I cannot believe that another year has come and gone. They say time flies when you are having fun, and I am living my dream. I could not imagine my life void of the interactions I am blessed to have with those we serve and their families as well as those that support us in any way. That includes you that are watching us and rooting for us everyday.

We are so happy to announce that we are moving forward in our efforts to offer housing to people affected by ASD no matter where they find themselves on the spectrum. By the end of February, ShineLight will have our 3rd housing option (by way of group home) full to capacity and in the spring of 2024 ShineLight Connect will break ground on our 2 unit duplex. This duplex has already solved a next step challenge for one family, as two sisters are set to live in one of the units offered by the duplex. Their family will be comforted even by the programming that ShineLight will partner with ShineLight Connect to offer support to ensure that these young ladies are able to maintain housing. We have faced opposition, but I believe that every person deserves the opportunity to age in place, and this is what we are able to offer through our duplex.

There is so much more on the horizon. I encourage you to continue following us. Finally, please don’t keep this all to yourself. Make sure you share us with others as we all do more in 2024!

— Nikki Giovanni Creecy

Nikki Giovanni Creecy  
Founder and CEO

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023

PROGRESS AT ST. PAULS FACILITY

The first year of the St. Pauls facility has been all about learning. We are not only in a new neighborhood, but a new county. Through these circumstances, we have learned more about how to positively impact our community through our presence.

Our first resident, DaKwuan, pictured right, is doing well. We are meeting some of his primary immediate goals. Our efforts are now directed at helping him understand what he wants in life and what it will take for him to get there.

DaKwuan is excited about getting housemates. Even now, he likes to visit with the residents at our other adolescent facility, so I know he will be glad to have peers around.

We have already screened two people and they are both set to move into their new home in February. We are actively screening for the last vacancy.

The thing that ShineLight is most proud of right now is the great group of people we have been able to hire for that location. It is in a rural area, which usually makes staffing that much more difficult. This was also true in this case, but we did not give up and it has paid off. We have an amazing team there!
Through generous donations of local organizations and the funds raised from our first annual 5k, our community made our dream possible of funding three individuals with autism to attend a new social skills training program.

ShineLight Connect Foundation was able to fund JaKayla Townsend, a recent social work graduate from North Carolina Central University, to facilitate the group. Based on her education and practical experience with social work, JaKayla developed the curriculum and identified critical skills to teach that lead to the success of individuals who can better thrive in our community. Through a baseline evaluation, midterm evaluation, and final evaluation, JaKayla is able to best monitor progress in each individual and identify where each individual may still need improvement.

She believes in hands-on practical experience, so she has taken the cohort on two field trips and recently taught social skills by having a holiday dinner together. For example, one outing has been taking the cohort to the beach and outlet mall shopping for a day trip. She said, “On this trip, I wanted the students to learn self-discipline, respect, problem-solving, and physical skills. We practiced respect by cleaning up after ourselves, helping others, and being mindful of our neighbors. We also learned about budgeting and making wise spending choices.”

This inaugural course for this new social skills program ended in early January 2024, where we plan to put together a second cohort immediately. With continued community support, together we can ensure that all Fayetteville community members are included and receive opportunities to thrive and shine their brightest.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

First, we want to thank the family members of everyone we serve. Whether it is an adult family member or a child, ShineLight cannot advocate for quality in their health, safety, and wellbeing without your support. It really is true that teamwork makes the dream work! We are so happy to have you as a part of our team.

We also thank every agency in our community connection, who support us to do what we do every day. Know that lives are better because of your commitment to what you do.

Last, but certainly not least, thank you to every ShineLight employee. Without you, we could not survive long. Thank you for personifying the mission and bringing to life our vision. A special thanks to every Direct Support Professional. You are on the ground every day. We see you. You are the real heroes!
ShineLight envisions our Housing Program being the umbrella program for young adults who desire to live independently in the community, as well as contribute and give back to the community as well. Housing is an umbrella for the other programs ShineLight offers that supplement efforts for independent living. Such programs are: supportive employment, social skills development training, and community navigation. Altogether these programs best prepare an individual to thrive, build confidence, gain employment, and live independently.

For every person that lives in a resident facility serviced by ShineLight, their ultimate goal is to eventually live on their own. Through this collection of programming, it is ShineLight’s goal to make these dreams come true. Every individual learns differently. Often through housing, an individual makes progress through a means of behavior replacement achieved through learning daily living skills. Through setting customized goals per individual, ShineLight helps individuals achieve personal goals, leading to independence.

**Supportive Employment**

ShineLight takes pride in our supportive employment program and the successes we have shared with many individuals who have landed jobs. ShineLight’s program is highly customized to an individual’s needs and presenting symptoms, through one-on-one coaching conducted by paraprofessionals who are usually direct care workers. Goals vary from individual to individual when related to employment, where goals are person centered, set based on the needs and desires of the individual. Essentially, ShineLight’s training for employment involves replacing behaviors that wouldn’t be acceptable in the workplace. Secondary factors relate to cleanliness, social interactions, money management, and tasks that are directly related to the job of their choice.

It is important to ShineLight to find employment that suits each individual. For individuals who are undecided in what they want their jobs to be, ShineLight supports them in becoming acquainted with the community. They encourage volunteering as a way to become acquainted with the opportunities that the community offers. Individuals in their programming have landed positions at Smoothie King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Texas Roadhouse, local gyms, local daycares, as well as positions at ShineLight. As a Fayetteville native, ShineLight Founder and CEO Nikki Giovanni Creecy also leverages her connections in the community to help individuals land jobs that provide a source of confidence, income, and autonomy.

So far, every person that ShineLight is currently supporting who wants to work is working. ShineLight also connects each working individual with a job coach who helps guide them to success while on the job. The job coach makes sure the person does not get overwhelmed in completing their tasks, and to make sure the tasks are completed according to the desires of the employer.

Contact us today at 910.323.1335 or visit us at www.shine-light.org
Social Skills Training

ShineLight has launched a new social skills training program that complements our housing program, as well as other programs. Like ShineLight’s other programs, they are all tailored to deliver the same goal – that an individual can learn and grow so they can live independently and support themselves as a successful community member. Led by an instructor with a degree in social work, individuals in this training learn to understand their emotions and how to cope with them. The class will lead to better understanding of themselves and how to express themselves, which leads to increased self-esteem. Increased self-esteem also comes from learning how to be confident in social settings and how to maintain relationships.

The class will also train individuals for job interviews and how they conduct themselves in these settings. The training will also promote self-care through teaching about hygiene and appearance; cooking and learning to prepare meals; food safety; understanding and advocating for their rights; establishing medical care; how to get insurance; knowing the medications they need; meal planning; and healthy eating. Individuals will also learn how to understand body language and social cues through both experience (role playing within social skills and social stories) and exposure (attending community events and exploring additional organizations.) Individuals will learn how to build and maintain relationships with others, learn how to introduce themselves to others and what makes them a good friend. Also important is learning what to look for in other people and how to build safe relationships, like in online chatrooms.

Community Navigation

The final program under the umbrella of transitional housing at ShineLight is the Community Navigation program. The goal is to help connect people to the community resources they need to have good quality of life. The aim is for individuals to thrive in the local community where they feel like they belong and can eventually contribute and give back to the Fayetteville community. Individuals in residential housing would also receive supportive employment, social skills training, and community navigation with us.

Community engagement is a component of community navigation. Many times, ShineLight has supported people who have come from institutional settings, or have been in the community while being supported as if they are in an institution, not getting much or in some cases, any community engagement. This is the first step of people becoming participating members of their community whose relationships have reciprocity.

Success of Shinelight Connect Foundation

We are excited and proud of the successes Shinelight Connect Foundation has achieved this year. We secured critical board members, and we held our first annual 5k which raised money to fund individuals for our social skills training program. Through the generosity of local donors like Wells Fargo, Saint Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Church, and the Silver Square Lodge, plus proceeds of the 5k, we were able to hire our social skills training facilitator, JaKayla Townsend. So far this year, we have funded three individuals for social skills training, and we have ambitious plans for 2024. Our next 5k is coming up in April with new, updated fundraising goals based on the need for social skills training. We also plan to hold an online silent auction in fall 2024. A great deal is on the horizon for us, not to mention the duplex project, and we could not do any of this without the support of the greater Fayetteville community. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.