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LifePath
options for independence

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THE GOOD LIFE

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New Graduates "SHINE" a Light on Medicare

By Janis Merrell, Editor of *The Good Life*



Janis Merrell

On June 21, six out of the eight new SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone) graduates received their certificates and celebrated at LifePath's office in Greenfield (graduates Ken Heider and Lucas Schlidbach were unable to attend). As newly-certified SHINE counselors, they will work in their own communities to provide free and unbiased health insurance information, education, and assistance services to Medicare beneficiaries and adults with disabilities.

Lorraine York-Edberg, SHINE Regional Program Director, conducted the intensive 60-hour training and presented graduates with their certificates and roses. She said the 2024 graduates were a "wonderful group to go through this training with."

Kathleen Gouveia, SHINE Training Coordinator at the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, also attended the celebration. She said, "Medicare can be very confusing and complex and having someone who can explain it to you is so important." She took the training a few years ago and remembered the beginning as being "scary and overwhelming," commending the graduates for their strong showing on the final exam.

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SHINE graduate Beverly MacLeod will be volunteering for SHINE at the Orange Senior Center. She first found out about the opportunity through the Greenfield Recorder and thought it would be perfect timing to take the training. She explained, "Orange is a community where a lot of people are struggling. I want to contribute to help people get the information they need and make it easier for them."

Janice Barnes has been a part of the Colrain Council on Aging for 14 years, and has seen the confusion on people's faces when trying to understand Medicare. As a new SHINE volunteer serving Colrain and surrounding hilltowns, she "hopes to help people understand they have choices and not give up."

When SHINE graduate Caroline Solan's father died of pancreatitis, it made her rethink her life and want to give back. "If you can improve the quality of someone's life, that feels really good," said Caroline, who will be volunteering at Highland Valley Elder Services.

Lauren Hannigan said she is already doing the work in her position as Outreach and Transportation Coordinator at the Hadley Senior Center. "I wanted to expand my knowledge," she explained.

Two of this year's SHINE graduates are LifePath employees. Karlena Henry has been an Information and Caregiver Resource Center (ICRC) Resource Consultant at LifePath since October of 2021. She said, "I wanted to take SHINE Training because no one currently in ICRC was trained, and as ICRC often gets questions from other staff and the public, having someone accessible is important for our work. On a personal note, Medicare has always been a mystery to me, and the opportunity to master something complicated and important appealed to me."



L to R: Kathleen Gouveia, EOA SHINE Training Coordinator; Lorraine York-Edberg, SHINE Regional Program Director; Caroline Solan, SHINE Graduate; Kyra DeCarlo, SHINE Graduate & LifePath Senior Program Assistant for SHINE/Quality Assurance; Karlena Henry, SHINE Graduate & LifePath Information and Caregiver Resource Center (ICRC) Resource Consultant; Beverly MacLeod, SHINE Graduate; Lauren Hannigan, SHINE Graduate; Janice Barnes, SHINE Graduate; Gary Yuhas, LifePath Executive Director; and Susan White, LifePath Associate Director of Volunteer Resources.

Kyra DeCarlo has been working at LifePath as the Senior Program Assistant for SHINE/Quality Assurance for about a year and a half. Along with being a new SHINE graduate, she was also instrumental in planning the celebration. "Many times I am the first contact for consumers reaching out to the SHINE program. I wanted to take the SHINE

counselor training to be more knowledgeable about Medicare to be able to ask informed questions when taking information from a consumer for the counselor they will meet. The more information a counselor has prior to the appointment the

better they can prepare. It helps for me to know the Medicare process and options to be able to give a general overview to those on the phone, to set their expectations for their meeting with the counselor," said Kyra.

Kyra went on to explain, "One of the many joys of my job is hearing the relief in a consumer's voice after I speak with them and set them up for an appointment, knowing a local SHINE counselor can talk with them about their questions or issues. Those especially with issues and they don't know where to turn to get assistance are so relieved and thankful to have someone local available to assist them. Many consumers are also shocked to find out that most of our counselors are volunteers or do SHINE counseling as an addition to their current roles at a Council on Aging, senior center, or medical center. They are amazed at the level of service and knowledge our counselors provide for FREE!"

Susan White, MPH, MPA, Lic. CHW, Associate Director of Volunteer Resources at LifePath, also attended the celebration, stating how SHINE counselors provide fear alleviation. "Fear blocks out hope and insurance is terrifying. We all stand on the strong shoulders of Lorraine and Kyra," she said, welcoming the graduates to LifePath's volunteer corps of 250 individuals.

LifePath's Executive Director, Gary Yuhas, MBA, congratulated the SHINE graduates, saying, "So many people in America are one significant illness away from ruin. You are helping people survive and thrive. It's not just the person in front of you, it's the family and caregivers."

If you have questions about Medicare options, you can consult with SHINE counselors over the phone or in person at some senior centers and other locations. To reach a trained and certified counselor in your area, contact the Regional Office at 1-800-498-4232 or 413-773-5555 or contact your local Council on Aging. If you're interested in becoming a SHINE counselor, contact Lorraine York-Edberg, Western Massachusetts Regional Director of the SHINE Program, via email at lyork-edberg@lifepathma.org or call 413-773-5555 x2275 or 978-544-2259 x2275.



SHINE graduates enjoyed lunch and this beautiful cake from Franklin Community Co-op.