

PENNSYLVANIA LIFESHARING CONFERENCE
Presented by the PA Lifesharing Coalition
October 18-20, 2026, The Sheraton Harrisburg Hershey, PA

PRELIMINARY AGENDA

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026

1 – 4 pm: Mental Health First Aid Class-part 1 (pre-registration required)
5 to 7 pm: Arriving Sunday night? Join us for light refreshments, networking
and lots of fun (and prizes!)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2026– BREAKFAST & MORNING PLENARY SESSION

7:30 AM	Registration Open
8:15 AM	Hot Buffet Breakfast Available
9:15 AM	Activity Room Open
9:15 AM	<i>Welcome from PA Lifesharing Coalition</i>
9:30 AM	KEYNOTE SPEAKER: <i>Building Resilience in the Face of Stress: Harnessing Psychological Capital</i> <i>Chris Dubble, CEO, The Pursuit of Discovery</i> <i>In today's demanding work and life environments, stress is unavoidable—but burnout doesn't have to be. This interactive workshop will equip you with evidence-based strategies to strengthen your Psychological Capital, the powerful combination of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism that fuels personal and professional well-being. In this workshop, you will learn how to reframe challenges, sustain motivation, and bounce back stronger from setbacks. Whether facing daily pressures or major life changes, you'll leave with practical tools to build inner resources, improve coping, and be resilient in the face of stress.</i>
10:30 AM	Break and Visit Exhibitors
BREAKOUT SESSIONS	
11:00 AM	<i>Lifesharing 101, Part I</i> <i>Lifesharing Coalition Leadership</i> <i>This session provides a practical framework for building and sustaining high-quality Life Sharing programs. Participants will explore key components including host family recruitment and screening, person-centered matching, program oversight, and the use of substitute care and respite. The content focuses on real-world strategies that balance regulatory compliance with relationship-based support to improve placement stability and host family retention. Participants will be able to:</i> - Develop effective recruitment and screening processes for Life Sharing host families - Apply structured, person-centered matching practices - Implement appropriate oversight and staffing models - Distinguish and operationalize substitute care vs. respite - Use best practices to improve program quality and provider retention
11:00 AM	<i>Compassionate Care for Individuals with ID Experiencing Grief (Part 1)</i> <i>Mary S. Barrett, MSN, BSN, RN</i> <i>This session examines the unique challenges individuals with intellectual disabilities may face when grieving the loss of a family member, friend, or caregiver. Attendees will be introduced to a practical</i>

	<i>training framework designed for families, caregivers, and agency or facility staff to strengthen everyday support for people experiencing grief. The presentation will highlight strategies, tools, and compassionate approaches that can help supporters respond more effectively while building a stronger foundation for grief-informed care.</i>
9:00 AM noon	<i>Mental Health First Aid Class (pre-registration required); part 2, continuation from Sunday</i> <i>Shemiah Cooper and Tamara Brown</i> <i>Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services</i> <i>We think of First Aid as something administered to people in need of physical health intervention. What about people who need immediate assistance for their mental health? The Mental Health First Aid course teaches the skills needed to identify, understand, and respond to signs of behavioral health challenges or crises. Once a certified aider, you will be able to recognize behavioral health signs and administer aid until appropriate treatment and supports are received, or until the crisis is resolved</i>
11:00 AM	<i>Activity Room Open</i>
LUNCH	
12:00 PM 1:15 PM	<i>Lunch and Visit with Exhibitors</i> <i>Excellence in Lifesharing Awards Presented by Becky Kreischer, Awards Program Chair, and Kristin Ahrens, Deputy Secretary, ODP, PA DHS</i>
AFTERNOON PLENARY SESSION 1	
1:15-2:30 PM	<i>ODP Updates</i> <i>Kristin Ahrens, Deputy Secretary, ODP, PA DHS and ODP Staff</i>
BREAKOUT SESSIONS	
2:45 PM	<i>Supported Decision Making – Your life, Your Decisions</i> <i>Supported Decision Making PA Project</i> <i>Every day each of us makes countless decisions about our lives, big and small. These decisions lead to the kinds of lives we live and futures we want to pursue. So what would it mean if you were not allowed to make your own choices, just because you struggled to understand, research, or communicate those choices? Supported Decision Making is a way of making your own choices with the support of a team of your choice – all while retaining your rights to make those decisions. SDM exists as a less restrictive alternative to guardianship, and as a system that can meet the diverse needs of people who want support in their decision making.</i>
2:45 PM	<i>MCC Life Sharing and the Dreaded Age Out</i> <i>Michele Bruce, Medical Coordinator; Cyndi Grimm, Life Sharing Nurse; Jessie Neal-Soska, Life Sharing Coordinator/Specialist; Barbara Dyer, Director of Life Sharing; Citizen Care</i> <i>People with medically complex conditions in Life Sharing homes often rely on intensive nursing supports funded through Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) services until their 21st birthday. When a child ages out of EPSDT, provider organizations must rapidly shift to new models of nursing oversight that ensure continuity of care, regulatory compliance, and ongoing health and safety. Often this comes with fewer guaranteed nursing hours and increased reliance on community-based caregivers. Citizen Care’s Life Sharing team will share how we didn’t know what we didn’t know when the first person in Pennsylvania aged out of EPSDT nursing. Our team will outline our experience with the ODP Needs Exception Allowance process as well as detail the steps we took to manage the learning curve for developing a nursing oversight plan that ensures continuity of care and safety. The session will also address building effective nurse training including competency, emergency preparedness, and monitoring changes in medical acuity. Participants will gain real world guidance on coordinating with home health and temporary nursing agencies, including on boarding expectations, communication standards, coverage planning, and maintaining consistency during staffing shortages. Attendees will leave with tools to build sustainable nursing oversight models in Life Sharing programs.</i>
2:45 PM	<i>Compassionate Care for Individuals with ID Experiencing Grief (Part 2)</i> <i>Mary S. Barrett, MSN, BSN, RN</i> <i>This session examines the unique challenges individuals with intellectual disabilities may face when grieving the loss of a family member, friend, or caregiver. Attendees will be introduced to a practical</i>

	<i>training framework designed for families, caregivers, and agency or facility staff to strengthen everyday support for people experiencing grief. The presentation will highlight strategies, tools, and compassionate approaches that can help supporters respond more effectively while building a stronger foundation for grief-informed care.</i>
2:45 PM	Activity Room Open
	3:45 to 5:00 PM NETWORKING AND VISIT EXHIBITORS
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2026 – MORNING PLENARY SESSION and BREAKOUTS	
7:30 AM – 3:00 PM	Registration Desk Open
8:00 AM – 8:30 AM	Hot Buffet Breakfast
8:30 AM	Activity Room Open
8:30 AM	Welcome, PA Lifesharing Coalition
8:35 AM	KEYNOTE SPEAKER AND FILM: JESS RONNE and “UNSEEN” <i>Unseen follows Jess and Ryan Ronne, a blended family with 8 children, including Lucas, who has profound disabilities requiring total care. Their situation has gotten more and more challenging as Lucas gets older and stronger. With limited resources and support, caregiving takes a toll on their physical and mental health. Following the screening of the film, Jess Ronne will join us to share more of her experiences and answer questions.</i>
10:30 AM	BREAK
10:45 AM	LIFESHARING 101, PART 2 (CONTINUED FROM MONDAY) Lifesharing Coalition Leadership <i>This session provides a practical framework for building and sustaining high-quality Life Sharing programs. Participants will explore key components including host family recruitment and screening, person-centered matching, program oversight, and the use of substitute care and respite. The content focuses on real-world strategies that balance regulatory compliance with relationship-based support to improve placement stability and host family retention. Participants will be able to:</i> - Develop effective recruitment and screening processes for Life Sharing host families - Apply structured, person-centered matching practices - Implement appropriate oversight and staffing models - Distinguish and operationalize substitute care vs. respite - Use best practices to improve program quality and provider retention
10:45 AM	Nothing About Us Without Us: Advocacy in Action Katie Herman, Life Sharing Coordinator, Citizen Care; Peggy Walsh, Life Sharing Coordinator, Citizen Care; Tyler Dayton, Advocate; Sue Dayton, Life Sharer <i>Advocacy is a vital part of the disability experience. Helping people supported, caregivers, and family members find their voice to ensure they achieve an Everyday Life and have access to the good things of life everyone deserves is essential to promoting choice, inclusion, and quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities and autism (IDA). This session emphasizes a shift from “doing for” to “supporting with.” We’ll explore advocacy across a range of contexts, from navigating daily life in a life sharing home (such as expressing preferences, making choices about daily routines, house rules, relationships, medical care, and long-term goals) to how people supported, family members, and caregivers engage with legislators to help shape and improve the service system. Participants will leave with practical tips and a list of resources to begin their advocacy journey or strengthen their ongoing advocacy efforts. The presenters bring a blend of</i>

	<i>professional expertise in the IDA field and lived experience as advocates and/or family members. Together, they share a strong commitment to advancing self-determination and fostering inclusive communities.</i>
10:45 AM	Empowerment through Employment: Enhancing Lifesharing Journeys Francine Hogan, Director, PA Family Network <i>This presentation explores how meaningful employment opportunities can enrich the lives of individuals with disabilities living in Lifesharing arrangements. We'll highlight the personal growth, community inclusion, and sense of purpose that employment fosters, creating a stronger foundation for a fulfilling life. This session will:</i> <i>1) Clarify the services and pathways offered by ODP and OVR to support individuals in Lifesharing to achieve employment goals.</i> <i>2) Equip Lifesharing families and providers with practical knowledge on accessing ODP/OVR employment supports.</i> <i>3) Deepen the audience's understanding of how employment, within Pennsylvania's disability support systems, fosters inclusion, purpose, and quality of life in Lifesharing.</i>
10:45 AM	Activity Room Open
12:00 – 1:00 PM: LUNCH AND VISIT EXHIBITORS (exhibitors depart at 1 pm)	
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2026 – AFTERNOON CONCURRENT BREAKOUTS	
1:00 PM	Tools For Your Toolbox: Bridging the Gap Between the Autism Community and Law Enforcement/First Responders Cheryl Stehle (CEO/trainer) / Jamiel Owens (trainer) Autism Toolbox Training <i>AuTT has a goal – to bridge the gap between the autism community and members of the law enforcement and first responders' communities throughout Pennsylvania. Through simple, straightforward, logic-based training, AuTT focuses on basic information sharing, open communication and collaboration. AuTT strives to ensure that the same message and goals are being shared by everyone, increasing the likelihood of positive interactions whenever possible. When training community members, AuTT emphasizes practical strategies for communication, ensuring that individuals and their family members and caregivers are prepared for situations where they may need to engage with police, firefighters, EMTs, or other first responders. We cover topics such as understanding common law enforcement protocols, practicing self-advocacy techniques, and recognizing potential sensory overload triggers that may affect an individual's response to emergency situations.</i> <i>The presentation, titled "Tools for your Toolbox – Bridging the Gap Between the Autism Community and Law Enforcement/First Responders," has three sections.</i> <i>•An overview of what is taught to law enforcement and first responders about autism.</i> <i>•A closer look at law enforcement and first responder training and how specific protocols can affect members of the autism community.</i> <i>•Suggestions about how a member of the autism community can fill their toolbox and prepare for any interaction.</i>
1:00 PM	MCC Lifesharing: Operational Challenges and Real-World Solutions MCC Lifesharing Task Force <i>This session focuses on how agencies are operationalizing MCC Lifesharing programs in real-world conditions, with an emphasis on provider and agency perspectives. Key topics include eligibility and registration processes, day-to-day program operations, program structure, regulatory expectations, and funding challenges, particularly as individuals transition into adulthood.</i> <i>The session will be delivered in a panel format featuring experienced providers who will share how they are solving these challenges in practice, where approaches are succeeding or falling short, and the tradeoffs being made to maintain stability and quality. Participants will gain practical insights and strategies that can be applied across different program models.</i>

1:00 PM	TOPIC AND SESSION DESCRIPTION COMING SOON Katie-Marie Wilson, ODP
1:00 PM	Activity Room Open
2:00 PM	Break
2:15 PM	Empowering Independence: Transforming Lives with Remote Support Through Person-Centered Technology and Agency Perspectives Heather Lewis, Coordinator of Technology Services, Mainstay Life Services <i>The growing demand for accessible and inclusive support has driven innovative providers to leverage technology to better serve people with disabilities. This session will showcase the journey of Mainstay Life Services, as they embraced remote support technologies to empower the people they support, enhance care delivery, and foster independence. Through real-world examples, this session will explore the challenges, solutions, and outcomes of implementing technologies. Attendees will learn how these advancements have transformed the lives of people supported and redefined the way support services are delivered.</i>
2:15 PM	Life Sharing Through an SRV Lens: Its Promise, Power, and Vulnerabilities Barbara Dyer, Director of Life Sharing <i>Life Sharing is a relationship-based way of supporting people with disabilities through shared daily life. Instead of rotating staff and shifts, Life Sharing is about people living together, supporting one another, and being part of family and community life. When done well, it helps people live ordinary lives, build meaningful relationships, and stay connected to their communities.</i> <i>This session looks at Life Sharing through a Social Role Valorization (SRV) lens. We'll explore what makes Life Sharing strong and meaningful, enhancing the image and competency of people supported. We'll also look at risks, such as over-dependence, caregiver burnout, or compatibility challenges as needs change. Participants will learn what safeguards are needed to protect people supported, families, and the integrity of the model.</i>
2:15 PM	Building Better Bridges Icylee L. Basketbill, B.S., Founder, Guided Pathways to Empowerment <i>All families need help sometimes—yet reaching out for support can feel vulnerable or uncomfortable. Often, the strongest pathway to support begins not with a service, but with connection. This session explores how strong relationships and healthy support systems create the foundation for accessing concrete support. This interactive presentation highlights the connection between social relationships, trust-building, resilience, and resource access. Participants will examine why social connections are essential protective factors for individuals and families and will be introduced to the Seven keystones of Support, a practical framework for identifying the different types of relationships needed for a balanced and supportive network. Through guided discussion, real-life examples, and reflective activities, attendees will gain strategies to help families strengthen relationships, expand support systems, and increase access to practical resources such as food, housing, transportation, healthcare, and financial assistance. Participants will leave with actionable tools they can apply in both personal and professional settings to foster connection and strengthen pathways to support.</i>
2:15 PM	Activity Room Open
3:15 PM – 3:30 PM	Gift Baskets Drawings and SPECIAL PRIZE DRAWING!! (must be present to win) Adjourn—Safe Travels Back Home!