From the Academy Award-nominated film “My Big Fat Greek Wedding,” Nia Vardalos shares her journey to motherhood.
2 Inspired Thoughts
A letter from David M. A. Jensen, LSSI’s President/COO

3 Acclaimed Actress Shares Her Journey Through Adoption
Nia Vardalos chooses foster care to become a mom

4 This Little Light of Mine
Intouch has made a difference in families’ lives and helps older adults maintain their independence

8 Becoming a Family
Every child deserves a safe and stable home

12 Finding Hope in New Beginnings
Every man and woman has the ability to change – Everyone can be reached

16 Turning the Wheels in the Right Direction
One donation, one vehicle, can change lives far and wide

19 Hands@Work
Crowdsourcing Care...more is more

20 On a Mission
Legacy Corps volunteers take care of our veterans and the faithful loved ones by their sides

23 The Cornerstone Foundation
Legacy Gifts – an important part of your life story

24 Inspired News
Learn about what’s happening around LSSI

26 Inspiration Page
30th annual and Grand Finale Forget-Me-Not Brunch and Fashion Show
Lutheran Social Services of Illinois is the statewide social service agency of the Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

MISSION STATEMENT
Responding to the Gospel, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois brings healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities.

WHAT WE BELIEVE
We at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois believe that we are called to care for our neighbors in need, and we believe that this calling is a gift and a privilege.

Out of this deep sense of commitment, we walk together with those whom we serve. We rejoice with them in their triumphs, and persevere with them in their challenges. We discover that our lives, too, are changed along the way.

This past year, our organization provided care and services to more than 96,700 people, with over 190 programs at 85 sites across Illinois.

LSSI.org has a new look, and, as many of you have requested, much easier navigation ability. This means that people can find what they are looking for easier and faster.

As you click through the pages, you’ll see our services are better defined for those looking for help; advancement and donation opportunities are very clear, with an enhancement on the ease of giving.
Dear Friends,

What inspires you, or is it more accurate to ask, who inspires you? When I share the story of LSSI throughout our communities, I talk about what we do; we bring healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities.

People admire our work, however, the volunteers who deliver our services to children, seniors, and families in need, elicit the strongest responses. It is the LSSI staff and volunteers who inspire us all to do more, to be more, for the benefit of the most vulnerable among us.

Allow us to introduce you to people like Diane, who provide support services to military veterans and their families. Diane provides caregivers much-needed respite and gives veterans the necessary support—at no cost to them. As a Legacy Corps member, she is one of many who helped to provide 22,500 hours of care last year, preventing the isolation, stress, and exhaustion that can impair both veterans and their caregivers.

People like Maureen and Sarah, who—through Intouch Care Services—make it possible for seniors to remain living independently in their own homes. And people like Linda, who, with her staff, has turned the generous donation of a new seven-passenger van into the lifeline foster children need to maintain visits with their birth parents.

These are just a few of the people you’ll meet in this magazine. They represent the unique and extraordinary LSSI community, who deliver our services day in and day out, without fanfare or applause. They serve selflessly, and are able to do so because our donors make it possible.

What they do, often under trying circumstances, leaves me in awe. How humbly and efficiently and professionally they do it—inspires me. These people remind me why we do what we do—and why we ask you for your support and involvement.

You don’t have to look far to see the results of their efforts, or to find reasons to celebrate.

We have two opportunities to do just that, in the next few months. April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, and May is National Foster Care Month. We appreciate these designations, because they spotlight the needs of children. Every day, our foster care services strive to place children who have experienced neglect or abuse, into loving and secure homes, with a goal to return the child to their original home, if possible. Taking care of children is what we do every month, every day, every hour, and we gladly embrace the extra attention and dedication these two highlighted months offer to bring attention to the needs of children.

We will share a wonderful story of foster care on April 30th, when we welcome acclaimed actress, author, screenwriter, and adoptive mom Nia Vardalos. Nia will talk about her journey through the foster care adoption process to become a “ridiculously happy mom.” She admits to having concerns about the foster care system, until she became part of it—and says she has never encountered more selfless people.

I encourage you to join us for this intimate look into one family’s journey, and the foster care professionals who helped Nia and her husband, Ian, realize their dream of becoming parents. Proceeds will benefit LSSI programs.

And just a few days later, on May 3rd, we will host the Grand Finale Forget-Me-Not Brunch and Fashion Show, with proceeds to benefit Children’s Services, hosted by the Women’s Network of LSSI. Event details are on the back cover.

As I talk about the people I admire, I must mention Marcia Weflen, Associate Executive Director of Children’s Services. Marcia is retiring after 30 years with LSSI. Since her first days with LSSI to today, her passion for service and compassion for people remains unwavering. On behalf of the staff, clients, and benefactors of LSSI, I thank Marcia for her dedication and her commitment to LSSI.

Thank you for letting me share a little bit about what makes LSSI special, muse about those who inspire me, and for pondering your own inspirational role in taking care of those in need.

With gratitude,

David M.A. Jensen
President/COO
After a 10-year journey through infertility, acclaimed actress Nia Vardalos and her husband, Ian Gomez, received 14 hours notice that they might become parents.

The call that changed their lives came from a foster family agency (FFA). A three-year-old girl had been relinquished to foster care by a young couple whose relationship did not last the birth. That little girl was waiting for a home.

An Academy Award-nominated actress, screenwriter, and author of “Instant Mom,” Nia treasures her new role as mom, and advocate for adoption and foster care. A private person, Nia has faith that her public voice can help others on the journey to become adoptive parents.

While Nia may tell you that her daughter, Ilaria, is her destiny, she will not tell you that she enjoyed every moment of getting there. “After banging my head against the brick wall of infertility, I accepted the fact that there would have to be another plan for me,” she says.

She was stunned to find out the U.S. has 500,000 kids in foster care, and 129,000 of them are legally available for adoption, and waiting for a family.

Moving past the misconceptions

Nia and Ian came slowly to the foster adoption program, due to misconceptions about how the process worked. “I thought in foster adoption, the children came to live with you for a while, then went back home, or might go back home,” Nia says. “I wasn’t aware of all the children who are already legally emancipated from their families.”

Nia hopes to share information on how to adopt children, whether via international means, domestically, or through foster care.

“There seems to be the impression that it’s difficult to adopt in the U.S.,” she says. “Having been through the process, I want to tell people how to do it: Just find an FFA to help you navigate the system, walk you through the paperwork, the necessary and thorough background screening process, and the procedure of adopting from foster care in the U.S.”

Nia acknowledges that adoption through foster care is hampered by negative misconceptions.

Before the adoption, Nia heard from friends who advised against adopting from foster care, because of myths that the children are damaged. “To be honest, I don’t disparage anyone for worrying, because the media has done a good job of only picking up those rare, scary stories,” Nia says. “Most people in Hollywood are more damaged than any child living in foster care!”

Ridiculously happy

For people unsure of adoption, Nia understands—and has advice. “If fear of the unknown is stopping someone from taking this step, I do what I can to provide information.

When I was worried about adopting, I fought back the irrational thoughts by asking myself questions, such as: ‘What’s the alternative? If I don’t do this, will I live a life of regret?’”

Nia and Ian are very private people, and to go public with their story in the book went against her nature. “But I felt if I did it, it might get more kids adopted,” she says. “When we were matched with our daughter, and I became a ridiculously, gushingly happy mom, it dawned on me—I think I’m supposed to be using my big mouth to talk about adoption.”

Parents who adopt children, Nia says, all share a secret. “If the standard route of creating a family had worked for me, I wouldn’t have met this child,” Nia says. “I needed to know her. I needed to be her mother. We got invited to a club we didn’t think we could ever get into.”

An Evening with Nia Vardalos

A BENEFIT FOR LSSI

Join us for an evening with Nia Vardalos. Nia shares her adoption journey as chronicled in her book, “Instant Mom.”

APRIL 30, 2014
CHICAGO ILLUMINATING COMPANY

Tickets available now at LSSI.org

Sponsored by Lutheran Social Services of Illinois.
This Little Light of Mine

Intouch Home Care services give people that extra little bit — or a lot — of help to remain at home.
Alzheimer’s Disease can rob you of memories, but it doesn’t need to steal your dignity.

That’s why Melanie Andres found 24-hour in-home care for her 88-year-old mom, Peggy Anderson, rather than find a nursing home.

“With Intouch,” Melanie says, “Mom is in the home she loves.”

Peggy is one of many people receiving in-home care from Intouch, a program of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI). Care can range from an occasional visit and help with simple chores, to round-the-clock care.

Finding the help you need

To find the care her mom deserved, Melanie turned to fellow parishioners. “Because Intouch is Lutheran-based, I knew the people would take care of more than Mom’s physical needs; they would care about her emotions, her spirituality, and her dignity.”

Melanie gets emotional when she talks about the way LSSI caregivers bring something special to their time with Peggy.

“To Mom, these are friends who visit,” Melanie says. “Our caregivers know what she loves, and they do it. They make cards. They drink tea, and put a small treat into Mom’s favorite little bowl. One caregiver makes CDs of her favorite songs; they sing and walk with her, that’s how Mom gets exercise. Her favorite song is “This Little Light of Mine.” That’s how I feel about our caregivers. They are our light.”

One example is a project that two of the caregivers, Maureen and Sara, created over several months.

“Mom likes to tell stories, but with Alzheimer’s you lose those memories,” says Melanie. “Maureen and Sara began to write down the stories as Mom was telling them. My father was still alive, helping to correct them. Then Sara typed 25 stories, and when my nephew got married, they presented the couple with this box of stories Mom could read aloud. No one can teach this level of compassion. These are good people who know how to reach your loved one, and care for them as you would.”

When Melanie leaves for a few days to visit her daughter in California, she’s completely comfortable with the care her mom will receive.

“Our caregivers are amazing. They care with their hands and their heart,” Melanie says. “Alzheimer’s is a draining disease. They remain patient and kind, always looking for ways to give my mom beautiful moments and bountiful comfort.”

Experiences in Maureen’s personal life led her to LSSI’s Intouch program, where she can provide care and compassion to Peggy on a regular basis.
Life’s toughest moments develop compassion for caregiving

The gift to care so genuinely and deeply came from some surprising and sad places for caregiver Maureen.

When she was 31 and the mother of four, Maureen’s mom was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. Rather than take control of the final months, Maureen surrendered to her mom’s lead. “I wanted to give her the independence and dignity she craved, to help her be graceful into the end of her humanity. We relied on the meaning and purpose she found in her rituals of faith. That was not the way Maureen handled the unexpected death of her sister, who was only 49 years old and the mother of five. It was impossible to process, and she reacted with anger, disappointment, and disillusionment. “My heart was only feeling pain; I felt cheated by unspoken words. I felt powerless. It took a long time for God to bring compassion into my heart,” says Maureen. “Both of these experiences led me to LSSI, and the opportunity to share time with people who need someone to be fully present in their needs.”

Now in her third year with LSSI as an Intouch home care assistant, Maureen is “transforming fear into love. I feel blessed to be able to put light moments into my clients’ lives by allowing them to teach me their needs. Caregiving is compassion, empathy, and passion in the moment.”

“I know they care about me”

Monique Streff has been in some type of therapy since she was in kindergarten. Now 54, cerebral palsy has dulled her physical capabilities, but not her spirit.

Monique’s sister, Denise, called Intouch last year, when her mother needed a little help with Monique’s personal care. More than caregivers, Monique considers them friends. “How can I describe them? Kind, warm, and caring. They help me with things other people take for granted. We don’t just focus on personal care, we have fun too. I don’t know what our family would do without Intouch,” Monique’s sister told program director Julie Russell.

Caregiver Colleen Murray understands this approach. A junior at Northeastern Illinois University studying social services, she works for LSSI on days she is not in class. Colleen’s experience has helped her become a better caregiver. “I’ve been able to keep people living independently because of the care I provide,” says Colleen. “Some have a mobility issue, and just need help doing laundry and other tasks. Mostly, they want to visit. Others need much more help. As a social work student, there is nothing more important to me than to make sure people are treated with respect and dignity in their care. I am proud to be part of this field. My heart is filled. LSSI has given me a good foundation for the future.”

How you can help

“I donate to LSSI because I’m a lifelong Lutheran, and giving back is important in our church — it’s the right thing to do,” said Gerhard Haigis, a longtime donor to senior programs at LSSI. “I give to seniors in particular, because it’s a terrible thing to be old and poor in this country. I noticed that right away when I came here as a young man from Germany. That’s why it’s so important for those of us who have been blessed, to share with those at the end of their lives, to help them live with dignity, and to stay in their own homes for as long as possible.”

Intouch Home Care Services receives critical philanthropic funding from individuals, private foundations, churches, and local United Way agencies. LSSI gratefully acknowledges these partnerships, which recently included grants from the Russell and Josephine Kott Memorial Charitable Trust, Michael Kott, Craig Lusthoff and Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation, Co-Trusters; the Doris and Victor Day Foundation; the Moline Foundation, and the United Way of the Quad Cities.
A letter to her mom’s caregivers.

Melanie Anderson writes about what caregivers mean to her mom.

Looking for in-home care? What can you expect? That’s a question I am occasionally asked. After all, I have become quite knowledgeable. Where to start? Of course, there are the obvious pamphlet promises: Handling all personal care issues, help with dressing, making meals, laundry, light cleaning, taking blood pressure daily, medication reminders, daily movement to maintain physical strength and flexibility… These are obvious services that are a given in home health. But what IS a caregiver? A good caregiver? A quality caregiver? She is all this, and more.

At our home, our caregivers do all of the above. But what we value in you is not just “basic services.” Each of you is unique with your own gifts. One of the biggest challenges is keeping Mom as pain-free as possible, by encouraging her to stand/walk throughout the day and by getting her to exercise daily. Thinking of fun activities that incorporate exercise, doing it with her — these are some of the ways you have found to maintain Mom’s physical strength. And the massages! She has come to love her therapeutic massages. Then there is the skill of knowing how to distract her when her feet and hands go crazy. You have found so many different ways to ease her discomfort and her anxiety.

Another challenge is finding ways every day to stimulate Mom cognitively. As you have gotten to know her, to know how she thinks, to know what is important to her, you have found ways to reach her. Each of you does it in a different way, and that in itself is wonderful. I cannot begin to list everything. I wish I had kept my own journal along the way of the wonderful activities, the singing, praying, reading, game playing, baking, gift-making, card creating, story sharing… and through it all, talking with Peggy as though with a friend. These activities, and more, have helped slow the progression of her Alzheimer’s more than I would have believed.

Still another crucial part of caregiving is maintaining Mom’s dignity. Mom does not just get a shower. She gets a hair set and style twice a week. She sits with a friend and gets a manicure. She selects her clothes for the day. She has friends who watch TV, and talk with her about what she’s watching. She has friends who sing with her — old songs, hymns, carols — or play CDs she likes. She has friends to share a cup of tea or coffee, and a cookie. She has friends who love listening to her share her stories or to look through photo albums. She has friends who help her to create cards and gifts to give to others. You have her help by drying the dishes, even if you have to get a few dry ones wet, so she can feel useful.

All of these help her have a positive sense of herself. I read once that those who suffer dementia may not remember what they did, but the feeling they experience remains with them for a long time. I find that to be true.

The most important gift of all is the manner in which you go about your shifts. You all work such long days and nights. I could not do what you do. And you do it with quiet caring and respect. Or not so quiet sometimes, which is an energy that is also important for Mom’s joyful spirit. She was quite exuberant herself in years past, often a sense of embarrassment in my early years! But it’s wonderful to see flashes of that Mom. You find ways to touch who she was, and still can be. You make her feel valued as a human being, not just someone to check up on, to see if she has an immediate need, but as someone whose company you enjoy. I know on some level she understands she has caregivers. However, we always refer to you as people who come to visit. It makes her happy. That makes me happy. It is not just recipe caring, but from-the-heart caring.

So what do I answer when asked about our situation? I say that we have the best care imaginable. We have caregivers who have become part of our family.
Becoming a Family

Giving every child a safe and stable home – how LSSI is working with foster families to make it happen

Every year on National Adoption Day, thousands of children formally celebrate what they already feel in their hearts: they have a “Forever Family.”

On National Adoption Day 2013, right here in Illinois, Zander and the Barkley family marked the beginning of a new chapter in a story that unfolds each day. Zander came to the Barkleys when he was just nine months old. Now three years old, they are the only family Zander has ever known, and they are the only family he’ll ever need.

Stepping out in faith

Becoming a foster care home was not a decision Laura Barkley and her husband, Craig, took lightly. Laura has always been interested in foster care. Craig was hesitant, especially with three active children: Gracie, 12; Mikayla, 10; and Jonah, 6.

They researched, talked, argued, and prayed. Finally, they connected with Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), because they believe that all children need safe and stable homes. They took foster care classes, knowing that if things didn’t feel right, they could always say no.

“We had moments of fear and doubt when we thought we would stop,” Laura recalls. “But instead of stepping away from the classes, we stepped out in our faith.”

The day their foster care license arrived in the mail, they received a call about bringing Zander into their home for the weekend. They said “yes.”

Zander has been with them ever since.

While he was their first placement, he has not been their last. Since licensing, the Barkleys have welcomed three more foster care children, and plan to provide a foster care home for many more.

Opening home and heart

Similar to many families contemplating foster care, “We were battling misconceptions,” says Laura. “Unfortunately, people only hear negative stories in the news, never the successes. We were opening our home and our hearts to children we didn’t know. But we also knew it would make us a stronger, more compassionate family.”

Zander (shown with his uncle) has been with the Barkleys since he was nine months old. This fall, a huge family gathering celebrated the day he came became a Barkley forever.
While going through the classes, Laura and Craig were often asked about the health and stability of the children they might foster.

“Our answer was simple,” she says. “You have no certainty about your own children, and the issues they might face in their lives. It is the same with foster children. There are unknowns. It doesn’t matter if you are a biological parent or a foster parent. You do your best with each situation as it arises; you give children a safe and stable home, and you love them.”

Pushing past the questions and the struggles

Zander was premature, very small, and very sick. Yet when Laura took him into her arms, she knew that if adoption was an option, they would pursue that path.

Six months after having Zander placed in foster care, his parents signed over their rights, opening the door for the Barkleys to adopt. “In the beginning, the goal is always to reunite the family,” says Shevawn Svehla, adoption supervisor for LSSI. “And sometimes, depending on that situation, that goal can change. That was the situation with Zander.”

“As the foster parent, I respect that the biological parents have given these children life and for that I am thankful,” Laura adds. “I have seen first-hand the brokenness in families. Many can’t do better because they were raised in brokenness, too. God’s passion and grace allows me to see that everyone is trying, but sometimes, that’s just not enough.”

Zander struggled with respiratory and scores of other health issues as a fragile infant. He fought through, and now he’s a very active little boy, who is exceptionally talented at sports.

National Adoption Day, the day Zander became a Barkley forever, was a huge family celebration — one
Laura would like to use foster to help people understand foster care and adoption, and especially the positive effect on the foster family's children.

Laura has countless examples of how her kids have helped foster children feel safe, loved, and part of a family. The Barkley children have learned to sacrifice, that sometimes fun events can be overwhelming for a foster child.

“Children are patient, they are kind,” Laura says. “Because of the situations we’ve been through, when my daughter saw a boy misbehaving at school, she didn’t assume the child was bad. She said, ‘There must be something happening in his life that would make him act that way.’ Foster care has helped my children become more empathetic, understanding, compassionate people. They understand that while moms and dads love their children, some are too sick to care for them. And that is a role we can fill as a family: to love those children.”

**Positive people, positive results**

National Adoption Day celebrates the positive results of the work done by LSSI staff.

“Our first mission is to return these children to their biological families,” says Shevawn. “When that isn’t possible, that’s when we pursue the path of foster care, with the hope to find a ‘Forever Family’ through adoption.”

The process of fostering to adoption, Shevawn says, can be a very long road. “These children have already endured so much, and their resilience is amazing. To see foster kids join a ‘Forever Family’ makes my job worthwhile.”

LSSI collaborates with other agencies to make National Adoption Day a reality, including the Department of Children and Family Service (DCFS) and the court system, as well as the community.

“LSSI guides families through the process,” says Shevawn. “This program is critical to the success of our communities and local families. We are deeply rooted in the community, and with that support, we can make sure our children have the homes they deserve.”
Andre Hobbs (right) is uniquely qualified to help returning citizens learn new skills and connect with the resources needed to build a positive life.
"I believe there is hope for everybody." When Andre Hobbs, 49, speaks those words, it’s easy to believe him. He spent much of his life running afoul of the law, and at age 39 was sentenced to seven years in prison for armed robbery. “To go to prison at age 39 was a huge wake-up call,” he says. In prison, he turned to the Bible for the first time in his life, and discovered profound meaning in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians that speaks of love. He realized, “I want to change my life, and I need to do it now.”

Andre made good on that promise to himself. Today, he works as an outreach worker for Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), at the organization’s new Re-entry Services for Returning Citizens program, located in Rockford, that opened in November 2013. The program, specifically for ex-offenders returning to their homes in Winnebago County, is meeting a critical demand. Of the 25,464 people released into the supervised parole system in Illinois in Fiscal Year 2012, 869 were returning citizens to Winnebago County, according to the Illinois Department of Corrections. The Re-entry Services program is a collaborative effort with the city of Rockford and Winnebago County, working jointly with the Winnebago County Board and staff, to provide needed services.

Andre recognizes that he is uniquely qualified to work with returning citizens because he has walked their path. He is a living example that individuals released from prison can build a positive life as contributing members of society, and he’s made it his life’s work to help fellow returning citizens. Working alongside Andre are three other outreach workers, Pamela Thompson, Gary Merkel, and AmeriCorps worker Quin Juni.

Re-entry Services in Winnebago County duplicates the success of the same program in the southern part of the state: Marion and Metro East St. Louis. Part of LSSI’s Prison and Family Ministry, Re-entry Services for Returning Citizens is based on restorative justice principles of helping formerly imprisoned men and women become accountable, and give back to their community. It is a multi-faceted program that provides returning citizens with meaningful skills, training, and continuing services to become productive and responsible members of their communities. LSSI teams up with churches and other organizations to connect returning citizens to the resources they need to create a new life.

Re-entry Services, like the other programs within LSSI’s Prison and Family Ministry, is supported by contributions from churches, individuals, and private foundations, as well as government sources. The Re-entry Services Program in Winnebago County recently received funding from the United Way of Rock River Valley and the Winnebago County Bar Foundation to assist in its implementation.
Meeting Basic Needs Provides a Starting Point

With precious few resources, and high expectations for them to build a new life from scratch, returning citizens face a harsh reality when they leave prison.

Mike Davis, Associate Executive Director, who oversees LSSI’s Prisoner and Family Ministry services, has 15 years of experience working with people released from prison and their families. He vividly recalls working at a shelter that provided temporary housing for men released from prison. “Guys showed up in T-shirts, sweatpants, and sneakers. That was it,” he says. “That was the sum total of their belongings.”

Numerous studies conclude that parolees often have difficulty managing the most basic ingredients for successful reintegration—reconnecting with jobs, housing, and their families—and accessing critical substance abuse and health care treatment. In addition, barriers that returning citizens face include: lack of food, clothing, transportation, and housing; the need for assistance in obtaining identification, employment, education, childcare, healthcare, and the lack of encouragement and help from a support group, mentor, or family members.

The Re-entry Program provides a host of wrap-around services to immediately address these needs. Clients are referred from the Illinois Department of Corrections Parole Division. “The parole division does a fantastic job working with us,” says Mike. “They want to see these men and women succeed as much as we do.”

Case Management is the first line of defense for returning citizens that specifically targets critical areas in need of intensive support. Once referred, returning citizens receive comprehensive case management for an entire year. Re-entry Services staff work one-on-one with clients to comprehensively assess their needs and risks, and to establish an individualized care plan that includes short- and long-term goals. The assessment can detail as many as 25 areas of need, including the very basic, such as a state identification card and clothing. Each returning citizen receives a hygiene kit with basic items such as soap, deodorant, and a toothbrush. It’s a small, yet symbolic step, toward a fresh start.

According to Bureau of Justice reports, about half of all former prisoners are returned to prison for a new crime or parole violation within three years. Based on data from LSSI’s Re-entry Programs in Marion and Metro East St. Louis, the program significantly lowers the rate of recidivism among those re-entering society, and assists in the stabilization of the entire family through services that support the returning citizen and his or her family members. Barriers like unemployment and a lack of job skills are common experiences among returning citizens. The core components of Re-entry Services are designed to prepare newly released individuals with job knowledge, experience, and trade skills that will allow them to obtain a job and earn wages.

Showing Love and Care

“We are very relational in how we approach the men and women in our program,” says Mike, referring to the strong emphasis placed on building positive relationships—with family members or an employer—and learning to trust and make new friends. “There is not a normal day in the life of a prisoner. There is a loss of interpersonal communication. I get that—they’re in prison. But we should not deny the impact it has on returning citizens.”

Andre can attest to the importance of developing positive relationships, something he said he lacked for most of his life. After he was released from prison, Andre spent six months at a halfway house in suburban Chicago. Yet even after moving to Rockford to be near his brother, and avoiding returning to his old neighborhood that offered no prospects for a new life, a caseworker from the halfway house continued to check in with him. It showed Andre that someone cared, and that made a difference.

“I can relate to these individuals,” Andre says of his clients. “This is a chance to give back. It’s not about a job—it’s about showing love. I used to think that was an unmanly way to operate, and boy was I wrong. This job is about showing our clients love, and showing them I care. There are opportunities for men and women who have made mistakes in their lives. Society says once you offend, you will offend again. Giving back to society is an awesome experience. If a man or woman comes out of prison and they don’t think anyone cares, they’re going to go back to what they know. We first have to show them love.”

As part of the program, clients are enrolled in support groups that are held at various churches in the community. Family members and children are welcome, and the groups create fellowship that includes a meal, worship service, and guest speakers who address relevant topics to returning citizens.

LSSI’s Prison and Family Ministry embodies the organization’s mission: Responding to the Gospel, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois brings healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities. Mike, a former parish pastor, identifies strongly with the mission, as do a great many people with whom he shares the merits of the program—it’s the right thing to do. Yet from a strictly bottom-line standpoint, the program also makes sense: in Illinois, the average cost per year to keep an individual in prison is $35,000. The alternative—keeping someone from returning to
prison—is much cheaper, and opens up endless possibilities for renewed lives. “Life is about being something that is bigger than them,” Mike says. “If we can bring our returning citizens to that point, I guarantee they will not go back to prison.”

Building Success
Mike is adamant that the programs within LSSI’s Prison and Family Ministry employ returning citizens. “Like Andre, in every one of our programs, we have walking proof,” he says. “It shows returning citizens that they, too, can make it.”

In just two months, the Re-entry Services for Returning Citizens program in Winnebago County has provided assessments to 20 clients, half of the number who have been referred to the program. As the Re-entry Services Program becomes more established, additional components beyond case management will be added, similar to those already in place in southern Illinois. These include:

Employment Skills School, a 30-day, computer-based program designed especially for returning citizens who are seeking employment. Components include all aspects of employment training, an open computer lab for employment and educational-related activities, intensive career development services, and periodic career counseling services for at least one year.

Scholarship Trades Program, is an on-the-job training program for returning citizens. Activities include working with dedicated community organizations in a scholarship work program for up to 90 days, supervision, and connections with the local community in meaningful ways.

Also offered is Green Re-entry Opportunities, a collaborative effort of planting and harvesting community gardens. Activities include working with churches, community organizations, and the University of Illinois Extension, to help returning citizens plant and maintain community gardens.

As these programs are introduced in Winnebago County, returning citizens will have further opportunities for growth and positive transformation. “Every man and woman has the ability to change,” says Andre. “You need to commit to people, whether it’s time, encouragement, love, scripture. Every man and woman can be reached. I believe there is hope for everybody. I tell every client that I work with, ‘You didn’t become this way overnight. Now it’s another process to become the man or woman God meant for you to be.’”

“This is a chance to give back. It’s not about a job—it’s about showing love.”
This donation – one vehicle – is changing lives far and wide. From its first day of service on December 9, 2013, the van has not sat idle. Staff has already logged hundreds of trips, and thousands of miles with children in foster care.

The generous gift of a new van has made it possible for LSSI staff to get foster kids safely where they need to go.
To some, a van is just transportation. To others, it’s a lifeline; the difference between getting desperately needed help and support – or feeling stranded and alone.

One anonymous donor knew just how important a new van could be to Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) Southern Region. Here, 70 employees serve 450 children and families with a wide variety of programs: foster care, Intact Families, counseling, adoptions and licensing.

**Parental visits key to success**

LSSI ensures that every one of the 351 children in their Southern region foster care is entitled to see a biological parent at least once per month during the first nine months of the program. This is one of the ways LSSI ensures that the family stays bonded and connected on the path toward eventual reunifying. These children also must get to court hearings, doctor visits, counseling, and sibling visits.

Logistically, it’s a nightmare, but it’s a necessity. This one donation—one vehicle—is changing lives far and wide. From its first day of service on December 9, 2013, the van has not sat idle. Staff has already logged hundreds of trips, and thousands of miles with children ranging in age from birth to 18.

Eve Rossin, LSSI Southern Region Program Director, says that before the 2014 seven-passenger van arrived, there just wasn’t enough transportation to go around. Staff were forced to rent vehicles—a much more challenging and expensive proposition, taking valuable time away from basic services, and putting children at risk of missing visits.

“They families have been taken apart, and we’re trying to help them rebuild,” says Linda Reiss, Associate Executive Director, Southern Region. “As we work to create a safer, healthier home environment, we need these children to feel connected to Mom and Dad, to their siblings. Sometimes the only thing that motivates parental change is a visit with their children. These children need so much—and they deserve so much more. With this donation, we are one step closer to being able to give them that.”

**Through the eyes of a child**

Linda recalls a recent visit; an imprisoned mom had a four-hour visit with her three children – one child was only four years old. It wasn’t Mom’s face Linda remembers when the kids walked in the door of the secured visitation room; it was the eyes of the children as they ran to her.

“At such a young age and vulnerable place, these kids just need to know that Mom is in a safe place,” Linda says. “They are not concerned that the place is prison. They see Mom; they know she is okay. When they leave, they start counting the days until their next visit.
They trust that we will get them there. With this donation, we are providing more than transportation. We are providing reassurance and building trust in children who have lost so much.”

Safe, reliable transportation is not something the staff takes for granted.

“Several of our other vehicles have surpassed 250,000 miles,” laughs Eve. “You can’t take those across the state or even across town. With this new van, we feel safe. We know we can get our kids where they need to go, when they need to get there – whether it’s a planned parental visit, or an emergency trip to the doctor.”

“This donation makes us more effective, efficient, able to handle daily tasks and emergencies, support families, help children, react to situations, proactively plan, and support the efforts of our employees,” adds Linda. “One van, one donation, does make a difference.”

“One van – one donation – does make a difference.”

Make a Contribution to LSSI Today!

We offer many opportunities and options for giving:

- Cash, Check, Charge
- Gift Annuity
- Designation Gifts
- Direct Gift Payments
- Gift of Securities
- Legacy Gifts/Cornerstone Foundation
- Thrivent Financial Members
- Special Fundraising Events
- Gifts In-Kind

Thank you for considering making a gift to Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) and becoming a partner in our work.

Contact us to learn more at LSSI.org or 847.635.4600.
Crowdsourcing Care

There was a time in America when individual families—often extended families—provided the social safety net for all of their kin. If parents were unable to raise their children, grandparents or aunts and uncles stepped in to provide needed care.

In the time after the American Civil War, organizations like unions and benevolent associations began to take increasing responsibility for the welfare of people and families associated with their particular group. It was out of that dynamic, that Swedish Lutheran congregations on the Northwest prairie of Illinois united to create Andover Children’s Home to care for those who were orphaned by a cholera epidemic that devastated families in the region. Andover Children’s Home was the first ministry in what eventually evolved into Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI). It was created and sustained by the combined generosity and effort of many people and congregations working together for the common good.

During most of the 20th century, governments at all levels took increasing responsibility for the care of people who, for a variety of reasons, could not care for themselves. Thus arose such programs as Social Security and Medicare. In Europe and elsewhere, the same dynamic led to the development of the so-called welfare state. The understanding behind the concept was that all of us—through our taxes—would share the burden of caring for those of us who need assistance. Once again, it was pooling the resources of many, to pay for what was deemed necessary to promote the common good.

Now we are in an era in which governments at all levels are loath to raise adequate taxes to pay the increasing cost of caring for vulnerable people. There is a broad sentiment that the private sector—and especially charitable and faith-based organizations like congregations and LSSI—should have a larger role in the care of people in need, and governments should get out of the business of providing human care services.

As people of faith, and as faithful citizens, we must challenge the notion that government is not responsible for social welfare, or the common good. At the same time, we must be clear that government is not the sole institution in our society responsible for the care of our vulnerable neighbors. The reality is that the public sector (government) and the private sector (businesses and charitable institutions) share responsibility for the common good.

If each person of goodwill would take responsibility for the care of just one person in need, we would live in a society in which no one was left out, or left behind. But that’s neither practical nor realistic. Instead, both through our taxes, and voluntary charitable donations to organizations that provides care to needy neighbors, we “crowdsource” our care. What no single person can do alone, all of us can do together.

At Lutheran Day in Springfield, on Tuesday, May 13, 2014, hundreds of Lutherans and other people of goodwill, who embrace our notion of shared responsibility for the care of people in need, will gather to learn more about how the public and private sectors can work together to advance the common good. We will share our common commitment to ensure that no person in Illinois is deprived of adequate nutrition, safe and affordable housing, high-quality health care, access to a good education, skill development training, and other human services that address a variety of disabling conditions. We will pledge to do our part to strengthen the caring institutions, such as LSSI, that do so much of the “hands on” care for people in need in Illinois. We will advocate very publicly for strengthening the state government’s commitment to programs that provide support for people in need.

We will also recognize an outstanding public official in Illinois, who shows unusual courage in support of the common good, by giving that individual the annual Paul Simon Courage in Public Service Award.

I hope you plan to participate in Lutheran Day in Springfield on May 13th. I would like to encourage you to nominate an Illinois public official whom you think should be considered for the Simon Award. To register for Lutheran Day, and/or to nominate a person to receive the Simon Award, please visit www.LutheranDay.org. For more information, please call at 847.390.1418, or e-mail Dan.Schwick@LSSI.org.

I look forward to seeing you in Springfield, and joining with you in advocating for the ultimate crowdsourced funding platform for human care in Illinois!

The Rev. Daniel Schwick
Vice President, Church and Public Engagement

Hands@Work
Our veterans pledged to love our country, trust in the justice of our cause, keep faithful and loyal. Their service demanded great courage, deep dedication, and high motivation. And as proudly as they served, others now have the privilege to return that honor.

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) has been awarded an AmeriCorps grant to provide free caregiver support services to veteran and military families. LSSI is one of only 17 agencies in the United States selected to participate in this grant, known as the “Legacy Corps for Health and Independent Living.”

Helping those who served—and the people they love

Legacy Corps members receive a monthly stipend to provide 10-12 hours per week of care for veterans and respite for caregivers. Last year, Legacy Corps volunteers provided 22,500 hours of support and respite—preventing the isolation, physical and mental stress, and exhaustion that can impair both a veteran and a caregiver.

Peg Saintcross started as a Legacy Corps volunteer, and is now the Legacy Corps Program manager. “There’s something here for everyone, especially in the expansive geographic area we serve,” she says. “Right now about 50 volunteers cover more than 12,000 square miles.”

Making connections that count

For many volunteers, just like our veterans, the need to serve is so strong, that they can’t imagine doing anything else.

“Just like veterans need a mission, so do volunteers,” says Peg. “To expand the number of people we can serve and the types of volunteers we can accommodate, we are now recruiting part-

The Leenys rely on Legacy Corps member, Tony Saintcross, to care for Jim while Joan runs errands or tends to her own health needs.
On a Mission

Legacy Corps volunteers take care of our veterans—and the faithful loved ones by their sides
time volunteers. In the past, the average age of a volunteer was 55, and the average age of a recipient was 60. Now, volunteers can be as young as 17, and some of the people we’re serving are only 20. This opens up a whole new world of service for those who need us the most.”

Jim and Joan Leeney, married for 45 years, are two of those people. Jim served in the Army during the Vietnam conflict. On April 22, 2005, their lives changed forever when Jim, 62, had a massive stroke. As a result, he can no longer walk, talk, read, or write.

But he can still communicate. After 45 years, Joan and Jim still make each other laugh. But even the strongest of individuals can feel isolated under the constant strain of full-time caregiving.

That was Joan, until she found Legacy Corps. With the help of volunteers, she was able to leave for errands, and do household chores, without worrying about Jim.

For Joan, “Legacy Corps changed my life. I am waging my own battle against cancer, and had a kidney removed in October. That experience has made me even more grateful for Legacy Corps volunteers.”

Joan doesn’t spend a moment lamenting their health situation. “Who does it help to feel sorry for yourself? Instead, we celebrate every day God gives us. Ours has been a wonderful journey. This illness has damaged Jim’s body but not his soul.”

Jim can still sing and every night they sing grace together:

Dear Lord, we thank you for food to eat;
Dear Lord, we thank you for friends to meet;
Dear Lord, we thank you for strength each day;
And for your love as you show us the way.

“Over time, I’ve seen the strength and resilience of the human mind and spirit, and the power of just being present and in the moment,” Diane says.

She continues to serve, she says, because of the people she meets and what she learns. “We have experienced what it’s like to be in a wheelchair, to have macular degeneration, to be unable to use your hands. To know what it feels like to rely on someone else,” she says. “That’s how we are able to help other people—to know just a little bit about what their struggles might be like.”

Alice Saracco, 89, has been a client since 2008. She and her husband, Anthony, were married just shy of 67 years when Anthony died in 2012. Legacy Corps volunteers have made it possible for Alice and her 66-year-old son, Rocco, to remain living in their home.

“I wouldn’t ask them to do anything I wouldn’t do, it’s just I can’t get to high places anymore, or handle the vacuum cleaner,” Alice says. “These seem like little things, but to me and Rocco, they are such a big help.”

Alice hopes when she is no longer able to be in her home, Rocco, who is mentally disabled, can stay—and with the help of Legacy Corps, her dream can come true.
Amercians have long been noted for their generosity, with about 80 percent of people making at least one charitable gift during any given year. Yet even with donors giving a total of $500 or more annually, fewer than 10 percent have designated charities in their estate plan. What is it that makes these donors so unique?

Philanthropic studies have shown that all donors understand one critical fact: giving makes a person feel good. Generosity is enjoyable! The “reward areas” of the brain light up when a person makes a charitable gift. But there is a significant difference between those who give to a current need, and those who make a planned gift.

Think about it this way: How likely would you be to make a donation to LSSI within the next three months? And then: If you signed a will in the next three months, how likely would you be to name LSSI as a beneficiary?

Most people are far more likely to make a donation than to include an organization in their will. Why? Because naming a charity as part of one’s estate plan implies a much deeper relationship than giving a single gift; it is a clear statement from the donor: I see LSSI and its mission to serve the most vulnerable people in Illinois as a part of my life’s story.

This is why colleges and universities often receive estate gifts: the donor recognizes the time spent in college as an important part of their autobiography. Grateful patients often leave legacy gifts to hospitals or research facilities working on cures for diseases.

In choosing to remember Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) and The Cornerstone Foundation in your estate plan, you tell the world that remembering those in need is an important part of your life’s story. You bear witness to the verse from Matthew: ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

You already know how good it makes you feel when you donate to one of LSSI’s programs, or give a memorial to LSSI in someone’s honor. You may not have thought of it in these terms before, but LSSI has become a part of your life’s story! Thank you for remembering LSSI in your estate plan.

For more information about making a legacy gift to LSSI through The Cornerstone Foundation, kindly contact Maryann Aimone, Vice President for Advancement, and Executive Director of The Cornerstone Foundation at 847.635.4671, or Frances Roth, Advancement Coordinator for The Cornerstone Foundation at 847.635.4678.

Giving Through Legacy Gifts
A gift to the Cornerstone Foundation builds a lasting legacy.

WHAT IS A LEGACY GIFT?
Also known as planned gifts, legacy gifts include those made through your will, charitable gift annuities, charitable trusts, gifts of life insurance, gifts from bank or investment accounts, and gifts of retirement plans. These gifts require thoughtful and deliberate planning.

The Cornerstone Foundation was created to receive legacy gifts to Lutheran Social Services of Illinois. Funds held by the Foundation provide financial support for current LSSI programs and continued support for future years.

WHAT ARE THE FEATURES?
Helping today and tomorrow. Responding to the Gospel, The Cornerstone Foundation is the endowment that helps ensure the ministries and future of LSSI.
Acknowledged. An acknowledgement of your gift will be sent to the recipient.
Affordable. Donations can be made in any amount you feel is appropriate.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?
Lasting legacy. Even after you’re gone, you can live on through continued good deeds.
Tax savings. Leaving some of your estate to LSSI may reduce the estate tax burden of your beneficiaries.
The Christopher Family Foundation received the 2013 Amicus Certus (“True Friend”) Award at the 32nd Annual Amicus Certus Celebration on October 26, 2013. “We are extremely pleased to honor The Christopher Family Foundation with this award,” says David M.A. Jensen, LSSI President. “The Christopher Family Foundation has been such a faithful partner with LSSI, in particular, by helping us realize our dream of providing all of the foster children in our program with a Lifebook, as well as sharing this important tool with child welfare practitioners outside of our agency.”

The Amicus Certus Award is given annually to individuals or organizations that have made significant contributions to the human community. The Christopher Family Foundation has been a major benefactor of LSSI’s Post-Adoption Services and its Lifebook program, which provides this therapeutic tool to help foster children make sense of their lives.

The 2013 Amicus Certus Celebration, hosted by the Women’s Network of LSSI, raised more than $115,000 for LSSI’s Children’s Community Services, which provides foster care, adoption and other services for children and families.

Inspired News

Amicus Certus Award Presented to The Christopher Family Foundation

Eric Draut, Chairperson of LSSI, presenting Doris Christopher of The Christopher Family Foundation, with the Amicus Certus Award.

Thank you to the following foundations and organizations for their generous support of our work at LSSI of “bringing healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities in need”:

- Aileen S. Andrew Foundation
- Anonymous (2)
- Caterpillar Foundation
- Daniel F. & Ada L. Rice Foundation
- Dermody Properties Foundation
- ELCA Domestic Hunger Grant
- G. A. Ackermann Memorial Fund
- Galesburg Community Foundation
- George Eisenberg Foundation for Charities
- Grace Bersted Foundation
- Helen Brach Foundation
- Lloyd A. Fry Foundation
- The Orange Krush Foundation
- Poshard Foundation for Abused Children
- Russell & Josephine Kott Memorial Charitable Trust, Michael Kott, Craig Lusthoff and Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation, Co-Trustees

Save the Date

Amicus Certus 2014 will be held October 25th at European Crystal, 519 W. Algonquin Road, Arlington Heights, Illinois. Visit LSSI.org for more details.
Below is a list of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) programs featured in this issue.

**This Little Light of Mine — page 4**
Intouch Home Care Services ......................... 877.709.9177
A service for older adults and their families, providing (non-medical) home care, so they can maintain their lives in the community, and remain in their homes. To learn more, visit LSSI.org

**Becoming a Family — page 8**
Adoption Services ........................................ 888.671.0300
Foster Care Services ................................. 888.322.5774

**Finding Hope in New Beginnings — page 12**
Re-entry Services for Returning Citizens .............. 618.997.9076 ext. 861
A vital service that prepares individuals who are incarcerated for successful transitions back to their communities once they’re released.

**Turning the Wheels in the Right Direction — page 16**
Foster Care Services in Southern Illinois ............. 888.322.5774

**On a Mission — page 20**
Legacy Corps ............................................. 847.293.0728
Support Services for veterans and military members, in order to alleviate some of the demands on caregivers.

**Inspiration Page**
**The Women’s Network of LSSI — Back Cover**
LSSI Central Service Office ......................... 847.635.4600
A volunteer organization, the Women’s Network of LSSI raises funds and awareness for the agency.

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**Salem House Has a New Name and Location**
As of January 15th, the new program name is Intouch Chicago South. The new name highlights both our service, and our service area.

The new location for Intouch Chicago South is 815 West 63rd Street, Chicago, IL 60621, and is located in the U.S. Bank building. The new location is accessible by public transportation, located one block from the Green Line, and right across the street from the bus stop at Halsted and 63rd. In addition, the location is conveniently close to the expressway.

To learn more, call 773.873.3403, or stop by and say hello.

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**Connect with us on Facebook and Twitter**
Learn about what’s new at LSSI, upcoming events, and the many ways you can partner with us.

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**Subscribe to Good Works**
Good Works, a biweekly e-newsletter, features a variety of inspiring stories about people served by Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), along with news of good things that are happening throughout LSSI and its programs. To sign up, e-mail info@LSSI.org.
Join us on MAY 3RD, 2014, as we celebrate 30 years with the Grand Finale Forget-Me-Not Brunch and Fashion Show. This year’s event will be held at The Stonegate, 2401 W. Higgins Road, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. For more information, call Ed Newton at 847.635.4656, or email Edward.Newton@LSSI.org.