

# Sharing the love of family

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The Calkins family

Submitted Photo

Lifesharing is recognized as being both a close personal relationship and a place to live. It offers an individual with a disability the opportunity to live with a family or individual who will support his/her desires and needs for an everyday life.

Individuals supported in lifesharing include children and adults with a wide variety of needs and challenges. Lifesharing enhances and enriches the lives of individuals by offering another residential living option other than a traditional Community Living Home.

The Bradford/Sullivan Intellectual Disabilities Program currently supports 27 individuals in the lifesharing program. Below is the story of one individual who is thriving with her local lifesharing family.

BY TEASHIA CALKINS

## For The Review

I started working for Martha Lloyd Community Services in 2009. Before coming to Martha Lloyd I had never heard of lifesharing before and didn't really know what it was. I started as an administrative assistant and then moved on to a residential manager. One day I happened to see a job posting for a lifesharing program specialist within the organization. I inquired more about the job, what it was, and after submitting my resume and going through the interview process, I was hired. It was very eye opening to see that members of our local community have opened their homes to individuals with disabilities who are longing for a family-like atmosphere. I was overjoyed to see individuals with disabilities employed in the community, attending different activities and really thriving in the lifesharing environments that they were in. I was happy to have a job overseeing the care of these individuals and really see all the progress that they were making, and continue to make, along the way.

During the summer of 2014, I was doing respite for a woman named Beverly who wanted to be a part of a lifesharing family. After a couple of weeks of discussion with my family, and her asking if she could just live with us, we were pretty sure we wanted to give it a try. I was expecting my second child any day so I knew we couldn't make the full transition right then and there. We continued to do weekday visits for dinner and weekend visits for typical family activities. It just seemed like it was a perfect fit.

After our second daughter was born in August we took a couple of weeks to transition to a family of four and continued our visits with Beverly. By October we were ready to make it official and she soon joined our family, making us a party of five! My daughters think of her as a family member; they have grown up having Beverly as part of our family and they've never questioned her being there. Our extended family and our friends include her in everything.

My oldest daughter and Beverly bond over playing card games, coloring and Beverly loves to attend her sporting events. The “baby” as Beverly calls her is often found snuggled up to Beverly watching one of their favorite movies, “Lassie.” She loves spoiling them but also knows when to tell them to, “Stop fighting and behave!”

Our relationship with Beverly is wonderful. The bonus of being a lifesharing provider is that you get paid to enhance someone’s life. There are regulations that must be followed; you are responsible for taking the individuals and picking them up from different activities and jobs if they have one. You are also responsible for taking those in lifesharing to any and all medical appointments, completing documentation and making sure the outcomes they want for themselves are being implemented so that they are living the most independent life as possible. It can feel overwhelming at times, but it’s most definitely worth it!

Beverly loves to be included and loved. It’s nice to know that not only did we want her to become part of our family; she chooses to be a part of ours as well.”

For more information please contact the Bradford/Sullivan Intellectual Disabilities Program at (570) 265-1760, Futures at (570) 265-3800 or Martha Lloyd Community Services at (570) 297-2185.