

# Messenger

Winter 2020



**A FAMILY  
BLENDED.**  
A life transformed.

# Looking forward to 2020

Friends,

We had a transformational year in 2019 with your support, encouragement and prayers. It was a year in which we provided more chances for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live lives of independence and promise.

Of course, a quality home is the base for all endeavors, and in this issue you'll read about people we support who feel at home with Bethesda—Jenni and Dillon. You'll also learn more about Bethesda Cornerstone Village, a first-of-its-kind initiative in the U.S. opening in Minnesota later this year. It will bring adults 55 and older together with people with disabilities in one community. By providing an array of housing options, we aim to ensure that everyone we support feels their home is a fit for their needs.

In addition, you'll see how we plan to make the most of National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in March by taking our outreach to a whole new level.

Finally, as we look to all that 2020 promises, I am very hopeful for the future of our organization. We have made great strides with not only homes, but also technology and reimagining the services and supports we provide. We are doing better financially. And we are living out our mission—to enhance the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities through services that share the good news of Jesus Christ.

I look forward to connecting with you again on progress. Happy New Year and the best to you and yours this winter season.

Best,



*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*



# Cornerstone Village: A place for everyone

Interest and enthusiasm have been increasing in and around Victoria, Minnesota, in anticipation of the first-of-its-kind Bethesda Cornerstone Village.

It all started with the groundbreaking ceremony held back in August, where we hosted about 200 people on the site of a former intermediate care facility. By next summer, active seniors and independent adults with developmental disabilities will be moving into this Christian community living option and enjoying life to the fullest.

Since the groundbreaking, we've received numerous inquiries from people interested in learning more and anticipate many more as the foundation is laid and walls go up.

Cornerstone Village will be a place where people of all abilities will live, socialize and even worship together. The site will offer 52 residential units, including apartment homes and villas that will integrate people with disabilities (up to 25% of units) with adults of all abilities 55 years and older.

There is a tremendous need for housing options like Cornerstone Village across the country. Sadly, people with disabilities often lack access to affordable, nearby residential options. Such housing is essential for those who would like to live independently.

The city of Victoria is the perfect location for Cornerstone Village. It has been a longtime home for Bethesda, spanning nearly 50 years. Leaders in the community recognize the value of the project and have been vocally supportive throughout the process, which has been tremendously helpful and encouraging.

This is just the beginning. More Cornerstone Village developments will be built at locations to be determined. They are all integral to Bethesda's 2030 vision.

## Interested in learning more?

There is a wealth of information at [BethesdaCornerstoneVillage.org](http://BethesdaCornerstoneVillage.org). You can also call 855-HOME188 (855-466-3188). Please consider sharing this information with family and friends, especially if they're in the Twin Cities area.





# “It’s a beautiful thing to see

When Dillon first went to live with the Roush family through the Bethesda host home program, they were given a list of things he didn’t do: talk, smile, laugh, make eye contact, hug, let people touch him—the list went on and on.

“But look at him now,” says Alpie Roush, gesturing across the room to where Dillon, 27, is playing a basketball arcade game with her son, Robert, 26. Dillon is all smiles as Robert takes his hands, wraps them around the basketball and helps him shoot hoops.

“He’s like a completely different person now,” Alpie says.



*Left to right: Dillon and Robert*

## A chance meeting

Two years ago, the family never would have guessed they’d be here today. But in January of 2018, Alpie attended a Bethesda potluck and struck up a conversation with a woman named Pearl. They learned they both had sons about the same age, both with autism.

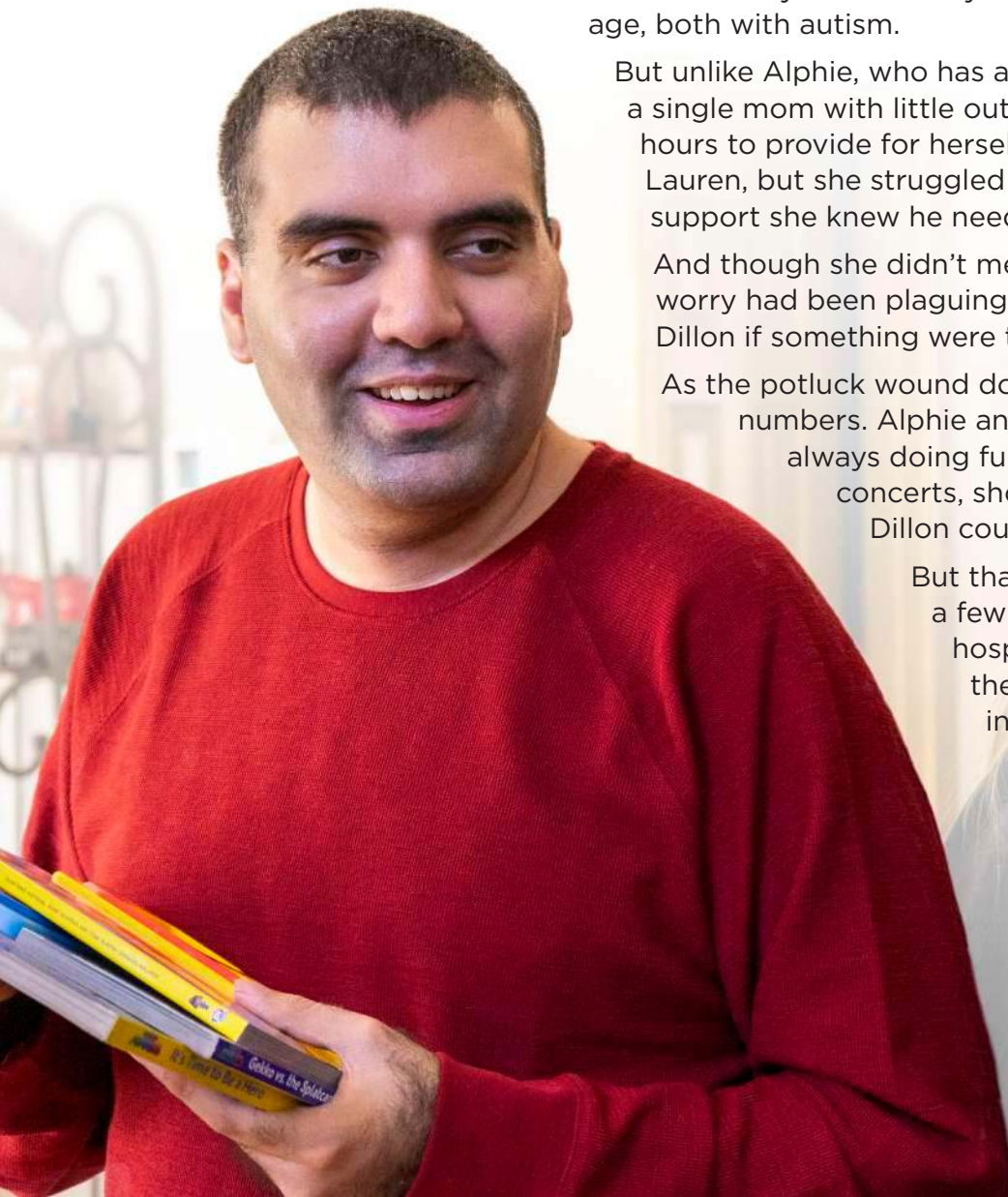
But unlike Alpie, who has a large, close-knit family, Pearl was a single mom with little outside support. She worked long hours to provide for herself and her two kids, Dillon and Lauren, but she struggled to give Dillon the additional support she knew he needed.

And though she didn’t mention it at the time, another worry had been plaguing Pearl: what would happen to Dillon if something were to happen to her?

As the potluck wound down, Alpie and Pearl exchanged numbers. Alpie and her husband, Allen, were always doing fun things with Robert—movies, concerts, shows—and they’d love if Pearl and Dillon could join them.

But that never happened. Because a few weeks later, Pearl was hospitalized with complications from the flu. Shortly after, she slipped into a coma and never woke up.

“When I first heard, I kept thinking, ‘Where will Dillon go? What’s going to happen to Dillon?’ ” Alpie says.



Dillon’s story is now on video!  
Visit [BethesdaLC.org/Messenger](https://BethesdaLC.org/Messenger)  
to view.

# them together.”

## A new hope

At first, Dillon went to stay with his sister, Lauren, but she wasn't at a point in her life to give Dillon what he needed.

“We were running on fumes every day,” she says. “I knew I didn't have the means or the understanding or even the maturity to do that just yet.”

Eventually, Lauren decided the best thing for Dillon was to find him a host home.

Things happened quickly after that and, with Bethesda's help, Dillon moved in with the Roush family as part of the host home program. It's now been a year and a half, and nobody could have imagined the impact it would have—not only on Dillon, but on Robert too.

“When Robert graduated high school, we didn't know what to do,” Alpie says.

“But Dillon has given him a whole new purpose.”

Robert adores Dillon and tells everyone they're brothers. He helps Dillon get ready in the morning, from getting him out of bed to putting his shoes on. And anything Robert does, he wants Dillon to do too, whether it's getting a new shirt or petting a snake at the zoo.

“We didn't know Robert could help people like that, take care of people like that,” says Allen.

“It's a beautiful thing to see them together,” says Alpie.

As for Dillon, he's flourishing beyond all expectations. He adores Robert right back and follows him everywhere, a charming sight as Dillon stands almost a foot taller than Robert. He's gotten better at making eye contact, even with people he doesn't know, and gives high fives. Shortly after he moved in, he shocked everyone by saying his first word ever: “ball.” When he's happy, his smile is pure magic, and when he dances, he radiates joy.

“He has come so far,” says Alpie. “And we can't wait to see what he'll do next.”

“My mom would be so proud,” says Lauren.

“I'm so happy for Dillon, and she would be too.”

*Left to right: Robert, Alpie, Allen, Dillon and Lauren.*



*“He has come so far.  
And we can't wait to see  
what he'll do next.”*

– Alpie



## What is the host home program?

The host home program (also known as shared living, life sharing or family home) 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.



# A new home brings a new

Imagine living in a home where most of your day is spent in your room by yourself with nobody to talk to. Where you don't have opportunities to get out into the world. Where all the gifts you have to share are going to waste.

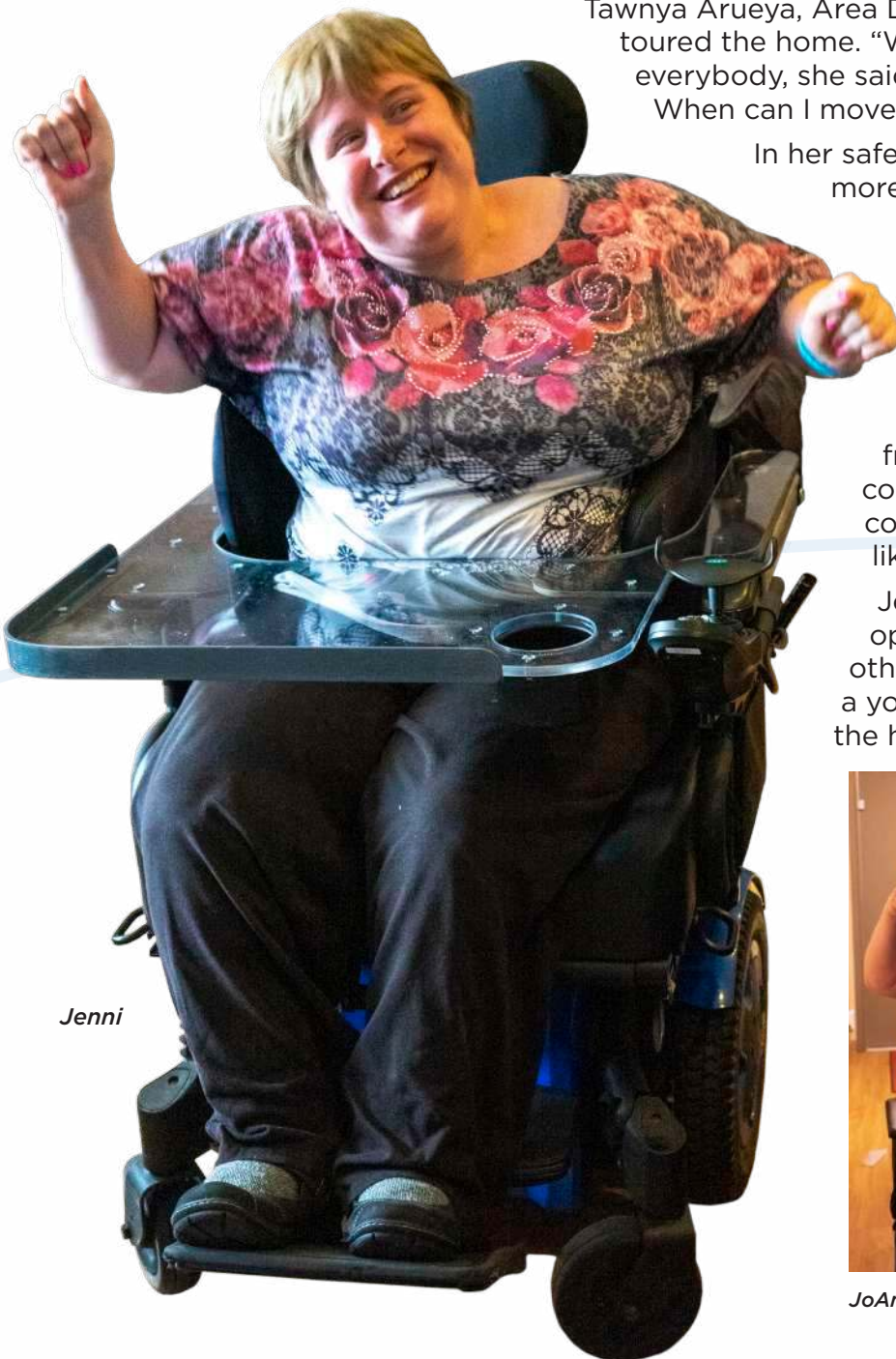
That was Jenni's life—or at least it was before she came to Bethesda. She had lived in group homes with two other providers in Minnesota, but they just weren't the right fit for her. There was a lot of staff turnover. She was often left alone in her room. And the homes didn't have the vehicles needed to take Jenni, who uses a wheelchair, out into the community.

But Jenni thrives on being social, on spending time with friends and family, and being able to help others. And she's not afraid to speak up for what she wants. So when she heard about the Bethesda group home in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, she immediately knew she wanted to check it out.

Tawnya Arueya, Area Director, remembers when Jenni first toured the home. "When she came here and met everybody, she said, 'Yep. This is where I want to move. When can I move in?' She was very excited."

In her safe and loving new home, Jenni has more freedom. She was able to choose her roommate, someone she already knew from her job. She loves her housemates and the staff, often treating them to trips to the movie theater her grandfather owns. When Bethesda needed to buy a new lift to help transfer Jenni from her wheelchair, they had two companies bring devices in so Jenni could try them and pick the one she liked best.

Jenni is also always looking for opportunities to give back and help others feel included. Like with Sammi, a young woman who recently moved into the home.



Jenni



JoAnn helps Jenni get in and out of her chair.

# sense of purpose.

“She just sits with her and talks with her, and that’s what it’s about. Talking to somebody and making them feel included,” says JoAnn, a Direct Support Professional in Jenni’s home.

“I kinda took her under my wing,” Jenni says. “This is her first group home. It feels very good to be able to help her out.”

Watching them together, it’s impossible to miss the special relationship the two of them share. At first, Sammi is reserved, saying very little and observing the world passively through wide blue eyes. But with Jenni’s patience and attentiveness, Sammi transforms into a vibrant, fun-loving woman whose infectious laugh rings throughout the house.

“I try to help as many people as I can,” Jenni says. “My wheelchair’s not going to stop me. Even though I’m in the chair, I don’t use that against my capabilities.”

Tawnya says Jenni loves her home so much, she’s taken to recruiting others to come to the Coon Rapids home.

“She’s referred employees from her former group home,” laughs Tawnya. “And she’s referred individuals to move in here. We’ve met people from the other group home and Jenni tells them, ‘You’re going to like it way better here.’ ”

“I just want others to know about Bethesda,” Jenni says.

“I love it here. I feel more myself here.”

When asked her favorite thing about Bethesda, Jenni’s answer says it all: “Everything,” she says. “My favorite thing about Bethesda is everything.”

*“My favorite thing about Bethesda is everything.”*

– Jenni



*Jenni and Sammi*





# Putting the spotlight on developmental disabilities in March.

Held each March, National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month is a time when we focus attention on the progress made by people with developmental disabilities, as well as the challenges they continue to face in order to build national awareness and support. This year we'll do the same—but at a whole new level.

Thanks to the generous support of Motor Racing Outreach (MRO), Bethesda will bring select people we support to a NASCAR race to kick off the month—the Auto Club 400 in Fontana, California on March 1. For these lucky Bethesda ambassadors, going to a race will be the experience of a lifetime; they'll have opportunities on and off the track and will be featured on social media and by reporters covering the race.

By being MRO's guest at a prominent event that is followed by a huge fan base, Bethesda will have the chance to spread awareness to a much larger audience than ever before. In addition, we will have a presence at concerts and other high-profile events through March, along with dedicated outreach to our congregations and employees.

We invite you to connect with us on our website, BethesdaLC.org, and on social media for information about National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. You can learn all about our ambassadors and how excited they are to be part of the Auto Club 400. Please help us spread the word about the need to include people with disabilities—not only in March but all year long.

***The Auto Club 400 will air at 3:30 p.m. ET (12:30 p.m. PT) Sunday, March 1, on FOX and the Motor Racing Network.***

