



Philip Catchpole

A LifeSong of Service

COVER STORY

By Jenna Caputo

Photos by MarkBolles.com

Service has shaped Philip Catchpole into who he is today, and he takes that very seriously. His passions in life include his faith in God, his love for his wife and children and his work for LifeSong, Inc. – a non-profit that serves differently abled people through community-based day services. He is always there for his family and extended work family and often incorporates activities that involve everyone in a way that has shaped his life and the lives of those around him. “Incorporating our hobbies, sports and special talents through serving our participants, families and staff has brought so much joy to our family. This service expands horizons, creates long life friendships and shapes us into who we are today,” he reflects.

Originally from Lee Center in Central NY, Phil enjoyed the great outdoors growing up, and could often be found snowmobiling, snow and water skiing, fishing, hiking or playing soccer. He attended Potsdam College for business and psychology and met the love of his life, Jill, a finance

and management major at Clarkson. His life plan quickly formed into two things – marrying his college sweetheart and following his father’s footsteps in working with differently abled people.

Having a family member who was differently abled originally propelled Phil’s father into the field – eventually moving their family to the Capital Region to work as the Associate Commissioner for Program Operations at the NYS Office for Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, now called the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD).

After college, Phil received a job as a Primary Therapist at Sunmount DDSO. He married Jill and moved to Tupper Lake, NY, but when they were ready to start a family, they decided to settle closer to Phil’s family and relocated to Clifton Park in 2001. Phil left state employment and entered the nonprofit field, eventually working his way up to his present job as the Executive Director at LifeSong. Jill is now the Assistant Executive Director there as well and their work has become a part of their family and everyday life.

LifeSong is a nonprofit 501C3 with a mission to make it possible for people with varying levels of abilities to become active, wage-earning contributors to their local communities. “We strive to help generate positive, successful employment opportunities as well as provide on-going support so that they may be effective in the workforce. We believe that when given proper supports and resources, any person with differing abilities can be successful at their place of employment,” says Phil. LifeSong’s services include job preparation, searching, placement and coaching through a variety of programs. The Awakenings Day Program is a 100% community-based program that focuses on making healthy life choices through a trifold structure of volunteering, skill building and recreation, providing a source of ongoing skills and personal development for individuals who are mobile, enjoy being active and value peer interaction. “A healthy balance between these components proves to provide several opportunities and situations in which to accomplish personal growth while gaining confidence, satisfaction and enjoyment in life,” says Phil. “These programs fulfill our mission to love, enhance, equip and inspire the men and women we work with and to help them reach their full potential.”

In 2013, they added in a musical component to their program since many of the participants voiced a desire to express themselves in the various aspects of the musical arts. LifeSong created a musical studio at their offices on Crescent Road in Clifton Park. The studio allows participants to learn how to operate a studio, play musical instruments and sing. Their music director, Mark Hines, helped to produce their first CD recording in 2015. “A LifeSong Christmas” featured the musical talents of all those in the class and was a hit!

The LifeSong members also wanted to dance. Luckily, Jill is a former ballet dance instructor, and along with other LifeSong staff, began a weekly class that currently incorporates ballet and hip-hop, since those were the requested dances of the members. They use dance space at The King’s Dancers’ studio in Scotia and share in their annual dance recital, which draws an audience of over 1,100 people each year.

The addition of these arts programs has been invaluable to their overall mission. Phil has found that their members



Phil and Jill Catchpole with LifeSong volunteers and EMS staff at the Clifton Park Halfmoon Emergency Corps. Clifton Park Halfmoon Emergency Corps is LifeSong’s first client location where volunteers prepare lunch for the staff while learning job skills.

have gained so much: “Confidence, memory, coordination, expression, self-esteem, learning to work together and having a sense of accomplishment – to get up in front of over 1,100 people, on a stage, creates amazing opportunities to grow and express oneself,” he says.

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Phil wishes there were more hours in the day so they could do even more for their members, but has been so satisfied with what they have been able to accomplish so far with the instrumental help of their staff. "LifeSong's mission and vision are proven to be carried out daily because of our dedicated, loyal and professional employees," he says. He is gratified to be able to serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and watch them grow into the people and community members they wish to be.

The community can help with this mission as well through participation in LifeSong's various events throughout the year. **Their next event is the 5th Annual Daffodil Dash 5K on June 10th at the Town of Halfmoon Park.** A fun-filled, family-friendly, Character Counts event, the tickets cost \$25 to run and the proceeds support LifeSong's programs and services that also receive continuous support from corporate sponsors and local volunteers.

The Catchpole family now also includes Aaron (19), Julia (17) and Seth (15) as well as their family pets Hershey, a chocolate lab that loves to run, and Caramello, the cat that loves to chase her. Their family still loves the outdoors and is often out at the kids' games (soccer, softball & baseball) or out snowmobiling, hiking, camping, boating or swimming. Phil, Jill, Aaron and Julia are also all certified

lifeguards. The family enjoys going out in the Capital District to partake in activities around the area including sporting events, dining, movies and concerts. They just enjoy hanging out together and often include the LifeSong family in many of their outings. They also have fun singing together and recently performed with the Easter choir at Faith Baptist Church on Easter.

Phil also has a guilty pleasure – sappy love stories. He often sits down with his wife and daughter to watch TV, and has many favorites, including the Hallmark series *When Calls the Heart* and the *Love Series*, as well as the new *Cinderella*, *Ever After*, *The Sound of Music* and many more.

He is very grateful for the support his family and LifeSong have received from the community that has allowed him to fulfill his lifelong passions. "We sincerely appreciate the kindness and support displayed daily to LifeSong, Inc.," he says. "Our corporate sponsors never cease to amaze and go beyond the expected."

To sign up for the Daffodil Dash, visit www.daffodildash.com. For more information about LifeSong, Inc., visit www.lifesonginc.org. ■

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