



HCQU Northwest

What a Wonderful Way to Start Summer!

On Friday, June 20th, our annual event was held to celebrate the first day of summer and an important milestone– 20 years of hosting this fun day!! The day was filled with joy, laughter, and gratitude as people from across our nine counties came together to mark the occasion.

This years' event offered a variety of hands-on summer-themed activities that everyone could enjoy. Attendees had the chance to pot their own flowers, create colorful sand art necklaces, decorate personalized water bottles, and craft beach-themed snow globes to take home as keepsakes.

Volunteers from Molly Dies Dance, One Way and many dedicated family members and friends helped bring the day to life. The Keystone Café generously provided a delicious spread, for all to enjoy!

Thank you to everyone for making our 20th year such a success!

Krista



Roseland Building

247 Hospital Drive

Warren, PA 16365

Phone (814) 728-9400

Fax (814) 728-8887

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Dawn Collins: Pediatric Coach

I joined the team at Milestone HCQU Northwest on April 3, 2025, as a Pediatric Coach, contributing to the new Pediatric Complex Care Resource Centers across Pennsylvania. As part of this initiative, I support children with complex medical needs and their caregivers. This program focuses on the non-medical aspects of care coordination and training, ensuring that children can remain in their homes while families and providers collaborate effectively. Through problem-solving, conflict resolution, and balancing familial, social, and medical goals, we empower families to navigate their unique challenges. Additionally, we provide targeted education and training, facilitate regional family advisory groups for peer support, and offer feedback on PCCRC resources.

I earned my bachelor's degree in Human Relations from the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford and have worked in the social work field since graduating in 2004. Over the last 20 years, I have held various roles, each offering a fresh perspective and enriching my understanding of family dynamics. Additionally, I spent nine years as a foster parent, further deepening my appreciation for the challenges and rewards of family life.

I am a mother of four children and live in Warren, where I have spent most of my life, alongside my husband, children, and our beloved fur babies. I am also a proud grandmother to a 9-month-old and a 3-year-old—true lights in my life. In my free time, I enjoy traveling with my family, outdoor walks, reading, home DIY, and crafts. I feel incredibly fortunate to be part of this initiative and the team at Milestone.

Paige Foringer: Family Facilitator

I joined Milestone HCQU Northwest on May 15, 2025, as the Family Facilitator. I assist families in 14 different counties. My role is to transition children with medical complexities from living in hospitals or facilities to the community and help them prevent long-term placement in institutional care. Once the child has been discharged from a facility, they will transition into the home with their families or be cared for by life sharing families.

I grew up in a small town in New Hampshire until my family relocated us to Jamestown, NY. In 2017 I moved to Warren, PA and currently reside in Russell, PA with my husband and our children. I graduated from SUNY Empire State University with my Associate's in Human Services and Bachelor's in Criminal Justice. I continued to pursue my education in criminal justice and graduated from Southern New Hampshire University and obtained my Master's degree in Criminal Justice. Previously, I was a self-determination assistant for an intellectually developmentally disabled adult. I have also worked in juvenile residential homes for children and youth. Most recently, I was an ongoing caseworker for Warren County Children and Youth Services. I provided services to children and families within Forest and Warren county and ensured that children were free from abuse and neglect. Being able to make a positive change in a child's life is what drew me to the Family Facilitator position. I look forward to providing support and advocacy for the families that we serve.



My favorite seasons are Autumn and Winter, however, I do enjoy summer activities (just not the heat). I enjoy spending time with my husband and our children. I love trying different cultures' food and my absolute favorite is Mexican!

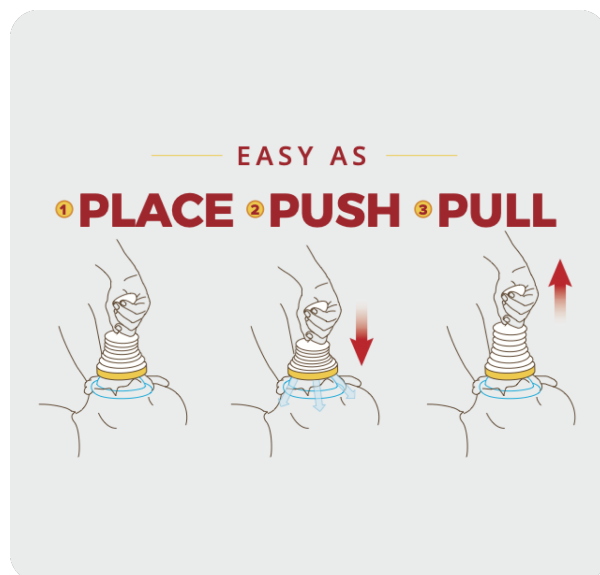
LifeVac

Just over 29 years ago, I was working the 3-11 shift at a local nursing home. It was dinner time. I was called to the dining room and a woman in a wheelchair was choking. Her face was purple, and her hands were over her throat. Her airway was completely blocked. As per protocol, I had to do abdominal thrusts on her (then called the Heimlich maneuver). She was a large person, and I am a small one. Getting my arms around her was very difficult; fortunately, there was enough adrenaline in my bloodstream to help me do it. I pulled upward and inward with all my might, and this big gob of food flew out of her mouth and landed on the floor. I will never forget it.

What would have happened to that poor lady if this intervention had failed to dislodge the obstruction? A lot would depend on the length of time it took for EMS personnel to arrive. Brain cells start dying after only a few minutes without oxygen. Fortunately, now there is something that can be used as a back-up in case standard basic life support is ineffective for a choking episode.

LifeVac is a portable, plastic device. It has a facemask and a plunger, along with a one-way valve. The facemask fits over the nose and mouth and allows you to create a seal. Pushing down on the plunger forces the air out the sides of the device and creates a suction, so that when you pull back on the plunger, the negative air pressure will pull the obstruction out of the airway. LifeVac can be used for a person whether sitting, standing, or lying down.

Anyone can purchase LifeVac for personal use, but for those who work as direct support professionals or healthcare providers, please first discuss your thoughts about LifeVac with your supervisors and administrators. This information is for educational purposes only; it is not intended to override your agency's policies or physician's orders, or violate any county/state/federal laws.



Tim Juliano

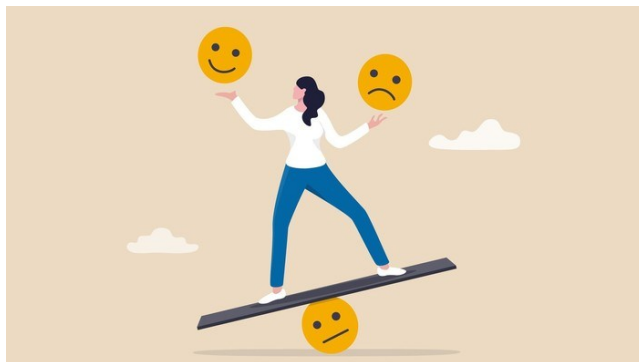
For more information, please visit the following:

<https://lifelvac.net>, 5/23/2025

<https://lifelvac.net/choking-prevention-tips/>, 5/23/2025

Feeling Better about Change

Recently life has brought about some changes for me. Right now it seems that there are so many happening all at once. My daughter just told me that she has been talking to an Air Force recruiter (she just graduated from high school 10 days ago). As if going to college wasn't enough, now she may leave home to go further away. I know that change is necessary, and a lot of times change is good, but sometimes these changes can get you down. We may be able to see the benefits but there may be reasons we still feel sad, and whether it's our children leaving the nest, changing jobs, going through a breakup, change in general can be difficult. It is okay to be sad, but it can also be difficult to get out of the sadness slump. Sometimes we may not know how to get us out of this mood. The following strategies are simple (or so they say) and they can be helpful to us when we just can't shake that sad feeling.



1. Don't feel guilty – When one feels sad, guilt may accompany it. It is important to know that being sad is a basic human feeling, not a sign of personal failure. Sadness is part of everyone's journey.
2. Make sure you take time for yourself. It is important to maintain both your mental and physical wellbeing. Think of the time you would give to your friends if they were feeling sad. Give that same time to yourself. Practice good selfcare. Take a bath, go for a walk, read a good book or watch a good movie. Do what makes you feel better.
3. Journal – Writing things down can help you identify triggers that could be contributing to your sadness. You may not even realize that they are making you feel worse. Sometime writing about our feelings can provide additional insight about our sadness.
4. Don't cover sadness up – Accept your emotions. Allow yourself to be sad. Learn from the process and learn how to improve your emotions along the way.
5. Allow yourself to cry. There are studies that show that crying is good for you because it releases happy hormones. Crying is a form of release, an emotional expression that offers relief and healing.
6. Exercise – Exercise is our body's natural way to relieve stress. It helps with sadness as well. Go for a walk, join an exercise group (this also helps with not isolating), lift weights, run. Whatever works for you. Get out and get moving. It does not have to be vigorous, but the more vigorous, the more relief you will feel.
7. Do something that makes you happy – What do you like to do? Dance, hang with friends, go to the beach? It doesn't have to be anything elaborate! Just find what makes you happy and do it.

We all get sad sometimes and the blues can be hard to shake. There are times when we may not feel like doing any of these things, but if we can take that step and get involved in something, life can be fun again!! Try one or maybe all these strategies. Add some of your own. Life is short! Don't let things keep you down.

Summer at the HCQU is an exciting time!

The weather is getting warm, and our summer at the HCQU has started! We just hosted our annual event, and are gearing up for the Senior Expos in the Fall.

This Fall we will also be updating our LMS (Learning Management System), so be on the look out for more information coming soon! This will be a more user-friendly system that is comparable to other training sites you may already use.

Let me know if you'd like us to come out for an in-person training, we LOVE to see your smiling faces!

LOCKED OUT: You can click on *Forgot Password* when logging in, or call/email me.

TEST RESET: You can send me a message through the LMS, call or email as well.

kfitsimmons@milestonepa.org or 814-728-9400.



Milestone PCCRC Updates

Milestone Pediatric Complex Care Resource Center NW at McKean County Community Fest

On Saturday, April 26th, 2025, Milestone Pediatric Complex Care Resource Center (PCCRC) NW staff members, Dawn Collins and Alyssa Raimondo-Swanson, hosted a booth at the McKean County Community Fest in Bradford, PA.

This vibrant event featured activities, giveaways, services, and informational booths for children and families throughout McKean County.

Alyssa and Dawn had the pleasure of engaging with dozens of community members and regional agency staff, introducing them to the PCCRC and its resources.

They shared details about the PCCRC's mission, distributed informational materials, and provided giveaway items. Adding a fun and educational touch, Sneezy Sam helped teach children the importance of covering their mouths when sneezing!

The PCCRC is a new statewide initiative dedicated to supporting Pennsylvania children with medical complexities—ages birth to 21— who receive Medical Assistance and qualify for in-home shift care services. PCCRC services are provided at no cost to eligible families.

Through this program, Pediatric Coaches offer training, support, and family advisory workgroups for families caring for children at home. Additionally, our Family Facilitator works with families whose children currently reside in long-term care facilities, helping to establish the necessary support systems for a transition home or into a community-based home setting.

Milestone PCCRC NW is housed within Milestone HCQU NW and is actively meeting with county providers across Northwestern PA to introduce this project and facilitate referrals.



If you or your organization would like to learn more about the PCCRC or refer a child for services, please contact Milestone PCCRC NW at PCCRCNorthwest@MilestonePa.org or **814-728-9400**. PCCRCs are available statewide.

If you are unsure whether a family resides within our service region, please reach out, and we will gladly connect them to the appropriate PCCRC.

Calming Cove at the Cleveland Zoo

My husband and I recently traveled to Cleveland Ohio for a concert and then went to the Cleveland Zoo the next day. We have visited many zoos over the years. In addition to the many animals, we have seen many creative things to increase comfort and include all in zoo fun, including nursing rooms for mothers and infants, changing tables in bathrooms, and misting stations to help people cool off on a hot day. The Calming Cove at Cleveland Zoo was a first for us. It offers a quiet space specifically designed for people with sensory sensitivities, such as Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Sensory rooms are safe spaces designed to promote self-organization, de-escalation, and positive change. By helping to manage negative thoughts and emotions, they can enable calmness and improve self-regulation. They are also known to improve focus, communication, and socialization. Sensory rooms have a multifaceted approach that can help all ages manage stress levels.



Examples of what might be found in a Sensory Room include projectors, bubble tubes, music, and aroma diffusers. Several of these are in the Calming Cove. The temperature is also cooler. The Cleveland Zoo covers 183 acres and has a lot going on. It could be overstimulating for someone with sensory sensitivities. The Calming Cove is a perfect place to take some time and collect oneself in order to enjoy the rest of the zoo.

Well done, Cleveland Zoo for thinking creatively and trying to include all in zoo fun!

Lisa Eckman

Healthier Eating for Those We Support

We are probably all aware that overweight and obesity are major problems in our society today. When we specifically consider those we support with Intellectual Disability (ID), here in Pennsylvania 38.3% of individuals have been found to experience obesity (compared to 28% in the general population). Like all of us, lifestyle factors such as less frequent physical activity and poor dietary habits play a role. We struggle to guide people to healthier choices while still honoring their right to choose for themselves.

I recently attended the first session of ODP's Capacity Building Institute Intensive, where we had small brainstorming sessions and large group discussions about how we might overcome some of the challenges to helping individuals build healthier habits. I thought I'd share some of the ideas presented.

- Educate Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). Many providers lamented that many of their DSPs do not know how to cook, or have limited understanding of how to put together nutritious meals. www.myplate.gov is a great place to start. Your HCQU can help, too!
- Encourage people to eat together. Meals should be as much about the opportunity to spend time together as about the food. This includes staff. They shouldn't be standing off to the side – they should be participating. This gives them the opportunity to model things like portion control and affirms that meals are about more than just eating.
- Focus on increasing vegetables in people's diets. Farmer's Markets can be a fun outing, and it may be more enticing to eat fresh food that you have chosen for yourself. Your agency might even consider contracting with local farmers to provide fresh produce regularly.
- Grow your own in raised beds. Local businesses may be willing to sponsor them so you could have one at each home. The difference between a fresh-picked tomato and one from the grocery store is remarkable!
- Awake overnight staff could take some of the burden of preparing meals for the following day. At least cutting up the produce could save a lot of time for meal preparation later.



- MY25 is a service designed for human services providers that helps them focus on maintaining choice while improving diets of people we support. They can even provide a grocery list for the dietary needs/choices! There's a lot more to know; find out here www.my25.com.
- Chat GPT has a feature that provides a ready-made shopping list, based on your specific dietary needs (ex. a diabetic diet), how much money you have to spend, and where you are planning to shop.

Whatever route you choose, the one thing most everyone in our discussion agreed upon – you have to take it one small step at a time.

By: Amy Tobolski

Letter from the Director

Summer is here, and along with that come more opportunities to be outside to engage in physical activities. The next three months are frequently filled with sunshine, but too much sun exposure can lead to sunburns and possibly skin cancer. Sunscreen and loose fitting clothing help a lot, but please limit your exposure – especially if you have light skin or are otherwise susceptible to sunburns. On really hot and clear days you may want to walk around a store or mall instead of being outside, or wait until the evening to spend time outside. In addition to sunburns also try to limit your exposure to mosquitos and ticks since both can possibly carry diseases. As I aid in our previous newsletter among the many trainings that we provide are Get Up and Move, Hydration and Dehydration, Sun and Skin, and Lyme Disease which are all about ways to stay safe while being active. If you or the individuals that you work with would like these or other trainings just email Krista at kfitzsimmons@milestonepa.org to submit a request. We can do trainings virtually, in-person, or you can take classes online via our LMS at <https://northwesthcqu.learnupon.com/>, so keep your requests coming to us.

Visiting a local farmers' market to get fresh fruit and/or vegetables is a great activity – especially if you do not grow a garden of your own. As always I encourage you to get outside whenever possible to enjoy the fresh air, but if not outside, try to find something indoors to keep you moving and to be healthier. If there is a way that the HCQU can help you now or anytime during the year, feel free to call us to schedule a training or request other assistance. Stay safe, drink water, eat fruit and vegetables (especially when they are fresh from a local farm or your own garden), and keep on moving.

Darryl



HCQU Contacts

Darryl Bergstrom

HCQU Director

dbergstrom@MilestonePA.org

Amy Tobolski

Clinical Supervisor

atobolski@MilestonePA.org

Krista Fitzsimmons

Training Coordinator

kfitzsimmons@MilestonePA.org

Connie Copley

Behavioral Health Specialist

ccopley@MilestonePA.org

Tim Juliano, RN

HCQU Nurse

tjuliano@MilestonePA.org

Lisa Eckman, RN

HCQU Nurse

leckman@MilestonePA.org

Paige Foringer

Family Facilitator

pforinger@MilestonePA.org

Dawn Collins

Pediatric Coach

dcollins@MilestonePA.org

Alyssa Raimondo-Swanson

Pediatric Coach

araimondo@MilestonePA.org