."

~ *Karyn Chillemi, Lifesharing Coordinator*

"Frank was always such a happy man when I knew him and well loved by Sandra and her family. I was able to say goodbye to him before he left us, and it was my honor and pleasure to be his coordinator."

~ *Karen Giesen, Lifesharing Coordinator*

"Frank was very special to our program. He loved listening to music, especially the oldies and church music. Most often than not he would get up and dance whenever he heard a song he liked. He especially liked his trips to New York City to see shows and eat a good meal. I think he liked the Rockettes Christmas show the best!"

~ *Sam Ochse, Director of Lifesharing*



# *DSP Accreditation Celebrations!*

In March 2023, our Intellectual Disabilities & Autism Service line kicked off a cohort of direct support professionals (DSPs) for the DSP Accreditation program provided by the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP). The NADSP program is a nationally recognized certification that can bolster employee's resumes and help prepare them to move forward in their careers with Access Services or other companies.

We are pleased to share the following individuals who are leading the way in this new opportunity:

Rachel Adebesin	Denise Kovalovsky	Rosalinda Reiss
Fatiya Awal	Ashlee McCuen	Neyda Rivera Lizardi
Jennifer Bollendorf	Kathleen McDowell	Valerie Schaeffer
Angela Chromiak	Wendy McMullen	Dianne Sheaffer
Sue Fatzinger	Melissa Mehallic	Wendy Ann Smith
April Gebelein	Ahmed Muftau-Lediju	Cynthia Startzel
Linda Haring-Reppert	Malikah Munday	Lawrence Williams
Victoria Hoffman	Gerson Ortiz-Vergara	Erica Winter
Donna-Joy Jones	Dennise Ramirez	

To date, we have a total of seven staff who have completed at least one level of certification in four short months. Three employees have successfully completed all three tiers of the program and graduated with their certification ahead of schedule! Ashlee McCuen was the very first person to complete the program with Wendy McMullen and Denise Kovalovsky following shortly afterwards.





In-Home Supports Supervisor, Maria Wolfe, stands with Access Services' first NADSP Accredited staff, Ashlee McCuen



NADSP Accredited Staff, Wendy McMullen and Denise Kovalovsky

Congratulations to everyone who has taken on the challenge! We are encouraged by everyone's dedication to this program and look forward to continuing the celebration with the rest of the cohort participants.

# It can be difficult to think of the future and the support that an adult with disabilities may need.

Access Services' Lifesharing Program has been connecting individuals with caring provider families since 1984.

Lifesharing providers who open their homes offer support and guidance to empower their individual to reach for and achieve their goals and aspirations. You can make a difference!



To learn more, visit  
[www.accessservices.org/services/lifesharing/](http://www.accessservices.org/services/lifesharing/)



# Who is Access Services?

For 47 years, Access Services has been developing innovative ways to provide support services to individuals with special needs. Today, we are a large non-profit organization operating in fourteen counties in Eastern Pennsylvania.

Our mission is to empower and serve people in need of specialized supports by providing innovative services that improve their ability to live fulfilling lives in the community.



Opt out of these mailings or request to receive our digital e-newsletter by emailing [ktizzard@accessservices.org](mailto:ktizzard@accessservices.org) or calling (484) 229-3983.



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