I have worked in public service for the low-income population in Lake County for the past 13 years, and am currently the Board President at Lifeline for the second year. I have served on the Board of Directors since 2012.

Community Action in Lake County is 45 years old! Lifeline, Inc. began proudly serving Lake County residents in 1973. Since then, Lifeline has helped thousands of residents with health services, housing, energy, and consumer education programs.

This year alone, Lifeline assisted over 2,500 households, including nearly 6,000 individuals.

This included the home energy assistance programs (winter and summer crisis), tax returns prepared through our Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Clinics, assistance with housing/rent, services, our employment and training programs, and help from our health services programs with prescriptions and diabetic supplies. Also, our 2-1-1 program took over 35,000 incoming calls requesting referrals for services in 2017. We’ve had a very busy year!

In 2017 and 2018 we launched two new programs: The IDA (Individual Development Account) Program and the Lake County Volunteer Guardian Program.

The IDA program is designed to teach low-income residents financial literacy skills, help them learn and adopt a behavior of savings and long-term planning, and begin actively saving towards an asset. We’re excited to partner with the Ohio Community Development Corporation on this exciting self-sufficiency program.

The second program is a partnership between Lifeline, the Lake County Probate Court, Lake ADAMHS Board, and the Lake County Commissioners, and will oversee volunteer guardians for Lake County’s vulnerable population. This is just getting up and running, and we are excited to see the impact it has in serving our community in a much-needed area.

We had our most profitable Dancing Under the Stars event in August. The 10th annual event raised approximately $75,000, and Lifeline was the beneficiary of half of those funds raised. We had record breaking attendance and profit!

In addition, our endowment with the Cleveland Foundation (the Lifeline Endowment Against Poverty) continues to grow and allows us to plan for our future.

As we begin our 2018-19 Annual Campaign, we thank you for your past donations and hope you will join us in our efforts of fighting poverty in Lake County.

~ Anne Curwen,
Lifeline Board President

What’s Inside

p. 2 Lifeline Supportive Housing Program Success Story
p. 4 Dancing Under the Stars 2018 recap
p. 6 Lifeline presents awards at 2018 Annual Dinner
P. 12 Lifeline Reentry Program a Strong Partnership
p. 14 Lifeline prepares for HEAP Winter Crisis Program
Lifeline’s Supportive Housing Program Helps Local Resident to Achieve Goals

by: Angela Wrana
Program Coordinator

In the summer of 2017, Sophia was 21 years old and a single mother to her two week old daughter. She had recently been employed at Dunkin Donuts and was struggling to get back on her feet and be able to provide for her daughter.

Sophia was also enrolled at Lakeland Community College full time hoping to pursue a career in radiology.

She had learned about the Supportive Housing Program at Lifeline from a friend who was also a single mother and working hard to make ends meet.

“My friend told me how helpful the program had been to her and she knew that I truly wanted to be successful for my newborn daughter and myself,” said Sophia.

The Supportive Housing Program provides both rental assistance and case management support to Lake County adults who are enrolled in an accredited educational institution.

Sophia met with Lifeline Program Coordinator Angela Wrana to apply for the program and was immediately enrolled.

“After meeting with Sophia and discussing both her personal and educational goals, I could tell how dedicated she was to providing a good life for her daughter,” said Angela.

With the financial assistance and case management support from the Supportive Housing Program, Sophia was able to rent a two bedroom apartment and provide a safe home for her and her baby. She has also been able to focus on school and has begun to establish a career for herself.

“Prior to the program, I felt totally lost and so behind that I wasn’t sure how I was ever going to get ahead,” said Sophia.

“I always had a vision of myself being an amazing mother to my daughter and creating a good successful life for us. I was so motivated but I did not know how that was going to unfold since I could barely pay my bills.”

Sophia has worked closely with Angela for case management services.
“Having the regular meetings with Angela are very important to me because we go over my goals and come up with solutions to any problems that I may be facing. We also complete budget worksheets for each month so that I can visually see my income and expenses so that I am aware of my spending habits,” said Sophia.

In addition to her meetings with Angela, Sophia has also completed Financial Literacy courses at Lifeline that provide additional education on credit repair and saving.

In the past year, Sophia has made great strides both academically and professionally. Sophia has decided to change her major from Radiology to Business and HR Management.

She is also employed full time and is being trained for a management position with American Family Insurance. Her daughter is also thriving and has just learned how to walk!

“Having the regular meetings with Angela are very important to me because we go over my goals and come up with solutions to any problems that I may be facing. We also complete budget worksheets for each month so that I can visually see my income and expenses so that I am aware of my spending habits,” said Sophia.

In addition to her meetings with Angela, Sophia has also completed Financial Literacy courses at Lifeline that provide additional education on credit repair and saving.

In the past year, Sophia has made great strides both academically and professionally. Sophia has decided to change her major from Radiology to Business and HR Management.

She is also employed full time and is being trained for a management position with American Family Insurance. Her daughter is also thriving and has just learned how to walk!

“I am truly impressed with all of the progress that Sophia has made in this program,” said Angela.

“She has achieved not only the educational goals that she had set for herself, but also her personal goals. She should be proud of her amazing accomplishments.”

Sophia will be completing the Supportive Housing Program in December. She plans to continue to excel at her current place of employment and utilize the financial and educational skills that she has learned from Lifeline.

“Since participating in the program, I feel that I am a lot more organized as an individual in both my work and personal life, more responsible with my spending and saving, and have more confidence in myself to provide a successful life for my daughter and I,” said Sophia.

“The employees at Lifeline have been so caring, understanding and helpful to me along the way.”

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**Call 2-1-1 Your Lifeline for Health and Human Services**

2-1-1 is a free hotline that connects people to social, health, and government services. If you need confidential help with housing, food, utility assistance, transportation, or employment, you can call 24 hours a day and talk to a real person. 2-1-1 has information on over 2,000 agencies and trained staff to help you find the services you need.

2-1-1 is a service of Lifeline, Inc.

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Call 2-1-1 for Health & Human Services
Referrals for Health & Human Services
www.211lifeline.org

Remember to call 2-1-1 for Health & Human Services when not an emergency.
Dancing Under the Stars, adapted from the popular television show, returned on Friday, Aug. 3 at LaMalva Party Center to an audience of over 500—our largest crowd ever in our 10-year history! This year featured 13 area community and corporate leaders paired with local dance instructors to entertain attendees and raise nearly $75,000 for Lifeline, Inc. and the Family Planning Association of Northeast Ohio/A Division of Signature Health.

Two-time celebrity and 2014 All Stars Peoples’ Choice winner Libby Hill served as honorary chair for the evening, kicking off the evening with inspiring remarks.

Then the competition began. Those competing for the Judges’ Choice and Peoples’ Choice awards included: Ryan Callender, a partner at Squire, Patton & Boggs LLP; Paul Catalano, Mortgage Loan Specialist at Home Savings Bank; Anthony Dibacco, insurance agent at Diversified Insurance Concepts; Lynda Frate, co-owner of Pub Frato; Julie Jancz-Gidlek, psychologist and adjunct professor; Scott J. Marn, Vice President of Investments at Benjamin F. Edwards & Co. and Mentor City Councilman; Stephanie Meacham, Commercial Claims Specialist at Progressive Corp. and WRJSL member; Miguel & Tanisha Solivan, Miguel a Gulf War Veteran and Global Product Manager at Avery Dennison and Tanisha, Director of Inside Sales for Meritec; Steve Trivisonno, Mentor High School Head Football Coach; Sarah Wade, Process Development Engineer at the Lubrizol Corporation; Kristina Willey, Director of the Holden University Center and Offsite Facilities at Lakeland Community College and Lakeland East; and Cookie Wilson, Front Desk Manager at Ladies & Gentlemen Salon & Spa.

Helping to prepare the celebrity dancers were professional dancers: Ethan Konig, Shari Smith and Shannon Taylor of the Fred Astaire Studio in Chagrin Falls; Aleksei Minanov from the Fred Astaire Studio in Willoughby; Hannah Elizabeth Green of Rabbit Run Community Arts; Darlene Kelbach from the Fine Arts Association; Ant Wilson of Viva Dance; and private dance instructors Maggie Runyon, Dan Nichols, John Thompson and Bobby Ford.

Dr. Jessie Baginski, CEO of Leadership Lake County, served as our masters of ceremonies, while Lake County Judge Eugene Lucci, pro dancer Heather Felden and previous celebrities Nicole Parker and Maurice Coffee served as judges. Parker was the Judges ‘Choice Award winner at our 2017 event and Felden is a four-time Judges’ Choice winner as the professional.

The dancers competed to win a Peoples’ Choice award by garnering “votes” in the form of contributions from supporters. These “votes” were given directly to dancers prior to the event, submitted through the web, and placed in voting boxes the night of the event.

The Peoples’ Choice Award was presented to Tanisha & Miguel Solivan for raising $12,184. The Star of the Night Award, was presented to Lynda Frate and her partner, Ethan Konig, for receiving the loudest crowd reaction.

The Judges’ Choice award was a tie this year and was given to both celebrities, Kristina Willey for her salsa number to the “Time of Your
Life Remix-2009” and to Anthony DiBacco for his Charleston to a Great Gatsby Remix. Willey was paired with pro Ethan Konig from Fred Astaire Chagrin Falls. DiBacco was paired with pro Maggie Runyon.

“For the past seven years, I have had the privilege of assisting people achieve their dreams by furthering their education in Lake County. Lifeline and the Family Planning Association of Northeast Ohio, Inc. provide the support so many of our residents need in order to reach those goals, that is why I was so privileged when asked to participate in this years Celebrity Cast,” said Judges’ Choice winner Kristina Willey.

“Fundraising activities leading up to the event were absolutely amazing! I was so honored to serve as a champion for these two tremendous organizations that impact the lives of so many throughout Lake County and Northeast Ohio. My experience would not have been as fulfilling without the overwhelming support of the community, dear friends, supportive family, and my professional, Ethan Konig.”

Peoples’ Choice winner Tanisha Solivan agreed that it was a good time for a good cause.

When asked if we would be willing to participate in “DUTS, it was always that we would do it! A big fat “YES!” We wanted to help! We’ve grown up in Painesville and not only have we experienced our own personal struggles, but we continue to see the needs of the community,” said Solivan.

“The largest obstacle was figuring out how we would get the job done! It wasn’t about us and we really wanted to make a difference! We wanted our city to be proud! Thanks to the support of our coworkers, family, friends, and the community, we were able to make it happen! We did it as a team and find great joy in knowing that Lake County families will benefit.”

We’re fortunate to have such committed pro dancers involved with our event each year. Pro Maggie Runyon has danced each year since 2012.

“I love Dancing Under the Stars! It’s such a great event for two wonderful organizations,” said Runyon. “It’s also a great chance to get people out of their comfort zones and onto the dance floor. I just love, love, love this event and I’m already looking forward to next year!”

The 2018 Dancing Under the Stars event was chaired by long-time supporter, Dione DeMitro, Executive Director of the Nonprofit & Public Service Center at Lakeland Community College, who led the event to its biggest year yet.

“This year was special because it was our 10th anniversary event,” said Lifeline Executive Director Carrie Dotson.

“But it was also extra special because our amazing chair, Dione DeMitro, led us to such a record-breaking night—our biggest crowd ever, the most funds ever raised by a celebrity cast, our highest grossing event ever. It was truly awe-inspiring.”

We hope everyone will join us next year for the 11th Annual Dancing Under the Stars, to be held Friday, August 2, 2019 at LaMalfa Party Center.
Ed joined the Lifeline Board of Directors in May 2012, appointed by St. Mary’s Church in Painesville where he served as president of the St. Vincent DePaul Society. Ed has been an extraordinarily active Board member, quietly assisting in whatever projects needed. Ed has long provided leadership on the Board Programs & Planning Committee and served as the Board Treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee for two terms, in 2016 and 2017.

“Ed has also been instrumental in his support of Lifeline’s missions and in moving our agency forward. In 2015, Ed travelled to Columbus for the two-day training on the national Pathways to Excellence quality assurance program and assisted Lifeline staff in beginning the process. As a part of the self-review process, Ed met monthly with Lifeline staff to evaluate the current strengths and weaknesses of the agency operations.

Ed was also instrumental last summer in helping to educate our community on 2-1-1 and its importance in the community and in helping Lifeline build relationships with the new Commissioners.

“Ed has been an extraordinarily active Board member, quietly assisting in whatever projects needed. Ed has long provided leadership on the Board Programs & Planning Committee and served as the Board Treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee for two terms, in 2016 and 2017.

The Outstanding Community Spirit Award was given to Larry & Lori Weisman of Sheraton Furniture in downtown Willoughby for their commitment to Lifeline’s mission and the clients that we serve, as well as their support of the community. The Community Spirit Award is bestowed upon a local business or organization who displays outstanding dedication and service to improving the quality of life for Lake County’s low-income families.

When Lori and Larry Weisman of Sheraton Furniture in Willoughby heard about individuals in their community struggling in their return to Lake County and successfully achieve their goals, they wanted to make a positive impact. Bri Moon, Lifeline’s Reentry Coordinator, explained Lake County’s Reentry Program and the movement to assist those formally incarcerated with employment, housing, behavioral health/addiction services and other barriers to successful reentry.

“Ed also steps up to help with the day to day activities of the Board,” said Dotson. “Every year during the HEAP Customer Appreciation Week, Ed volunteers to be here bright and early on multiple days to help with pre-screening the clients—this is a huge help to our staff, as well as a service to our clients. On the fundraising end, Ed consistently has the highest percentage of contacts giving because he works at it.”

“Both his volunteerism and his actions make Ed an incredibly valuable Board member, and one we will be sad to see go when his term expires in December,” said Dotson.

In addition to the projects and leadership Ed has provided our Board over the years, Ed also steps up to help with the day to day activities of the Board,” said Dotson. “Every year during the HEAP Customer Appreciation Week, Ed volunteers to be here bright and early on multiple days to help with pre-screening the clients—this is a huge help to our staff, as well as a service to our clients. On the fundraising end, Ed consistently has the highest percentage of contacts giving because he works at it.”
In 2017, nine individuals were assisted with beds and/or couches for their homes. Prior to receiving these items, individuals were sleeping on blankets in their empty apartment and sitting on the floor. With the generosity of Sheraton Furniture, clients were able to have warm beds to sleep in and a couch in their living space. The company even offered free delivery for the clients. Obtaining an apartment is a significant achievement for the clients and have the opportunity to make it a “home” adds to the community desire for them to become successful Lake County residents; the opportunity to put down roots.

“Sheraton Furniture is a wonderful presence in our community and has gone above and beyond when it comes to helping their fellow neighbors. They made the individuals feel like a priority by assisting them with affordable, fine quality furniture,” Moon shares.

“This new partnership with Sheraton Furniture creates a new opportunity to develop collaborations that benefit the community and clients.”

The Outstanding Community Partnership Award was presented jointly to Father Chris Zerucha of St. Mary’s Church in Painesville, Bob Cahen of the Lakeland Foundation and Lakeland Professor Dr. Alice Walker and her students for their collaboration on raising local matching funds for Lifeline’s new IDA Program. The Outstanding Community Partnership Award recognizes a program or collaboration that shows both innovation and results in helping low-income families achieve self-sufficiency.

When Lifeline decided to move forward in development of an IDA Program at Lifeline, the staff knew that the first big hurdle would be raising our local match. We knew it was going to be more of a grassroots fundraising effort for the pilot project. We had no idea that we would get such amazing support from our local friends and partners. Father Chris Zerucha was the first to jump on board and get behind the project and last spring began selling the program and its benefits to potential donors. Over the course of the summer, Father Chris brought six individual donations in, as well as convincing two local businesses to support the program through fundraising events, totaling nearly $6,000.

Rarely have we found a community member as passionate about a program and its potential impact and actively supporting it, as Father Chris has been about the IDA Program.

In August, Lifeline was approached by Lakeland professor Dr. Alice Walker and Executive Director of the Lakeland Foundation, Bob Cahen, about working with a social work class who was learning about motivational interviewing and fundraising as a collegiate chapter of the AFP. They needed a project to focus on for the semester and, after reviewing several of Lifeline’s programs, chose the IDA Program.

Under Bob and Alice’s guidance, the class researched IDA Programs—the impacts, the challenges and the logistics, and put together sales pitches. In December, the class made their sales pitches for the IDA Program to actual Lakeland Foundation donors, several in turn that made contributions to the IDA Program.

In total, including a matching contribution from the Lifeline Board, nearly $15,000 was raised in 2017 as our local match to the Ohio CDC funding. Because of the tenacity and support of these partners, our IDA Program is launched and we’re ready to help our customers make lasting financial impact on their lives.

The Outstanding Achievement Award was given to two Lifeline program participants, Sabrina Falls and Kelly Broadwater, to recognize their significant progress in achieving self-sufficiency.

Sabrina Falls began her journey to self-sufficiency by enrolling in the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP) in December of 2016. Battling temptations from her previous drug addiction and finding a balance between her goals and being a single mother of two was difficult for Sabrina, but she knew that she wanted to make a change. Her goals included obtaining her GED, finding housing that was a safe environment for her and her two children, and concentrating on staying sober.

Through dedication and perseverance, Sabrina found housing at Neveah Ridge, working with case managers and completing outpatient services at Lake Geauga Recovery Center. Throughout her stay she attended high school equivalency courses and completed her GED in June of 2017. Before Sabrina finished her time at Neveah Ridge, she diligently searched for safe and affordable housing that would benefit her and her children after her time at Neveah Ridge was over.

In August of 2017, the participant achieved her goal of finding housing. She signed her first lease agreement, as an adult, with New Directions for Living. She went on to successfully complete her Aftercare Group at Lake Geauga Recovery Center in December of 2017 and enrolled at Lakeland Community College the following month.
Continued from Page 7

Today, Sabrina is learning to sustain her success and continue her growth to achieving self-sufficiency. She is comfortably living at New Directions with her two children and working closely with the case manager on site, as well as through CCMEP. She currently attends Lakeland Community College part-time to explore career opportunities and complete brush up courses in English and Algebra. In her spare time, Sabrina attends substance abuse and support groups alongside individuals who have shared the struggles that she had endured.

“Sabrina’s success can be attributed to her commitment to the CCMEP Program. She attended all of her appointments with the paperwork she needed. I could see she was committed to creating a better life for herself and her children. I have no doubts she will do that,” said Breanna Horton, Lifeline’s former CCMEP Coordinator.

Kelly Broadwater was referred to Lifeline for The Homeless Crisis Response Program (HCRP) by a local domestic violence shelter.

The HCRP Program provides emergency housing assistance to homeless individuals and families in Lake County. HCRP provides rental assistance as well as assistance with security deposit, first/last months rent, utility deposit and/or arrears. To be eligible for the program, customers must have a referral from Project Hope, Forbes House, or be working with an agency who works with those living on the streets or in hotels.

When Kelly first came to Lifeline for HCRP assistance, she was a single mom with three children and a baby on the way. She had escaped an unhealthy living situation and was trying to finish school while raising her children. Kelly desperately wanted to establish safe housing for herself and her children, but was in need of the financial resources to do so.

Once her referral had been received, Kelly met with Lifeline Program Coordinator, Angela Wrana to complete the intake process for HCRP. Kelly was immediately enrolled in the program and found her new home quickly afterwards.

Kelly and her family had previously experienced a house fire, so they found it particularly reassuring that a requirement of The HCRP Program is that Lifeline staff must conduct a safety inspection of the unit prior to signing the lease. This allowed her piece of mind when transitioning into her new home.

The HCRP Program provided Kelly with five months of rental assistance as well as assistance with her security deposit and utilities. With this assistance, she was able to save her money to obtain beds for her children, a kitchen table and other needed household items to furnish their home.

“This program helped me get on my feet. It literally changed our lives,” says Kelly. Kelly states that her children are thriving in their new environment. “My son, Cameron is autistic. It is very important that he is in a safe and stable environment. This has helped him cope.”

The HCRP Program not only assisted her financially, but she also received case management support as well. Kelly communicated with Angela frequently to discuss budgeting and any issues or concerns that she was experiencing.

“Kelly was very motivated and determined. She never gave up and was always on top of fulfilling her responsibilities to maintain the resources needed for her family,” said Wrana.

Since completing The HCRP Program, Kelly has finished school and will be attending her graduation ceremony in May. She is presently saving for a vehicle and keeping her children engaged in activities.

This year Lifeline’s Annual Dinner and Awards Presentation were held in conjunction with National Community Action Awareness Month and featured remarks by both Lifeline Board President, Anne Curwen and by Dotson.

Dotson says that because Lifeline, Inc. is such a locally-focused organization, they work to recognize those who have made an impact locally with these awards.

“As a Community Action Agency, we are obviously a very community-based organization. Last year we served close to 7,000 households from nearly every community in Lake County with our community services programs and answered over 35,000 calls for information and referrals through 2-1-1,” said Dotson.

“We’ve strived to continue that effort by recognizing local individuals, organizations and program participants who have been successful in the past year.”
Lifeline is Recruiting Volunteers to Assist with Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program

Lifeline, Inc. concluded its 2018 tax season with great results, according to the agency’s administration. Final statistics for the VITA Program for the 2018 tax season show that 235 residents had their taxes prepared at a Lifeline VITA tax clinic and that 45 of them received the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). A total of $297,516 in tax returns were filed and brought back into the Lake County community through Lifeline’s VITA Clinics.

The EITC is a federal income tax credit for low to moderate income working families and individuals. Congress originally approved it in 1975. Eligibility factors include how much you earned in the prior year and how many children you have. Even single adults and couples without children can qualify for the credit, although families with children receive larger credits.

“We’re really excited about the number of people that we served with free tax preparation services this season—it was our highest numbers ever for our program. We’re also really pleased to bring that kind of revenue back into the Lake County community,” Dotson said.

“We have to thank our partners at the United Way of Lake County. They stepped up to provide additional funding for our VITA Program so that we could really take it to the next level and assist additional residents.”

Lifeline, Inc. uses volunteers trained and certified by the IRS through its Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. VITA volunteers provide free income tax assistance to low-income, elderly and disabled people. Throughout the 2018 tax season, volunteers donated 486 hours to Lifeline’s VITA Program.

Lifeline Program Coordinator, Heather DeMetro agreed that the program was a huge success this year.

“This year’s tax season was a huge success! We had more volunteers than we have ever had and helped more families in Lake County get their full refund than any year prior. We couldn’t have done it without all the volunteers and their hard work,” said DeMetro.

Volunteers for the 2018 tax season included Charlene Fortney, John Decker, Matt Fekete, Paula Richards, Sabra Rodriguez, Sue Kunsman, Jerome Hinkel, Elaine Waytes, Bev Vitaz, Cher Kelley, Patricia Kelley, Rita McMahon and Frank Vaccariello.

Lifeline was really pleased to be able to expand the VITA clinics this year to a third location, offering clinics at the McKinley Outreach Center in Willoughby, in addition to clinics at the Perry Community Center and at Lifeline’s Painesville office.

Dotson says that it’s also the partnerships and collaborative efforts amongst providers in Lake County that have really boosted the results of the program.

“This year we were able to expand on our partnership with the Perry Senior Center to more easily serve those in eastern Lake County, and launched a new partnership with the McKinley Outreach Center in Willoughby to be more accessible to those in western Lake County, both of which were very helpful,” said Dotson.

“We also have a long-standing collaboration with Lake Erie Colleges accounting and law professors, Julie Ziemak and Joanne Gurley, who provide valuable guidance and training to our volunteers—we couldn’t do this without their contribution.”

Over the course of the last eight tax seasons, the VITA Program has really made a difference for Lake County residents. Since 2010, our volunteers have prepared tax filings for 1,193 Lake County residents and generated $1,467,427 in returns for them. They have kept every penny and paid no fees. Volunteers have donated 2,911 hours to train and prepare tax filings for our clients.

“It's pretty amazing when you see those kinds of numbers—nearly 3,000 volunteer hours. This year was also significant for our VITA Program because it was the year we surpassed 1,000 residents served and we're closing in on $1.5 million generated,” said Dotson. “For a program that is completely volunteer-driven, that is an amazing amount of money brought back into our community.”

Lifeline, Inc. will again host VITA tax clinics beginning in January 2019. While specific clinic details will not be available until December 2018, Lifeline is already recruiting volunteers to become trained to assist low to moderate income households with tax preparation next winter and spring. In partnership with the IRS office in Cleveland, Lifeline staff and its volunteers will undergo varying levels of training, provided free of charge by the IRS.

You can make a real difference in the lives of working families by helping them claim every tax benefit to which they are entitled. Tax payers who take advantage of this free tax assistance can save on tax preparation fees and receive fast refunds.

Anyone can volunteer. No tax accounting experience is necessary, only a desire to help others in need. Volunteers participate in a several training levels. Once certified, volunteers will be scheduled to assist with tax preparation January through April. Lifeline, Inc. will use computers to prepare and transmit tax returns.

Anyone interested in volunteering can contact DeMetro at (440) 354-2148 or heatherd@lclifeline.org.
Lake County Begins Launch of New Volunteer Guardian Program

by: Alyea Barajas
Senior Services Coordinator, Lake County Board of Commissioners

Lake County is proud to announce the formation of a new volunteer guardian program, a partnership between the Lake County Probate Court and Lifeline, Inc. The program is made possible with the help of several funding sources including, the Lake County Senior Services Levy, Lake Health, the Lake County ADAMHS Board, and Lifeline.

"Realizing that our aging population in Lake County was going to present significant new challenges, my colleagues and I on the Board of Commissioners in 2015 authorized a comprehensive study to identify gaps in senior citizen services that would need to be addressed. This study indicated that a formal guardianship program was not only important, but also sorely needed," Commissioner Daniel P. Troy related.

The conclusions of this study were also reaffirmed by assessments done by other agencies such as the Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry and Lake County’s Lifeline agency.

“When Lake County citizens approved the Senior Services levy last fall, it moved the task of creating and structuring this volunteer guardianship program from a concept to a reality,” Commissioner Troy added.

“I'm excited about this great collaborative partnership of the Commissioners, Lake Health, the ADAMHS Board (and its wonderful network of not-for-profit service agencies), and, of course, Lifeline. I'm also very proud of the fact that, once again, we have found a way to work together to ensure the best in quality of life in our county, and especially that of our senior citizens.”

The volunteer guardian program will provide legal guardians to serve as concerned, caring advocates and surrogate decision-makers for indigent, incompetent adults who cannot care for themselves. The program will work across systems and organizations to jointly resolve the complex life barriers presented by persons in need of a guardian and will utilize both paid staff and volunteers.

“We will work with the Probate Court to create a strong and comprehensive volunteer guardian program. The need for increased guardianship services came up time and again in the focus groups for our 2017 Lake County Community Needs Assessment and were so pleased to be able to fill that gap and be a part of the solution,” said Carrie Dotson, Executive Director of Lifeline.

“We're very thankful to our funding partners for making this program possible and were looking forward to getting up and running!”

To learn more about the Lake County Volunteer Guardian Program or serving as a volunteer guardian, contact Lifeline’s Director of Community Services, Michelle Mezaris, at (440) 354-2148 x225.

Interested in volunteering with the Volunteer Guardian Program?

Contact Michelle Mezaris at 440-354-2148 or michellem@lclifeline.org
Thank you, Lifeline Annual Campaign Donors!

The Lifeline Board and staff extend their deepest thanks to those who made our 2017-18 annual campaign a success!

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* Indicates First-time Annual Campaign Donor
Lifeline’s Reentry Program Meeting Community Needs through Partnerships and Collaborations

by: Bri Moon
Program Coordinator

The Lake County Reentry Coalition came into existence in 2013 as the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections was beginning to understand the value on community linkages for those returning to the community.

In 2017, Lifeline’s newly funded Reentry Program was designed to help individuals returning to the community have a successful transition from being institutionalized to being supported when coming home by those invested in reducing their rate of recidivism.

The Lake County Reentry Program is a service operated by Lifeline, Inc. and also coordinates the Lake County Reentry Coalition and Citizen Circle adjunct programs.

Lifeline Program Coordinator Bri Moon has been able to expand the programs into the jails and prisons on a regular basis. She works closely with the various partners in the Reentry Coalition to develop planning and implementation of the strategic plan.

“What makes the Reentry Coalition so successful is that anyone being released back into the community after jail, or prison, can go to one place, Lifeline, for help with anything from housing to fees for a driver’s license,” said Bridgid Corbett, Lake County JFS representative to the Reentry Coalition since 2016.

“The Coalition is made up of representatives from several community agencies that are all invested in making it easier for people to get a second chance to improve their lives.”

Individuals returning home often struggle with finding housing, employment and other community resources that promote permanent reintegration into Lake County.

“Since the development of a full time Reentry Coordinator, Lake County has had an increased presence within the...”
community and demonstrated our commitment to meeting the needs of those who have been incarcerated,” said Moon.

The Reentry Office, in partnership with the Coalition, has successfully carried out over four annual Reentry Employment and Resource Fairs that serve the public with new and innovative ideas to improve their success and support their transition.

Speakers present successful businesses they have started that have provided financial stability, employers are ready to hire onsite and community resources are available to meet participants immediate needs.

New programming includes a Support Group for those who have moved into a new level of success since their return.

The Reentry Program, works with both individuals and groups to move forward with achieving the Reentry Coalition’s goals. During the past five years, reentry efforts have included work with the homeless population, those currently incarcerated, mental health and substance abuse consumers and the unemployed.

New initiatives through the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections allow local reentry programs to reach out to incarcerated individuals prior to release and make connections with the hope of connecting with them upon release.

Due to the efforts of Moon and the support of the community, there is a clear link between her work and partnerships and increased attendance at Citizen Circle and communication with institutions.

Financial support from the Lake County ADAMHS Board, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, as well as Lifeline’s federal Community Services Block Grant, have given the Reentry Program an opportunity to grow and become a leader in these efforts and a model within the State of Ohio.

Lifeline has spent over $45,000 in funding to help individuals with housing, including security deposit, 1st months rent, and past due rent; clothing for employment; transportation; appliances and furniture; and help with DMV fees.

“The Reentry program is a blessing for people trying to put their lives back together,” said participant Richard Norwood.

“Please keep the funding going so we have honest hope for good things to happen in a crisis.”

Anyone interested in learning more or getting involved in Lifeline’s Reentry Program, the Reentry Coalition or the Citizens Circles can contact Coordinator Bri Moon at brim@lclifeline.org or 440-354-2148.
Lifeline Finishes Busy Summer Crisis Season, While Preparing for the 2018-19 Winter Crisis Season

Lifeline’s Home Energy Assistance Program staff has been very busy throughout the 2017-18 program year. The staff saw high numbers of applicants for both the 2017-2018 Winter Crisis Program and the 2018 Summer Crisis Program.

“It’s amazing to me just how many households in Lake County use the HEAP programs to maintain their utility service, and ultimately their self-sufficiency,” said Carrie Dotson, Executive Director at Lifeline, Inc.

“Utility costs are high and rate increases sometimes unexpected, so we have a lot of our local residents who are relying on both the emergency assistance and payment plans to help them maintain service.”

During Lifeline’s 2017-2018 Winter Crisis Program, November 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018, the agency collected 948 applications for emergency assistance. Of those 948 applications, 829 were approved. The program allocated nearly $210,000 during the winter season for emergency assistance.

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“We saw so many new people during the 2017-2018 Heap Winter Crisis Program who had not heard about our program until they read about it in the newspaper or saw the inserts with their utility bills,” said Marina Rivera, Energy Programs Manager at Lifeline.

During Lifeline’s 2018 Summer Crisis Program also saw high numbers. During the brief, two month season, over 320 applications were accepted and over 310 were approved for either emergency assistance or financial assistance in paying for an air conditioner.

Those served during the 2018 Summer Crisis Program included households that either had a senior citizen or someone with a documented health condition in the household. In the months of July and August 2018, over $52,000 was allocated in emergency assistance, in addition to 30 air conditioners distributed.

“We were thrilled to be able to partner so well with the Lake County Council on Aging and Lake County Senior Centers to help a lot of our senior citizens stay cool during the summer,” said Dotson.

“This program really isn’t just about providing comfort—it’s about keeping people healthy. One of the requirements to qualify for the SCP is that applicants must either have a senior citizen in the home or have a physician documented health condition. These are people who clearly need their utilities on and to keep cool during the hottest months of the year.”

The HEAP Staff at Lifeline are gearing up for the 2018-19 HEAP Winter Crisis Program. It will begin on November 1st and applications will be processed by the Lifeline Energy Assistance office.

“The staff and I are looking forward to the HEAP Winter Crisis Program. We know we’ll be busy and help a lot of residents who need it,” said Rivera.

The WCP program can provide a one-time payment per heating season (November 1 through March 31) for gas or electric utilities, or toward the delivery of wood, propane, fuel oil or kerosene to households when: a customer’s gas or electric service has been disconnected; a customer has received a final disconnect notice; or the customer has less than a 10 day supply of bulk fuel.

In order to help those who already have a critical energy situation, Lifeline’s HEAP program will be offering special walk-in days at the start of the program.

Thursday, Nov. 1 and Friday, Nov. 2, walk-in sessions will be held beginning at 7:30 a.m. The office will be closed on Monday, Nov. 12 in observance of Veteran’s Day.

A special walk in day will be held on Saturday, November 3 beginning at 8:30 a.m. Lifeline’s Energy Assistance Office is located at 54 S. State St., Suite 303 in Painesville.

All walk-in sessions are on a first come, first served basis. Only customers who meet the eligibility
HEAP Winter Crisis Program 2018-19

Important Information

WCP begins November 1, 2018 and ends March 31, 2019

To qualify for assistance, customers must have a disconnection notice on their main heating source. For assistance with fuel oil, they must have less than ten days supply in their fuel tank. Applicants must also meet federal income guidelines to qualify for assistance.

November 1-November 2 will be walk-in hours only--no appointments will be scheduled. The office will be closed on Monday, November 12 for Veteran’s Day, as well as on November 22 & 23 for Thanksgiving.

Throughout the remainder of the season, walk-in hours will begin Monday, Wednesday & Friday mornings at 7:30 a.m. on a first-come/first-served basis.

Appointments can be scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays by calling our toll-free, automated appointment hotline at 1-866-223-1471.

Customers should bring the following information at the time of their appointment: photo ID, Birth certificates, Social Security cards for everyone in the household, all income verification for the last 90 days (including child support and utility reimbursements), gas and electric bills and if renting, landlord name/address/phone number.

Please contact the HEAP Office with any questions.
We can be reached at 440-350-9160
Lifeline Celebrates 45 Years While Looking Ahead

This year Lifeline celebrated its 45th Anniversary of serving Lake County and it gave us a great opportunity to look at where we’ve been and where we’re going.

Lifeline has grown significantly over the last 15 years. In 2005, Lifeline was a very small Community Action Agency, with an agency-wide budget of $318,000 and three staff. In 2005, 1,022 households were served by one of Lifeline’s five programs. Fast forward to 2017. Lifeline closed 2017 with revenues of $1,482,554 and over 20 employees operating 18 different programs. In 2017, 2,598 Lake County households received services from Lifeline, plus over 35,000 inquiries to 2-1-1 were answered.

With these big changes, Lifeline has evolved and our needs have changed. Our office is responding to those needs in three key areas—within our facilities, financially and strategically.

Lifeline is fortunate to lease space from Consolidated Investment Corp., a local business that understands the needs of the Painesville community and supports the work of local non-profits. With their support, Lifeline has been able to expand and improve our office space to better suit the needs of both our staff and our customers. In 2019 we are looking forward to expanding once again!

Another area that Lifeline’s Board has planned is financially. In early 2014, Lifeline’s Board began to discuss the need for long-term investment and how we will fund programs well into the future. The end-result of those discussions was the creation of the Lifeline Endowment Against Poverty, launched in November 2014 in partnership with the Cleveland Foundation. Our Endowment continues to grow and will allow Lifeline to meet community needs for many years to come.

Finally, Lifeline’s Board and staff are planning for the future strategically. Lifeline is pleased to be again partnering with the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies and the Ohio Community Action Training Organization to complete a new strategic plan that will carry the agency through 2019-2021. Lifeline’s Board uses the data in our Community Needs Assessment to drive them in their fulfillment of our mission.

Throughout September, Board members, staff and community partners were asked to give their feedback on Lifeline via online surveys. In early-October, a staff retreat and a Board retreat were held. At the Board retreat, the needs assessment data was shared so that Board members could keep in mind what we are working for. All of this will be compiled and developed into a solid plan that will be Lifeline’s blueprint in the coming years.