



AbleLight



Bethesda

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Spring 2022

# Messenger

See your support in action

## Blazing his own trail

Chris continues to defy expectations at his AbleLight group home.

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Safe & Loving  
Homes  
Edition

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# Letter from Keith Jones

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

Friends,

Earlier this year, I had the distinct privilege of joining AbleLight as President and CEO. Since then, it has been a very busy time as I have been traveling around the organization and learning about our important mission—a mission we could not accomplish without your generous support.

Did you know in the US there are nearly 600,000 people on lengthy waitlists for home- and community-based services? The estimated lifetime care costs for an individual with a developmental disability is \$2.3 million. And approximately 70% of adults with developmental disabilities who live with a parent or other caregiver are not connected to publicly available services. These statistics are staggering. Rising costs, decreased funding, and years-long waiting lists have left families underserved. This is why your contribution to AbleLight's mission is so very critical and worthwhile.

This issue of *Messenger* focuses on one of our key areas of impact: providing safe and loving homes. Read more about how your generous efforts and gifts allow AbleLight to address housing insecurity through a variety of options that help people live as independently as possible while maintaining a meaningful connection to their community. After all, a great life starts with a great home. Looking ahead, I can promise you these next few years are going to be exciting. With your ongoing support, we will light the way toward a bright future for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Together we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals and families.

As we take this journey together, I will do my best to keep you informed. I want to hear from you, and as I continue to visit around our organization, I hope we can meet. Please feel free to drop me a note at [CEO.Feedback@AbleLight.org](mailto:CEO.Feedback@AbleLight.org) if you would like to share a comment or question. I would appreciate hearing from you. You are an important part of the structure that makes AbleLight the leading organization it is. With your help, the sky is the limit!



Keith Jones  
President and CEO  
AbleLight



**Keith Jones**  
President and CEO

As President and Chief Executive Officer of AbleLight, Keith Jones is responsible for all aspects of the organization, including the strategy and execution needed to meet the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, now and in the future.

Jones brings more than 20 years of experience to his role, having led transformation efforts in the health care field, including at several highly complex multistate companies, and has consulted with many Fortune 500 companies with a focus on accelerating the execution of strategic plans.

Most recently, Jones served as CEO of Blue Sprig Pediatrics, a company he founded in 2017 that offers behavior support services (ABA Therapy) to children with autism. Blue Sprig has grown to more than 160 locations throughout the country.

Prior to launching Blue Sprig, Jones served as Chief Operations Officer for PSA Healthcare, where he strengthened the company by overhauling its business strategy, operational leadership, organizational culture and business processes. His leadership led to significant improvements in employee engagement, clinical quality and financial performance.

Jones enjoys public speaking and has accepted invitations to present to audiences around the world. He earned a degree in architecture from Leeds Beckett University in England. Jones lives in Houston with his wife and four children, and is an avid baseball fan and fly fisherman.





# Welcome Home!

## Mike's group home with supportive technology helps him become more independent

Like many people with developmental disabilities, Mike lived with his parents until well into his adulthood. He loved his parents, and they loved and doted on him.

But in some ways, Mike was sheltered. His parents' protectiveness kept him safe and healthy and well-fed and well loved. But it also meant he spent most of his time inside and didn't get out much. He also wasn't expected to do things like help clean up around the house or cook his own meals, so he didn't have many independent-living skills.

When Mike's parents passed away, he came to live at AbleLight. He was immediately loved by all for his quick smile and sneaky sense of humor, and the team quickly recognized how capable he was. And so, Mike's second life as an independent, tech-savvy guy began.

**Mike's life looks a lot different today. He lives in a tech-enabled home in Oregon, and his staff has worked with him diligently to help him learn how to use all the smart and assistive tech in his home. And using the tech has brought Mike all kinds of independence.**

Today, Mike is independent enough not to need staff support 24/7. So Mike and the staff found a great balance. With some training and practice, Mike learned to use an iPad to do things like turn the lights on and off, change the channel on the TV, and FaceTime staff if he has a question or needs help. He's also a pro at using the smart medication dispenser to manage his meds himself, and he uses a grabber tool to make it easier to reach things from his wheelchair.

This level of independence is a revelation for Mike, and it gives the staff freedom to do things like take others to appointments

or run errands, knowing Mike is in good hands—his own—and can reach them at any moment if he needs them.

Beyond the tech, Mike is also discovering independence in his community, which has led to some beautiful connections. Mike has become a fixture at the local park, where he watches the neighborhood baseball teams play; he even has his own umpire uniform and helps call the games sometimes. He thinks cops and firemen are the coolest, and the cops and firemen think he's pretty cool too—they know him by name and are always bringing him souvenirs and gifts. And it's not uncommon to see Mike at the school down the block volunteering with the students.

It doesn't take much to see Mike is living his best life—and that part of that is the true connection he has with his staff. Watching them interact looks like a family get-together. They laugh over shared memories, like when Mike discovered he could use his wheelchair to break up ice and help staff clear the driveway after a blizzard. And they tease each other, Mike grinning mischievously when his staff member, Tabitha, ribs him for how he likes to mess with them by sneakily changing the channel or messing with the volume on the TV.

Mike has been blessed with a lifetime full of love and support. And while he loves and misses his parents (including his mother's cooking, he adds), he is still living a full and beautiful life, both experiencing and giving joy every day. And we at AbleLight feel blessed to be a part of Mike's story, and to be able to witness him as he continues to blossom. Because we feel sure he's going to do great things. ■

A man with dark hair and sunglasses, wearing a blue and yellow varsity jacket with the number 20, is sitting in a wheelchair outdoors. He is looking down at a tablet computer mounted on a stand in front of him. The background shows a paved area with some snow or ice.

# Blazing his own trail

Chris continues to defy expectations at his AbleLight group home.

When Chris was just under two years old, he fell into a swimming pool and nearly drowned. He was hospitalized for six weeks and had to be revived multiple times after his tiny heart stopped beating. It was a rough start, to say the least.

Chris was left with a permanent disability, but he's never let his accident define him. If there's anything that defines Chris, it's his staunch refusal to do what's expected of him.

The first thing Chris did that wasn't expected was survive. And, with his dad Greg in his corner, he continued blazing trails at every turn.

He learned to eat without a G-tube. He learned to use a power wheelchair despite a neurologist telling him he couldn't. He became proficient in touch technology and adopted the iPad as a communication device before it was widely used as such.

He joined the high school cheerleading squad and cheered for the football team, of which he was an honorary member. He played baseball spring, summer and fall.



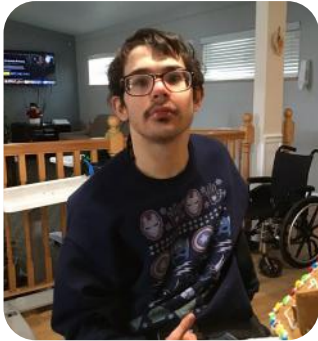
"He's tenacious," says Greg. "It's helped him in his life."

His tenacity continues to help him in his adult life, including when he decided to move out of his dad's house and into an AbleLight group home.



"Kids need to go off and be on their own," Greg says. "It's part of growing up."

Chris agrees. "Greg is an old man," he says, sounding every bit like the independent 20-something he is. ("He's also a smart aleck," says Greg.)



Since Chris moved into his group home, he's continued to set up goals and knock them down one by one. He can eat on his own now, something he needed assistance with in the past. And he's more independent with showering and personal care. He also continues to be known as the tech-savvy guy in the home; when asked if others need a lot of help with their devices, he says, "ten thousand percent."



"Chris loves his AbleLight home so much, says Greg, that if he leaves to go hang out at his dad's house for a while, he's antsy within a few hours to go back home."

"It's his room. It's his space. It's his home," says Greg. "Finding AbleLight was like divine intervention. It's been a great part of his journey." ■

## Meet the AbleLight Board

Called to our mission through faith and inspired each day by the success of the people we support, our all-volunteer board of directors establishes the legal and ethical policies that govern our organization and ensure our future. Meet some of our Board leadership.



**Cesar Villalpando**

Cesar has served on the AbleLight Board of Directors for the past four years and has been chairperson since 2019. His expertise is in healthcare leadership.



**Randall Odzer**

Randall is Chief Financial Officer of LIBERTY Dental Plan and former Chief Financial Officer of the U.S. Insurance Solutions division of Principal Financial Group, a Fortune 500 global financial services company. Randall is a results-oriented business leader with diverse healthcare and insurance experience as CFO of several organizations.



**Catherine Brondos**

Cathy Brondos is an educational trainer and coach. Her career primarily focuses on high school administration, special education, science education and undergraduate teacher education. She completed postgraduate programs in school administration and in special education at the University of Denver.



# Home Sweet Home:

## A caring community to call home

The sense of community at AbleLight Village is so strong, residents gather all the time around shared interests, like faith.

AbleLight Village is an innovative housing solution in so many ways, including creating a sense of belonging and community among the residents of all abilities. Residents in Victoria, Minnesota gather together for birthday celebrations, cooking lessons, crafting sessions, BINGO games and much more.

Residents participate in choosing programs and activities designed around their common interests. A consistent highlight of many residents' week is Bible Study. Led by Mark Shockey, Lead Pastor of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Edina, Minnesota, the Bible study is integrated to include adults with developmental disabilities and seniors aged 55 and older.

*"We all have the common need to grow in our faith at any age and any point of life," says Pastor Shockey. "And people with disabilities have the same questions we all have."*

Pastor Shockey makes sure the Bible studies are inclusive by adapting his lessons to ensure they're suitable for people of all abilities.

*"It's important that everything we do is for everybody," says Julie Hughes, Onsite Leasing and Program Manager of AbleLight Village. "We can adapt whatever we're doing to who we have here."*





One way Pastor Shockey keeps things fresh is by using the Andy Griffith show to teach lessons from the Bible. The group will watch an episode and then use it as a jumping-off point to talk about Christ's love, kindness, and other important themes.



*"What I find is all I have to do is get a discussion started," he says. "I'm just listening and asking questions and helping people apply the truth of God's word to their lives. It creates such a powerful bond between those with disabilities and others in the community who are now starting to see things together. And there's so much support that comes in the midst of that. The community that's formed here at AbleLight is so powerful."* ■

## A new and exciting chapter in **serving people with disabilities.**

Our programs and services are designed to accommodate the unique needs of the people we serve with a goal of promoting independence, safety and security.

One way we do this is by providing a variety of choices for safe and loving homes:



**Community-based Housing** provides a range of living options, including shared living arrangements and small group homes.



**Supported Living Services** support individuals who wish to live in their own home or apartment with flexible options for in-home care.



**AbleLight Village** is a residential community designed to unite people with developmental disabilities with other members of a community in a loving environment.



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

In January 2022, we officially became AbleLight, and we are thrilled to be able to share all of this exciting work with you. Make sure you connect with us so we can stay in touch about all the ways we're delivering on our promise to help people with developmental disabilities achieve their full potential.

Here are ways to stay in touch:



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



Visit **AbleLight.org** to see more inspiring stories of people we serve living to their full potential



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