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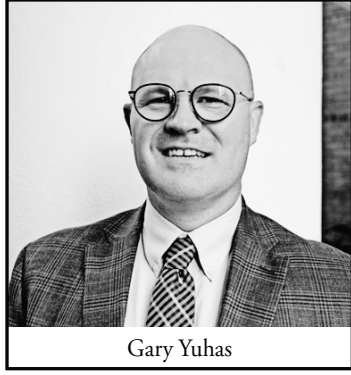
options for independence

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THE GOOD LIFE

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At the 50 Year Mark, a Challenging Path Ahead

By Gary Yuhas, MBA, Executive Director

Gary Yuhas

It's an interesting time at LifePath. We are reflecting on our first fifty years as an agency. We are excitedly planning for upcoming events, such as our fiftieth anniversary

celebration, activities to thank our volunteers, and our annual team appreciation event. This all happens in the midst of our everyday work, with everyone contributing to touch the lives of more than 10,000 individuals each year.

The joy and excitement of looking forward to these events is welcome, and helps to temper the increasing undercurrent of challenges facing our agency and others like us across the country. Despite this positivity, we find ourselves in the midst of very challenging times. Because of financial constraints, and as a way to control costs, the state has implemented caps on the number of consumers we can serve in some of our home care programs, while being clear that further reductions are coming. We will soon be creating

wait lists for some programs; programs that allow for individuals to safely remain in their homes while reducing the need for more costly hospitalizations and placement in long-term care facilities.

State budget challenges were bubbling up well before the new, additional threats presented by the current federal administration. So what IS happening at the federal level? We don't actually know. Keeping up with the non-stop onslaught of "efficiency measures" is a full-time job. While announcements keep coming, useful communication, guidance, and clarity are all minimal at best. We are told that our federally-funded programs are funded until September of 2025, but with no increase in funds. Given the increased needs of a rapidly aging population, we know already that flat funding will result in us reducing our services, as we face inflationary pressures just like all of you.

Another concern is that the Older Americans Act, which funds all of our federal programming, has not been reauthorized. This Act, which has historically had bipartisan support through many federal administrations, was on track to be passed at the end of last year, but was completely derailed following the election. There are no indications that it will move forward through the current federal chaos and dysfunction. If that funding doesn't come through in some other way, we will be forced to make difficult choices for a number of programs, including Meals on Wheels.

At a recent team meeting, I shared that the federal administration has proposed a number of changes that I would place on a scale between "problematic but manageable" to "catastrophic." We are choosing to not spend time and energy on speculation, and instead focus on our

important work. But it is clear that Medicaid cuts are a focus of the new administration, and merit immediate concern far beyond speculation. Any cuts to Medicaid will be catastrophic.

Medicaid funding brings significant money to the state. That money is used to fund programming for older adults, those living with disabilities, children, pregnant women, and others. At LifePath, Medicaid funding supports Home Care, Personal Care Attendant, and Adult Family Care programs, among others. Individuals who receive support via Medicaid often do not even realize it. In Massachusetts, Medicaid is called MassHealth. If you have coverage through MassHealth, a Senior Care Options plan, or a One Care plan, you are on Medicaid. And you should be aware and vigilant about any changes to Medicaid and how they can impact you.

At LifePath, we have been planning for a variety of scenarios well before the last election. We have been taking a critical look at what services we provide, while looking for ways to be more efficient and more effective. Even so, we already know that some of the programs we have today will not exist in the future. As a nonprofit organization, we have accountability to those we serve, our communities, our partners, our LifePath team, and other stakeholders. I know that disappointment will touch all of us at some point.

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Calls are coming more frequently than ever from folks needing more services. We hear you; we KNOW you need more services. The sad fact of the matter is that we are not equipped to help everyone, and we can't provide for all of

anyone's needs. Our network was not designed and was never intended to be a sole means of support. We are but one of many supportive services and organizations in our community.

As increasingly difficult times descend upon us, I know that this community will do its absolute best to collaboratively weather these challenges. The reality is that no single organization is going to meet all present needs. Another reality is that all organizations working and striving together still aren't going to meet all present needs. And, future needs . . . it's a worry we all share.

People often ask us what they can do to help. There are several ways. Financial support is always appreciated. Or, consider being a doer, and join our volunteer corps. We have many engaging, enriching volunteer opportunities available.

Another way to help right now is legislative advocacy. Mass Aging Access is our partner organization that supports LifePath and the other Aging Service Access Points across Massachusetts. Please consider visiting their site at www.agingaccess.org. Clicking the orange "Take Action" button at the top will take you to a page where you can see all of our legislative priorities. I encourage you to advocate for what you feel is important for you, those you care about, and the community you live in.

Your support is more important than ever. LifePath has been providing essential, community-based services for fifty years, and we plan to be here for fifty more. We have navigated adversity in the past, and we will do so again, with your help.