

# Eye on LSSI

A look at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

SUMMER 2013



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois is the statewide social service agency of the Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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**MISSION STATEMENT**

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

**VISION STATEMENT**

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois,  
as one agency with many expressions,  
will create community by graciously  
serving as both the employer and  
provider of choice.

[www.LSSI.org](http://www.LSSI.org)

**ON THE COVER...**

Mary Sue Waite, LSSI Lifebook specialist, works with Asa, 3, on his Lifebook. Since the Lifebook program's inception in 2008, more than 3,000 foster children in LSSI's care have received Lifebooks, and specialists like Waite have directly worked one-on-one with more than 600 children, assisting them and their families in creating a Lifebook, a meaningful record of their lives.

PHOTO BY ALEX PASCHAL

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois does not discriminate in admission to programs or employment in compliance with the law.



# Eye on LSSI

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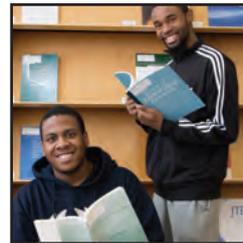
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I am honored to address our readers for the first time in this space, a pleasant task which falls to me after the recent retirement of Pastor Denver Bitner, our President and CEO, and it is with a few words of appreciation for Pastor Bitner that I will begin.

During the four years of Pr. Bitner's leadership, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) achieved growth in the number of people we

serve, set new strategic directions, began forging new collaborations, increased public visibility for the needs of the people we serve and developed new service initiatives. All of this has occurred within an increasingly difficult economic environment in our state.

Those of us who have been fortunate to work with Pr. Bitner on a daily basis have found his insight, direction and encouragement to be invaluable. He has been a constant advocate for the people we serve, and his service has daily reaffirmed our mission: "Responding to the Gospel, LSSI brings healing, justice and wholeness to people and communities."

Pr. Bitner's duties called for him to deal with a wide variety of people, including prominent media figures and the highest public officials, but in my observation, he always took the greatest pleasure when he was with our clients and the people who serve them.

In fact, many of the people and LSSI programs you will read about in this issue of *Eye on LSSI* — including LSSI's

Hands@Work program, which helps ELCA congregations respond to social needs in their communities (see page 14) and the growth of LSSI's Lifebook program for foster children (page 6) — were inspired by Pr. Bitner's vision and passion for reaching out to people and communities.

We will certainly miss his regular presence, but will build on what he has done with us, and we wish him Godspeed in the next phase of his life of ministry and look forward to his continued service with us as President Emeritus.

For the present, executive duties for LSSI will be shared between Eric Draut, our Board Chair, who will be volunteering as part-time Executive Chairman, and me, as Interim President. We both have long experience with the agency, and have an excellent team both in management and our Board of Directors to support us.

We will be continuing on the strategic directions established during Pastor Bitner's tenure, with particular emphasis on achieving sustainability in our difficult economic environment. Lutheran Social Services of Illinois has a long history of faithfully meeting challenges, and we are confident that it will continue to do so.

With gratitude for your partnership in serving people in need,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David M.A. Jensen". The signature is fluid and cursive.

David M.A. Jensen  
Interim President

President Emeritus Pastor Denver Bitner has been a constant advocate for the people we serve, and his service has daily reaffirmed our mission: "Responding to the Gospel, LSSI brings healing, justice and wholeness to people and communities."



# Fostering Knowledge for the Good of Kids

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oster parents wear many hats in their caregiving role, but sometimes walking in the shoes of their young charges can make a world of

difference in the parent-child relationship.

“I wait for everyone to come into the room and find their space,” explains Patti Zullo, a Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) placement stabilization coordinator at LSSI’s Augustana Open Arms. “Once they’ve set down their cell phones just so and nested in a spot, I make them all move. They grumble. They don’t like it. They have to get comfortable all over again.”

Zullo serves as a trainer for LSSI’s trauma-informed training program for foster parents. She employs a variety of exercises to help them better understand the trauma their foster children may have undergone and how it influences their emotions and behaviors. Zullo has found that prompting sentiments of loss, fear and anger in the individuals participating in the training quickly gets the empathy juices flowing.

“I ask the parents how they feel about being unsettled,” she explains. “I tell them that if they feel disrupted just moving seats, imagine what children entering the foster care system must feel when strangers come and take them away from their family and home.”

## Foster children carry ‘invisible baggage’

Many children in the foster care system have experienced traumatizing events, including being separated from their birth parents. The effects of complex trauma or exposure to multiple traumatic events from physical, emotional and sexual abuse to neglect or family violence often don’t disappear once a child has been removed from an unstable situation. Children carry trauma like “invisible baggage.” Trauma manifests itself in emotions and behaviors triggered by events and sensations — from loud, angry voices to certain smells — that may not be obvious red flags to foster parents and other child welfare providers.

“Sometimes, foster parents think that fostering will be like an afterschool special,” says Zullo. “If they provide food and a safe home where no one is being beat up or high on drugs, then everything should be fine. Unfortunately, there are triggers everywhere for these children, no matter what their age.”

In June 2010, LSSI made a commitment to provide trauma-informed training for its foster parents. Using a curriculum developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, staff from LSSI’s Children’s Community Services have already trained more than 200 foster parents — potentially impacting some 500 foster children. The 10-hour training program

Kendall and Kiovanni, were first fostered, then adopted by Ron Guhl in 2010. He says LSSI’s trauma-based training helped him fine-tune his listening skills, a crucial part of being an effective foster parent.



adidas

teaches foster parents about complex trauma and how it shapes the emotions and behaviors of children. Short lectures, handouts and classroom exercises draw upon the specific experiences of participants to make the educational materials pertinent, practical and realistic.

“Foster parents too often look at the



Ron Guhl, a foster and adoptive parent, with Patti Zullo, a trainer for LSSI's Trauma-Informed Training for foster parents in Metro Chicago.

face value of a behavior without recognizing the meaning behind it,” says Marcia Weflen, associate executive director of LSSI's Children's Community Services. “The training helps them understand what may have affected the child so they can better respond.”

Most foster parents know that the children they bring into their homes have gone through extremely difficult times. But in the heat of the moment, when a child is acting out, caregivers often react rather than take a proactive, thoughtful approach. “The worst thing a foster parent can do is threaten that the child

will have to leave the foster home if he or she doesn't behave, which causes even more trauma,” continues Weflen.

“Ultimately, we are trying to improve stability by helping foster parents deliver the message that they will be there for these children through thick and thin.”

The training program encompasses eight learning modules. Topics range from trauma's effect on brain development and symptoms of post-traumatic stress to techniques foster parents can employ to aid the healing process. Participants discover that trauma resulting from child abuse or witnessing domestic violence leads to feelings of terror, helplessness and/or guilt that can drive behavioral problems.

“With knowledge comes the patience and power to choose the appropriate intervention and parenting techniques,” says Mary Alice Wentling, a clinical supervisor who co-teaches the trauma-informed training for LSSI's Rockford location.

Through the training, foster parents learn they must advocate for their foster children and actively participate as members of the foster care team. Says Zullo, “The role of foster parents is critical. They are caring for children of trauma, who all need healing. This training teaches them that basic parenting is not enough.”

### **Training benefits all**

Just after receiving their second foster child placement last August, Mark and Jennifer Meyers of Machesney, near Rockford, completed LSSI's trauma-informed training two months later. Caring for a sibling pair, Selena, 1, and Alex, 2, the first-time foster parents were eager to learn as

much as they could.

Prior to the training, the Meyers had been dealing with Alex's nightmares, which often followed visits with the child's biological parents. “He'd wake up screaming, and we would not be able to console him,” says Mark. “The training helped us to be more considerate of what was triggering his anxiety and what we could do to soothe him in advance.”

LSSI offers training to participants with varying levels of foster parent experience. While the program ideally should reach all newcomers to the foster care system, veteran foster parents benefit just as much, if not more, in some cases. Says Theresa Rone, a licensing and adoption supervisor who conducts the training for LSSI's Marion office, “The program, which is among the most valuable we provide, can give parents a new perspective.”

Laura and John Miller became foster parents nine years ago to baby Dhani, whom they adopted as their daughter. Three years ago, the downstate Illinois couple began fostering brothers James\*, 4, and Connor\*, 6, for what they thought would be a temporary stint. However, the biological mother and father of the two soon waived their parental rights. The siblings came to the Miller home with special needs and behavioral problems. The youngest would not only destroy property but also would hit pets as well as people, including Laura, who became his favorite target. The oldest never slept and would sneak out of the house. By the time the Millers attended the training last year, Laura says, “John and I were going back and forth on whether to keep the boys. We were almost ready to quit.”

The training proved crucial. It

“The role of foster parents is critical. They are caring for children of trauma, who all need healing.”



renewed the Millers' devotion to the children. Explains Laura, "It got us to take a step back and remember where these boys came from and why they suffer the issues they do." Currently, the Miller family, which includes four biological children and two grandchildren, is in the process of adopting the kids. The couple has also put into practice some of the lessons they learned about the importance of self-care for caregivers — a component of the training. "We realized we weren't taking a break for ourselves," says Laura. "So now, we get respite and try to spend time away from the kids."

The foster parent of three sibling brothers, Oak Lawn resident Ronald Guhl took advantage of LSSI's trauma-informed training. In addition to sharing experiences and brainstorming with other program participants, Ronald credits the training with fine-tuning his listening skills.

"The classes taught me to close my mouth and really listen before

responding with honesty," says the 47-year-old single dad. "Children need to be heard for us to help them."

For the past five years, Ronald has guided Kwame, 17; Kendall, 16; and Kiovanni, 11, through the highs and lows of growing up as foster children. His commitment to the boys — he adopted the two younger ones — has never wavered despite the fact all three children have special needs. While Ronald jokingly questions who is more traumatized, "the foster parent or the foster child?", thanks to the training he has learned to not take his foster children's words and actions personally. "Kids will say things you don't like," he says. "You've got to let that stuff bounce off."

In recent years, research on trauma has revealed its negative impact on brain development and mental health in children. A growing body of evidence has led to a more formalized approach to tackling the behavioral challenges that arise in foster kids due

Laura Miller shares a moment with her daughter Dhani, 9, while helping her with her homework at the family's home in Dongola, Ill. Dhani was the first child Laura and her husband, John, adopted.

to physical and emotional abuse. Enhancing best practices in foster parenting, LSSI's trauma-informed training program has led the way in the child welfare field and earned accolades from agencies such as the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

"We're just adding new language to things that people have known or suspected for a long time about trauma and past experiences," says Ruth Jajko, associate executive director in charge of LSSI's statewide adoption services. Jajko helped to organize a DCFS-run "train the trainers" workshop when LSSI launched the trauma-informed training program three years ago. She says, "By increasing knowledge and building empathy, we can provide useful, tangible tools to our foster parents."

# Lifebooks Help Kids Heal, One Page at a Time

**A**s a mom to foster, adopted and biological children, Jennifer Shaw of Dixon, Ill., has seen firsthand the multiple, far-reaching benefits of the “My Awesome Life” Lifebook program developed by Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI).

“The books are definitely helpful and so therapeutic,” says Jennifer, who with her husband Joshua has fostered more than 30 children in the past 10 years. “A Lifebook opens so many doors for conversation and bonding, and a whole lot of understanding,” she adds.

Similar to a scrapbook in that it celebrates a child’s life through photos, drawings and memories, a Lifebook goes far beyond that by including journal pages that help a child understand what is often a complicated — and sometimes traumatic — life by guiding the child in exploring his or her thoughts and feelings.

More than 3,000 Lifebooks have been given to children served by LSSI since the program began in 2008, according to Ruth Jajko, LSSI’s statewide director of adoption services.

A training video, “Putting the Pieces Together: Lifebook Work with Children,” developed by LSSI in conjunction with the Center for Adoption Studies and the Rural Documentary Collection, sparked the creation of the Lifebook program, explains Statewide Lifebook Coordinator Monica Johnson.

LSSI’s Lifebook program was initiated thanks to a generous grant from the Christopher Family Foundation for its Post-Adoption Support program, which developed into support for the Lifebook program. The Christopher Family Foundation has been the primary funder for the project during the past five years (see page 29 for a profile about Doris Christopher). Additional support has been provided by the Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust and G. J. Aigner Foundation.

## Connecting kids to their past

Five Lifebook specialists train the agency’s child welfare staff and foster parents, as well as provide ongoing support and guidance to new staff and foster parents entering the agency, and do some of the detective work needed to collect pictures and find important people in the children’s past. The specialists also spend time working with children on their books. “Since the inception of the program, the specialists have worked directly, one-on-one with more than 600 children to assist them in creating a meaningful and completed Lifebook,” Johnson says.

“Every child deserves a sense of his or her own history,” says Mary Sue Waite, an LSSI Lifebook specialist in northern Asa, 3, who was fostered, then adopted by John and Jennifer Shaw, enjoys working on his Lifebook.



“We want the child to see with this Lifebook that sad things can happen in life, but it doesn’t define who he is, and it shows how he can grow and learn from things.”

Illinois. “Many foster children lose that after being separated from their original families, and the emotional damage can deepen, if children have to move to more than one foster home. Lifebooks help children reconnect with people and fill in the gaps in their personal histories.”

Specialists, and sometimes foster parents, often take pictures of the houses a child has lived in and try to gather other information from their past. “I’ve contacted former teachers and old coaches to get letters and pictures. I’ve also tried to get pictures of pets they’ve had,” Waite says.

Laura Hart, a Lifebook specialist in the Peoria area, adds, “Sometimes kids will want a picture of a park where they used to visit with their mom or a picture of the hospital they were born in. Whatever they ask for, we try to get.”

Brandi Campbell, a Lifebook specialist who covers the southern Illinois region, says, “To be able to sit down and give information to the child that they need and deserve to have, and to see how much it means to the child, is very rewarding.”

### **A non-threatening tool**

Initially, LSSI used a more generic Lifebook, but Jajko and Johnson have since developed the agency’s own practice-based “My Awesome Life” book, which was introduced about a year ago.

“It’s a very colorful, friendly book,” says Hart. “There’s nothing threatening or intimidating about it. Younger kids see it more as a coloring book they’re going to fill in about themselves. Older kids really can see the value in getting the information and pictures that no one has really helped them get until now.”

When she first introduces a Lifebook to a child, Campbell stresses that it’s the child’s book to work with at his or her own pace. Every book comes in a sturdy cardboard box full of art supplies, so the child can decorate and personalize the box and color and draw on the pages in the book.

“We start out by coloring and answering questions about things like their favorite color and what they like to draw,” Campbell says. “Then, when we’re doing the pages later in the book, it’s a distraction tool. So you can be

talking about the heavy, hard stuff, and meanwhile they can be coloring and participating, but it’s not such an in-your-face, let’s-talk-about-this kind of thing.”

Waite adds, “It’s a healing approach toward being in foster care. We want the child to see with this Lifebook that sad things can happen in life, but it doesn’t define who he is, and it shows how he can grow and learn from things.”

Working through the tougher questions, such as why the child doesn’t live with his biological parents or is separated from his siblings and why he’s lived at various foster homes, can be emotionally difficult but also cathartic for the child.

“A lot of kids look for their fault in the situation,” says Hart, who also serves on a statewide foster parent advisory council. “Those tend to be the most therapeutic cases, because they’ve gone to that place where they think it’s all their fault or they don’t understand at all, and they think since no one’s talking to them about it, it must be sort of taboo. The Lifebook gives them permission to talk about things they maybe already had questions about.”

### **Lifebooks create a bond**

About 700 foster parents/caregivers have received training on Lifebooks and — as foster mom Jennifer Shaw has found — working on them with a child can be just as enlightening for the adults.

“I think it helps the bond between the foster parent and the child, because it kicks open that door for them to be able to let things out that they have felt the need to hold back or hide for so long,” Jennifer says. “And sometimes, it helps give the foster parent insight into some of the behaviors we may be seeing in the child.”

The Shaws have three biological children ages 6, 9 and 11, as well as a 3-year-old they adopted from foster care and a 5-month-old they are in the process of adopting. Currently, they are also fostering a 13-month-old.

“Every Lifebook is unique, and every child has their own way of approaching it,” Jennifer says. “We had siblings once, a 5-year-old boy and a 7-year-old girl. The boy had some traumatic things happen to him as a very small child, so there were a lot of things he couldn’t put into words because

he didn't understand it. He just knew how he felt about it. So he did a lot of picture drawings, and I would write little notes in the margins about what he did say. His sister, on the other hand, talked a mile a minute, and she wrote in her Lifebook the same way. There's no wrong way to do it."

Another 12-year-old girl the Shaws once fostered was on her way home to live with her biological mom and filled parts of her book with fun memories of her last year in care.

"We took lots of pictures, so her mom could see who she lived with and the things she did," Jennifer notes. "I think it helped her bond with her mom, and it helped her mom to know that her daughter really had been safe in care."

Connecting with former teachers, mentors and previous foster parents helps kids gain some closure, Johnson adds. "They love the validation they get from those people," she says. "It's a major self-esteem builder."

Various journaling sections of "My Awesome Life" are available to fit the needs of children at differing stages of their journey through foster care and adoption, as well as children not in the foster care system who might be dealing with loss, trauma or change.

Perhaps one of the strongest testaments to the importance of a Lifebook is the statement of an 18-year-old boy who had been in multiple foster homes, Campbell notes.

"The last time he was moving, the first thing he asked for was his Lifebook. That says a lot for an 18-year-old boy to realize the value of having his book."

### Helping all foster kids

To help reach even more children in the foster care system, LSSI has developed an innovative, affordable Lifebook training curriculum that includes a trainer's guide, DVD and PowerPoint presentation that other agencies can purchase to replicate LSSI's success with Lifebooks.

"Not only do we want the children we serve to have meaningful and completed Lifebooks, we want all children placed in foster care to have a Lifebook," Johnson says. "The best way to make that happen is for adults in their lives to be trained on its benefits, importance and how to do the work with children."

A DCFS-approved research project concluded on March 30, 2013, comparing the outcomes of children who have participated in LSSI's Lifebook program with foster children in another agency who have not participated in it.

"There really isn't a lot of research out there on Lifebooks, so this is groundbreaking," Johnson says. Preliminary results from the

research project indicates that after Lifebook work there were increases in both the foster parents' and children's comfort levels in talking with each other about the children's birth history, as well children feeling that they gained more knowledge about their birth histories. In addition, answers to service satisfaction questions strongly indicated that (1) both foster parents and children were satisfied with the Lifebook services provided to them; (2) felt their Lifebook specialist listened to them; and (3) would recommend the services to others, if it were available.

*For more information on LSSI's Lifebook program or to purchase "My Awesome Life," visit [www.LSSI.org/Support/MyAwesomeLife.aspx](http://www.LSSI.org/Support/MyAwesomeLife.aspx) or call Monica Johnson at 309/786-6400.*

## Lifebooks: Stories of Healing

Since LSSI's Lifebook program began in 2008, many of the children participating in it have found healing and clarity in the process of putting their Lifebooks together.

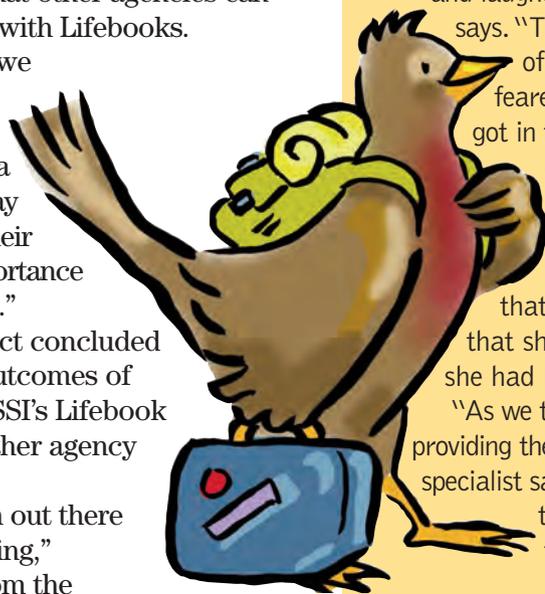
"We get to make a very large impact on children's lives by doing something that's very common sense," says Laura Hart, one of five LSSI Lifebook specialists. "I like the 'aha' moments we get with the foster parents or with the kids while working on a Lifebook."

In one case, the Lifebook program helped two sisters deal with a traumatic past and learn how to feel safe with their aunt. A Lifebook specialist reported that the girls were excited the minute she introduced them to their Lifebooks.

"They loved getting pictures of themselves at younger ages and laughed together, remembering happy times," she says. "The eldest, Melissa, shared difficult memories of a violent past with her birth parents. She feared she might 'turn out the same way' after she got in trouble for fighting at school. After working on her Lifebook, she was able to talk about new ways of coping with her angry feelings."

The sisters now live with their aunt, Mary, who was overwhelmed to learn all that the girls had been through and distraught that she hadn't been able to protect them because she had lived far away.

"As we talked, however, Mary learned the power of providing them with care and protection now," the specialist says. "The Lifebook helped these girls explore their traumatic pasts and receive reassurance from their aunt that they are now safe."



# Protecting Seniors from Elder Abuse

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he numbers are staggering. The stories are gut-wrenching. And the people involved may live right next door to you.

Each year, though only an estimated one in six instances is reported, 2.1 million senior citizens fall victim to abuse, neglect or exploitation. An estimated 10.5 million occurrences go unreported.

The general public often thinks of elder abuse as only befalling frail senior citizens. They envision an injured, feeble, defenseless, elderly person with broken bones and bruises who has been physically mistreated.

While that scenario is prevalent, abuse can be, and often is, less obvious.

Mary Cox, supervisor of Senior Protective Services at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), says in cases of elder abuse, “You don’t have to be emaciated, raped or physically abused to be mistreated, controlled or afraid.”

Every day, her staff responds to calls for those experiencing various forms of victimization. Sadly, she says, caregivers and family members are the primary offenders.

Though there is no defining face of an abuser among caregivers, significant risk factors for elder abuse include those who lack the ability to cope with stress; those who suffer from depression; and those who lack support and are sole caregivers.

Care coordinators respond to seven different types of abuse allegations. Financial exploitation is number one, Cox says. It is followed by passive neglect, emotional abuse, confinement, physical or sexual abuse, and willful neglect.

With an ever-growing caseload, they are seeing all types of cases, many of which are multifaceted. Renee Krynski, care coordinator, says she runs into a recurring situation where adult children are bilking their parents.

“It is an atypical part in the fabric of our society,” says Cox. “We see multiple generations in the home, usually the elder’s house, and most will give their adult child money so their needs and their grandchildren’s needs get met. They may go toe-to-toe with a child, telling them ‘You have to straighten out, get a job, etc.’, but it is easy for an adult to manipulate the senior, using a child’s needs to get what they want.”

## **Abuse can be multi-faceted**

In one case, Krynski describes a client whose fate and day-to-day care was left in the hands of someone who was stealing the client’s pain medication. Although this is a common scenario, she said the variables differed in that there were so many things wrong in the home that it was in the client’s best interest to be removed from the situation.





ALEX PASCHAL

The Senior Protective Services staff includes (in front) Mary Cox, supervisor, Senior Protective Services, and in rear (from left): Renee Krynski, Raelyn Metzler and Devin Straight, the program's three care coordinators, who work on the front lines to protect seniors.

The client was twice brought home by police after he was found wandering along the highway. Leaving home undetected by a caregiver, he was found disheveled, confused, seemingly under-medicated and hungry, Krynski says.

A child in the same home approached care coordinators as the client was being led to a safe location after multiple attempts to rectify the situation failed.

Cox says, "We were alone for a few minutes, and the child said, 'This is a good thing. [The client] needs supervision. I go to school, and my mom sleeps all day.' Even the child knew home was not a good situation."

A member of Cox's team contacted the Department of Children and Family Services for the child.

"Once we got a grip on the medication theft, we really discovered the [condition of the] home was deplorable," she says. "There were wandering issues, even though the caregivers knew they were to keep an eye on him after our initial visit."

Now that the senior is safe, Krynski says they have seen a great improvement in the client. Staff at the long-term care facility where he was placed said they had never seen someone with an appetite like his before.

## To Make an Elder Abuse Report:

Never assume someone has already filed an elder abuse report, says Mary Cox, supervisor of Senior Protective Services. "We would rather take a chance of finding nothing than to have something detrimental go unreported."

To make a report in Carroll, Lee, Ogle or Whiteside counties, call Lutheran Social Services of Illinois at 815/626-7333 Monday through Friday, between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. After hours, on weekends, holidays or in other counties, call the Illinois Department on Aging's Elder Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 866/800-1409.

If you are a senior who is being mistreated:

Tell someone. Regardless of who is mistreating you, there is help available to get your life back. Open up to a person you can trust, whether it is your spouse, physician, a family member or friend, or simply call LSSI at the number above.

## Typical offenders include relatives

"When a report is made, we let [seniors] know what their rights are," says Cox. "We will advocate for them, find

the referrals they need, help with the process legally and be their emotional and moral support.”

Close relatives — a spouse, child or someone the elderly person trusts, such as an in-home caregiver — are the primary offenders.

Thankfully, Cox says her office sees many reports where only basic care education is needed. She says it is passive neglect where a dutiful, well-intentioned caregiver simply lacks knowledge about what should be done for the senior.

Not providing proper meals, a clean living environment or improperly medicating a senior are some of the cases that Senior Protective Services sees regularly. Once staff educate caregivers, the problem is often resolved.

Although the majority of reports are made by medical personnel (27 percent, followed by family members at 20 percent), more and more seniors are taking a stand for themselves. In part, Cox believes the newer generation of seniors is more aware of the dangers of being conned and is less willing to be victimized.

“People who lived through The Great Depression era are like, ‘I’m okay’ when they have everything taken away. Baby boomers are more assertive and demanding,” she says.

Many seniors keep the abuse behind closed doors because they are afraid, ashamed or concerned that the person who is victimizing them will face legal problems.

The notion of being taken out of their home and put into a nursing home is a common threat caregivers use to instill fear.

Cox says that once an initial report is made, a senior realizes she has an advocate. Once a relationship is built, the senior then feels comfortable enough to discuss any additional concerns.

Another common situation that Krynski has seen is simple spats among adult siblings that can lead to charges of confinement. “If the parent lives with one of their grown children, them not allowing others to visit — especially if they are homebound — is taking away their rights,” she says.

It is important, she adds, for the general public to know that “Able-bodied seniors don’t always file reports. Some fear retaliation from their abuser, while others concern themselves with what may happen to them, believing no one else will be there to take care of them.”

Seniors who agree to services with LSSI develop their own goals and pace to prevent further abuse and improve their lives. The LSSI care coordinator provides emotional support and advocacy to the client. Often times, that involves the LSSI care coordinator working with the client’s family or support network, and even with the abusive person(s) (with client’s permission) to help them better understand the senior’s needs and feelings.

## 2013: The Year of Elder Abuse Prevention

The Administration on Aging (AoA), has named 2013 (YEAP) the Year of Elder Abuse Prevention.

Mary Cox, supervisor of Senior Protective Services, says, “During YEAP, we would like to promote that seniors, at any age, are still adults with the right to self-determine choices in their lives the same as younger adults do. If a senior does not feel abused or exploited, or decides it is best to accept the situation the way it is, then we certainly respect their right to make that choice. We let all seniors we assess for abuse know that LSSI will help and advocate for them, if they ever change their mind or think they might need help in the future.”

The national campaign to encourage organizations and individuals to raise awareness about elder abuse, neglect and exploitation and to help protect seniors will help empower older persons, which is the most effective tool in response to all forms of abuse.

Having a vigilant caregiver, family member, neighbor or friend can put a stop to the horrific crimes the elderly face, says Renee Krynski, care coordinator. Cashiers, bank tellers, law enforcement officers — anyone is encouraged to report suspicious behaviors on behalf of a vulnerable senior.

With proper training of service providers, such as social workers, law enforcement and medical personnel, it is the hope of the AoA that no case goes unreported.

Senior Protective Services in Illinois operates under the Office of Elder Rights, which is a program of the Illinois Department on Aging. Care coordinators are bound by confidentiality and work only with authorities with the senior’s permission.

“We strive to protect people who are cognitively impaired and cannot make decisions in their own best interest,” says Cox. “People do not need absolute proof that someone is abused, neglected or exploited before making a call.”

Mary Cox says she is very glad that Senior Protective Services is there to protect older adults in the community. However, she adds, “The mistreatment of elders has yet to be fully addressed as a shameful part of our own culture. It’s as if older people do not have the same value as younger people. The vulnerability associated with aging does not get as much attention or moral contemplation as it needs to.”

# Trinity Sets the Table for Teen Parents

“**A**re these people for real?”

That was the incredulous reaction of one teenage mother upon encountering members of Trinity Lutheran Church who not only shared a potluck dinner but were also ready to babysit for her while she attended parenting classes at Rolling Meadows High School.

Members of Trinity Lutheran Church of Rolling Meadows became involved with the high school's Teen Parenting program in the fall of 2012. By that time, almost a year had passed since Pastor Ben Bergren and members of Trinity's Elders Board had started looking for a community-based project that could command the interest and participation of significant numbers of the congregation.

They started by assessing the needs of the community. What programs were in place? What needs were being met? Where were the gaps? Where could they make a significant contribution?

Pr. Bergren says, “The task force was very thorough in amassing a lot of data about community needs, but after a few months, we were overwhelmed by the task of sorting through the data and finding a focus. We needed help.”

Enter Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), in the person of Pr. Dan Schwick and the Hands@Work initiative.

## ‘Setting the Table’

Schwick set in place a discernment process LSSI calls “Setting the Table,” a way to sort through the mass of data and identify needs the congregation was equipped for and ready to address. Schwick says the process is “a way to build consensus and a long-term commitment to a social ministry within the congregation.”

The congregation narrowed the choices down to a manageable few, including expanding their food pantry and expanding their cable TV network to distribute church services and Pr. Bergren's sermons.

At one point during the summer of 2012, they invited Joanne Bratta, coordinator for the District 214 School District Teen Parenting program, to come and speak to them. She has held the position for about 25 years; the program itself is about 60 years old.

Pr. Bergren says Joanne convinced them that here was a program where members of Trinity could and should make a significant contribution.

Joanne Bratta, coordinator of Township High School District 214's Teen Parenting Program, embraces Deacon Glenn Anderson, one of the members of Trinity Lutheran Church in Rolling Meadows who volunteers. “They came to me at a time when I needed them most – just like angels,” says Joanne.



By November 2012, the program was up and running. And just in the nick of time.

Joanne says at the time Trinity got involved, she was “losing baby sitters, and kids were dropping out of school.” Before the program started, one of Trinity’s elders, Kathie Godfrey, visited her at school, looked around and told her, “Oh, my goodness, you need help.”

District 214 is the second largest high school district in Illinois, covering six schools in a little more than 68 square miles. It includes the communities of Arlington Heights, Buffalo Grove, Elk Grove Village, Mt. Prospect, Prospect Heights, Rolling Meadows, Wheeling and Des Plaines.

Joanne works with teen parents in six high schools — Buffalo Grove, Elk Grove, Hersey, Prospect, Rolling Meadows and Wheeling. The goal is to help teenage parents remain in school and complete their education while dealing with the complexities of parenthood.

In an average year, Joanne has about 130 young parents participating in the program, mostly mothers, but also a few fathers.

Joanne, a registered nurse, helps the young parents with counseling services and holds parenting classes at Rolling Meadows High School.

Because teenage parents often feel stigmatized and cut off from the normal life and routine of the community, Joanne looks for ways to integrate them into the society around them. She found what she was looking for when she was asked to speak to the members of Trinity about her program.

And the feeling was mutual.

Once a month, about 20 members of Trinity bring a potluck dinner to the evening parenting classes at Rolling Meadows High School. They share the meal and the fellowship, and for some of the young parents it may be their only opportunity to talk about their lives and situations with caring adults outside the classroom.

Schwick says that at the very first potluck (there have now been more than seven), a mother and father of 14 and 15, respectively, found themselves seated with a

couple celebrating more than 50 years of marriage. The teenagers took that opportunity to explore the pros and cons of their own situation and the possibilities for marriage in the near or distant future.

In between the monthly potlucks, members of Trinity provide babysitting, while the teens attend parenting classes at Rolling Meadows.

Members of Trinity have also expanded their food pantry to keep on hand a supply of baby care supplies, such as blankets, wipes, diapers, baby oils and lotions, and toys. They also held a Christmas party for the teen parents and their children.

Listening to Pr. Bergren and Rick Johnson, who was a member of the Elder Board’s task force, and to Joanne Bratta, it’s easy to see that the outcomes of Trinity’s participation add up to a lot more than the sum of the parts.

### More than donors

Unstated but implicit in the way they discuss the process of coming together is the idea that both Trinity and Joanne were looking for something that would go beyond the usual donor/recipient relationship.

Less than a year after that first potluck, it is clear that they have found it.

Joanne says many of the young women were “at risk” even before they became pregnant. Judging from the letters some of the teenagers have written to Trinity, many of the teen parents feel they have been judged and shunned by the community around them.

“People sometimes don’t treat these kids very well because of their age and ethnicity,” explains Joanne. “They’ve never had adults, except those at school, who treat them as valued people. And then Trinity walked in, and that changed everything.”

The teens were not prepared for the non-judgmental acceptance they found with the folks from Trinity, prompting that young woman’s question to Joanne: “*Are these people for real?*”

“After our first potluck dinner, the people of Trinity discovered that by serving others even in simple ways, that God shows up and blesses the giver and the receiver in such a way that we all become givers and receivers of God’s grace.”



Young moms from Rolling Meadows High School enjoy their monthly potluck with members of Trinity Lutheran Church.

Joanne says, “The kids love them.”

In addition to helping the young parents remain in school and complete their education while they develop their parenting skills, Trinity’s participation is helping these young parents reconnect with a community some feel has rejected them.

That feeling comes out time and again in their letters to Trinity:

“I want to ‘thank you’ from the bottom of my heart. I’m very grateful for you to come and talk with us. Most people would look at us with some expressions. My family looks at me like ‘Oohh, this girl already ruined her life.’ But I know there’s some people like Mrs. Bratta and like you guys from church. I’m glad I meet people like you.”

— Jessica

“Hello, I’m really thankful that your church joined our program. Mostly people think we are bad because we are teen parents, but for the first time I didn’t felt judged ‘cause of my age. Thank you for the dinner and for your support.”

— Marie

### **‘We are the ones that are blessed...’**

Rick Johnson and his wife, Kathy, on the other hand, say the 20 to 30 members of Trinity who have joined in the potlucks and babysitting are getting a lot more than they

give. He says, “You wanted to do this to help your community and serve God by serving your fellow man, but you come out of it thinking that quite honestly, we are the ones that are blessed to be able to do it.”

“After our first potluck dinner, the people of Trinity discovered that by serving others even in simple ways,” adds Pr. Bergren, “God shows up and blesses the giver and the receiver in such a way that we all became givers and receivers of God’s grace.”

For her part, Joanne Bratta says, “I feel blessed that Trinity has come into my life. I don’t know what I would have done without Pr. Ben, the elders and the members of the church. They came to me at a time when I needed them most — just like angels.”

There are now about a dozen ELCA congregations engaged in the discernment process that led Trinity to the Teen Parents program. Schwick says “Setting the Table” usually takes about a year of data gathering and monthly meetings.

LSSI’s Hands@Work initiative takes the ELCA’s theme — God’s Work. Our Hands. — and helps congregations put it to work in their communities. It helps congregations assess needs and determine ways in which members of the congregation can make a significant contribution that goes beyond just donating money.

*Congregations can get more information on Setting the Table and the Hands@Work initiative at [www.LSSI.org/Support/ChurchEngagement.aspx](http://www.LSSI.org/Support/ChurchEngagement.aspx) or by calling Pr. Dan Schwick at 847/390-1418.*



College

ARM  
FLAVA

# Full Circle

*In this article, guest writer Jane Otte, executive director of Prisoner and Family Ministry, reflects on how the loss of mothers to incarceration affects families. This two-part story is illustrative of how Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) intersects and affects the lives of these families — both the mothers and those on the outside.*

## Part I: The Children

For 24 years, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) has been transporting Chicago children to visit their incarcerated mothers through its “Visits to Mom” program. In this ministry, we bear witness daily to the great struggle that children face to understand themselves and their lives with a mom in prison.

We face multiple realities in this work that limits our ability to help families beyond the prison visits and into their lives on the “outside.” It is a fact that when children grow into adolescence, they begin to disassociate from their parents. This happens to children of incarcerated parents, too. The other reality is that when mom comes home, everyone wants to remove themselves from the prison experience and from the people — including organizations like LSSI — that were a part of their lives during mom’s time in prison.

*But, we have now witnessed the full circle.*

Lucien’s\* story began 11 years ago when his mom, Sheryl\*, went to prison. By some definitions, Lucien could be called homeless. He lived with Grandma and Auntie. In his teen years, Lucien lost a brother to gang violence in the neighborhood and another brother to complications related to asthma. Prospects of Lucien even growing into an adult as a young black man in his neighborhood were pretty slim.

Glenn and his siblings moved in with the Palmer\* family when Glenn’s mom, Lattice\*, went to prison. That was when he was in 8th grade. Eight months out of every year, the Palmer family would make the trip to bring Glenn and his siblings to see their mom in prison, to keep the family connected. This took a great effort, especially considering that mom was not coming home until 2022.

While riding our Visits to Mom bus to see his mom — part of our Connections program — Lucien spoke with our Visits coordinator about his dream.

“I want to go to college to make my mom proud,” Lucien said.

No one in Lucien’s family had ever gone to college. This was a wild and crazy dream. But Lucien had already made good choices in his short life. He had not joined a gang; he was working on his GED; and, as our Visits coordinator explained, “He has a story to tell, and he lives to change.”

The Connections staff got very busy. A college in Wisconsin was called, and the staff took Glenn and Lucien to visit the school along with Glenn’s “adopted brother,” Exavier. All three young men were interviewed, and the staff helped them fill out forms and applications. The three were accepted and the college provided scholarship assistance. Three generous donors helped with school fees and filled up huge gym bags with items needed for being away at college. At the end of August 2012, the three young men and their families came to the office for prayer and for counsel about college. This is what the young men had to say:

Lucien: “I would like to personally thank all of you guys for a life-changing experience. This is a great opportunity for me to

Exavier and Glenn are freshmen at Silver Lake College of the Holy Family in Wisconsin. Over the years, their families have received services from LSSI’s Connections program, including Visits to Mom.

*\*Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.*

# Taking children to visit their incarcerated mothers is based on the belief that the children will be riding home to a future that does not include prison.

make my mom proud and make my dreams come true, because before I found out about Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, it seemed like I spent my life dreaming about what I wish I could do instead of [doing] what I knew I could do. I appreciate this so much. I'm going to work twice as hard to prove to myself and those who doubt me that I knew I could do better than what I was doing. I respect this program so much, because if it weren't for you guys, I wouldn't have been able to see my mom or meet the Visits coordinator. ...I am so thankful, and I promise to keep in touch and work very hard and will refuse to give up on myself."

Glenn: "Thanks to you, I will be able to do something bigger to exhibit my thanks in four years. I never thought I would be sitting here thinking 'hum, what am I going to major in?' Just the sound of it makes me feel like this is my chance, my opportunity, my time to shine among other bright stars. So, I leave this letter to you as a decree of my ambition. Thanks again."

Exavier: "Thank you. I'm so lost for words, and I know every day is a blessing. I thank God for you, and I thank God for your blessing. I'm so happy to know my dreams have come true, that I'm going to college and that there are organizations like LSSI and their sponsors who are giving me the opportunity to succeed in life. ... I hope in these four years of college, I can achieve my goals as a civil engineer, basketball player and in the medical field. I also want to help other incarcerated families by being a prime example of the support and generosity that LSSI has shown my family."

Today, two of the young men — Glenn and Exavier — are in Wisconsin attending college. Lucien decided to go back home for now, but has finished his GED. Each of the individual donors has their contact information and is sending them care packages. Every Thursday, these young men call our office and leave a voice message about how they are doing and what they might need for their studies. Our staff volunteers to help them each week.

## Part II: The Mothers

Gratitude — to God and to those who love their children — best describes Latices and Sheryl's attitude.

This past January, I traveled to the Lincoln Correctional

Center to interview Latices and Sheryl. Their sons, Lucien and Glenn, along with Latices's godson, Exavier, were helped by our Connections program to apply and then to be accepted to a college in Wisconsin this past fall. From the beginning of my conversation with them to the end, these incarcerated mothers thanked God.

These "thanks" could appear trite — what else could they say? Mothers locked up, distant from their children, not able to "do" anything to physically care for their little ones — why not give a verbal "nod" to God in the hope that God will listen?

*No, this is about faith — believing and trusting that God will care for those you love when you can do nothing.*

"I have been praying for nine years. I wanted them [my children] to do something that I could not do. I follow God," Sheryl testified.

Again, those words came so quickly and easily to her that I doubted. But, who am I to judge this mother who left the interview to go to a prison dormitory, to go to a prison job every day, to look at more days the same and still believe. And for this mother, it was not just believing but speaking those words into existence. "I totally walk in faith — 'the prayers of a righteous woman avail much,'" Sheryl said, quoting Proverbs 15:8.

Latices and Sheryl are so removed from family life and communication that they did not know how their sons were doing in college. Parents often deal with not knowing about their adult children, but parents on the "outside" have cell phones and Facebook and Skype. These incarcerated mothers have memories and time alone.

"I always wanted my children to be educated," Latices mused. "I told them that when you don't have nothing else, education is all you have." And she has worked at it from a distance. Latices has read and recorded books to her younger son, Marco,\* through LSSI's Storybook Project.

"That is one of the greatest programs here," said Latices. "If I don't get the chance to do it (Storybook) for awhile, Marco says 'Ma, I ain't got a book from you! Where's my book at?' I love to read to him."

Since 2008, LSSI has been keeping Latices and her family connected through our program that is aptly named

*continued on page 28*

# “It’s complicated ...”

*Human beings are complicated creatures.*

*Human communities are complicated organizations.*

That’s why it takes an integrated, collaborative and multi-dimensional approach to care for individuals, families and communities.

At Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), although we are primarily devoted to providing high quality and affordable human services, we also recognize that people need access to all the basic building blocks to security and success. In fact, at LSSI, along with providing essential social services, we often also provide food, housing, healthcare and education or training. In many ways, LSSI is not just a human services organization — we are a “human care organization.”

Too often in Illinois, when our state government leaders are setting priorities, they fall into the trap of pitting various parts of human care against each other. There is currently debate in Springfield about whether children’s services or senior services should receive expanded funding. The best answer is that both areas of human care need to be strengthened. Human care in all its dimensions needs to be strengthened if people and communities in Illinois are going to thrive.

That’s why on May 8, LSSI spearheaded a Rally for Human Care as part of our annual Lutheran Day celebration in the state capitol in Springfield. We were joined by



KRISTEN SCHMID

Lutheran Day participants, enjoyed a day of learning, fellowship and face-to-face advocacy with their legislators, and also took part in the Rally for Human Care.

hundreds of people from a broad cross-section of human care and advocacy organizations to harmonize our disparate voices into a chorus in favor of a strong public-private partnership to make sure that a credible safety net exists for all people in Illinois. LSSI was joined by people and groups who have a focus on one or more of the “building blocks to success,” but realize that none of the building blocks alone helps people thrive and live full lives.

Later in the day on May 8, Lutheran Day participants had a rare opportunity to have a strong bipartisan experience. We presented the 2013 Paul Simon Courage in Public Service Award, posthumously, to the late Dawn Clark

Netsch, long-time Democratic office holder and politician in Illinois. Helping us to remember the contributions of Ms. Netsch was current Illinois State Comptroller Judy Baar Topinka, a Republican, who reminded the crowd that just because people have differing political philosophies, doesn’t mean that they can’t get along and even show respect and affection for one another. That is a lesson that everyone in Springfield needs to hear over and over again.

The date for Lutheran Day 2014 — our tenth anniversary — will be announced soon. Plan now to attend.

For more information, please visit [www.LutheranDay.org](http://www.LutheranDay.org).

## Human care in all its dimensions needs to be strengthened if people and communities in Illinois are going to thrive.

# A Safe Place for Kids to Talk, Learn and Grow

**E**veryone needs someone to talk to. A parent. A friend. A sibling. Someone you feel safe with. Someone facing the same issues as you.

For teenagers, having someone to talk to is especially important. They are trying to figure out how they fit in the world, how to deal with other kids. Things are changing, and there are decisions to make – college, a job, relationships, where to live. “It’s all about the choices we make,” says Angela, 24.

Angela was adopted when she was young after her mother, who had a drug addiction, abandoned her and her sisters. When she was 14 years old, her mother called SASS (Screening, Assessment and Support Services) for help. “I would run away,” she says, “and my parents wanted more structure for me.”

Younger kids may need help, too. Some may have behavioral issues – like the kids who run out of the classroom because they don’t want to be there. Others may need extra help in handling their emotions, behaviors and relationships with others. Still others have to deal with bullying and self-esteem issues.

Help is available. Mental health services are in place for children and youth to help them throughout the critical times of their lives. And by learning how to value themselves and interact positively, kids can lead fuller, happier lives.

One program that helps kids is SASS, a statewide program that provides crisis intervention and follow-up services for children up to 21 years old who are experiencing a crisis and are from low-income families who may have no insurance or Medicaid coverage. Any concerned person may call CARES, a statewide hotline, on behalf of a child who appears to be in crisis. If the child is determined to be at risk, an assessment is made to determine if the child needs psychiatric hospitalization or outpatient services.

At its Portage Cragin Counseling Center, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) provides SASS services on the northwest side of Chicago. LSSI provides therapy and other mental health services for younger kids at Portage Cragin. “A lot of our approach is education and family therapy, which helps both kids and families understand mental health and how learning new coping skills can make a big difference in their lives,” says Cheryl Oseguera, director of Outpatient Mental Health Services. “We do a lot of preventative work to address problems before things escalate.”

Karah Kohler supervises LSSI’s SASS program, as well as Project HOPE, a program for youths 14 to 24 years old. Under SASS guidelines, “we have 90 days to work with kids and their families,” she explains. “Some of the kids need therapy. Others don’t, but need social skills. So, we work to get services for them and connect them to resources.

“The main goal is to identify what needs the child has and then find the appropriate service(s) for him or her,” she says, adding that once a child is referred to LSSI through SASS, “we serve them immediately. There is no waiting list.” Last year, LSSI served 546 kids in the SASS program.

As part of its program, Project HOPE holds social activities like this trip to a suburban skating rink. From left: Elena Kneeland, Project Hope caseworker/counselor; Angela, a participant; Laura Szwałek, caseworker/counselor; and Brittney, a participant.



## All about relationships

“SASS is all about the relationship between the counselor/case manager and the child,” Kohler says.

Agnes Misiaszek is one of seven LSSI case managers/counselors who works with the kids during the 90-day period. “We will go to the child in crisis wherever he or she is — home or school or in our office,” she says. “We do an evaluation to see if the child needs hospitalization or can go into a counseling/therapy program.”

Children are referred to SASS by concerned parents, schools, nurses and others. Sometimes, there are behavioral issues at school; the kids are threatening to harm themselves or others. Others may be having psychotic episodes, or dealing with grief and loss, or trauma.

“We get a lot of kids threatening suicide; some who cut themselves with sharp objects; some who make a statement (e.g., ‘I’m going to kill myself if...’) that concerns parents or teachers,” Misiaszek says. “We also get calls to evaluate kids who are homicidal, who get into fights at school and are threatening other students.”

She notes that younger kids in elementary schools may be dealing with bullying and self-esteem issues. Building a relationship with these vulnerable kids is key to the treatment process.

Misiaszek also works with teenaged girls and clients who need a Polish-speaking counselor. She usually meets with them once a week and works with between 15 and 20 clients at a time, depending on the time of year. She works with most of the kids during the school year.

When working with teenaged girls, Misiaszek meets with them to find out what triggers their destructive behaviors. Then, she works to teach them coping skills that they can use to deal with the triggers, which include boyfriends who don’t call back, break-ups with boyfriends and bullying.

Misiaszek also works with the parents, teaching them how to deal with the kids when they are facing these

issues. She stresses that the parents should be prepared for treatment to take considerable time. At end of the three months, she sometimes refers the girls to the long-term program at Portage Cragin.

## ‘HOPE’ for a successful transition

Some of the teens are referred to LSSI’s Project HOPE. Located at Portage Cragin, Project HOPE “steps in when the 90-day period of SASS service has ended,” Misiaszek says.

Project HOPE serves young people 14 to 24 years old, and provides them with counseling, mentoring, social activities and other resources. The program helps kids realize that they are not alone in their struggles; that others have similar family issues. Currently, there are 21 kids in Project HOPE.

“Not all kids will need to move to Project HOPE,” she adds. “But for those who do, it is a safe place where they can deal with their concerns and issues, through mentoring and counseling provided by the program’s two staff: Laura Szwalek and Elena Kneeland.”

“Project HOPE is a very needed service,” says Szwalek, program coach, “It helps them to get skills that will help them successfully ‘launch’ into adulthood. Many don’t have supportive or involved parents,” she adds.

“And Project HOPE helps them to realize that they are not alone in their struggles; other kids have similar family issues,” Kohler says. She notes that because the program is available until participants are 24 years old it has a built-in mentoring piece. “The older kids can mentor the younger ones; that’s a real cool piece of the program,” she says.

Once a teen or young adult joins Project HOPE, he or she is assigned to Kneeland or Szwalek. “We take a couple of sessions to get to know them,” says Szwalek. “Then, we work with them to make a goal achievement plan and work with them individually to help them reach those goals.”

“Project HOPE has really helped me,” says Angela, who has been a part of the program for four years. “I like that I

“Project HOPE has really helped me. I like that I just get to vent. Sometimes, I don’t have anyone to talk to [at home or school]. When I walk out of the center, I feel free; I just feel good to be able to breathe and walk home, and I feel better.”



just get to vent. Sometimes, I don't have anyone to talk to [at home or school]. When I walk out of the center, I feel free; I just feel good to be able to breathe and walk home, and I feel better."

Angela also said that she likes the group meetings, because "there are people trying to work [through] the same things as me."

Although she is adopted, Angela spent some time living in group homes. She says she had a problem with aggression and running away. To control her sometimes aggressive feelings, she is learning about doing breathing exercises, and "I let everything out [instead of keeping it inside]; if you hold stuff in, it's not good. It's really important to have someone to talk to," she says.

Brittney, 22, also needed someone to talk with. She's been attending Project HOPE for two years, encouraged by her counselors at Portage Cragin. She thinks Project HOPE "helped me with being a better person and interacting with people."

High school issues brought Brittney into counseling. She says she was being bullied and harassed by a couple of students. "I learned how to walk away from people [who were harassing me] and to do breathing techniques," she says, adding that she also needed someone to talk to outside of her family.

Edith Wirtz, a therapist at LSSI's Portage Cragin Counseling Center, uses play therapy with younger clients to see how they perceive their problem, asking them to tell a story about it through play.

Project HOPE has also helped Angela be a good mother to her 5-year-old daughter. "When I meet with Laura, she teaches me how to talk to my daughter and discipline her, and how to have patience," she says.

Angela says she is lucky she has a back-up plan. She experienced some problems living on her own, so now, she lives with her mother. "I found out I couldn't live by myself," she says. "Now everything is better, because I am living with my mother. I am trying to get my life together." She adds that when she feels more stable, she will try living on her own again.

"I am blessed that I have support. A lot of people are searching for help," Angela says.

Fortunately for Angela, Brittney and scores of other children and teens, SASS and Project HOPE are available to provide the help and support they need now, to build a more positive future.

*For more information on SASS and Project HOPE, visit [www.LSSI.org](http://www.LSSI.org). Or call 800/345-9049 (CARES) to report a crisis, or 773/282-7800 to contact Project HOPE.*

## Joshua Arms Has New Website

Joshua Arms, a program of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), has a new website that makes it easy for visitors to see all that the affordable senior housing development in Joliet has to offer. Visit the site at [www.LSSI.org/JoshuaArms](http://www.LSSI.org/JoshuaArms).

Joshua Arms, located at 1315 Rowell in a tree-lined residential area, offers 186 independent, apartment-style units and 56 supportive living units, where residents receive three meals a day, housekeeping and other daily living services.

The website, which can also be accessed through the homepage of [www.LSSI.org](http://www.LSSI.org), conveys the inviting atmosphere at Joshua Arms, highlighting its many features and amenities. The website is an easy-to-use tool for potential residents and family members to learn about Joshua Arms, including eligibility and floor plans.



## Helping Seniors Stay in Their Own Homes

If you are a spouse, adult child or friend who is taking care of a loved one suffering from dementia, Alzheimer's or physical ailments associated with aging, you know firsthand how stressful and overwhelming caregiving can be.

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) can help. Through its Intouch Home Care Services, LSSI can provide a trained home care assistant, including CNAs, from two to 24 hours a day in your loved one's home to assist him or her with a variety of tasks, such as meal planning and preparation, transportation, personal care or medication reminders.

Since 1981, Intouch has been dedicated to helping seniors maintain their lives in the community and in their homes by providing compassionate, professional services that are tailored to the needs of each individual. By working with the individual and family to develop an appropriate plan of care, Intouch helps relieve the stress and worry often associated with caregiving.

Intouch staff members also provide companionship and work with clients on enhancing their wellness. And home care assistants are available to provide respite to family caregivers.

For more information on how Intouch can help care for your loved one and give you peace of mind, or to



schedule a complimentary assessment, call Julie Russell at 847/401-9919. You can also visit [www.LSSI.org/homecare/Index.aspx](http://www.LSSI.org/homecare/Index.aspx). Click the "Find Us" or "Service Finder" box for contact information on programs in your area.

# “thank you”

to the following foundations and organizations for their generous support of our work of “bringing healing, justice and wholeness to people and communities”:

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Lutheran Foundation of St. Louis  
Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust  
Orange Krush Foundation  
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Southern Illinois Healthcare Foundation  
Walmart Foundation

## IRA Gifts — They’re Back

On January 1, Congress approved qualified charitable distributions for 2012 by IRA owners over age 70½, up to \$100,000. The IRA gift law has been extended for the entirety of 2013, so qualified donors can make direct IRA gifts of up to \$100,000 any time in 2013.

Here are some important points to keep in mind about IRA gifts:

Charitable distributions are tax free in 2013 up to \$100,000, and, better yet, 2013 gifts will satisfy part or all of the required minimum distributions IRA owners must take after age 70½. That means income tax savings, even for those who do not itemize their deductions.

Only the IRA custodian can transfer gift amounts to a qualified organization. If IRA owners withdraw funds and then contribute them to charity separately, amounts withdrawn will be taxable to them.

IRA donors need receipts of the same kind provided for other types of charitable contributions. It’s important that donors coordinate IRA contributions with LSSI’s office to ensure that appropriate documentation is provided.

Owners of “inherited” IRAs can make gifts (if they are over 70½), but other retirement plans, such as pensions, 401(k) plans and others, are not eligible.

IRA gifts cannot be made to charitable remainder trusts or for charitable gift annuities.

Please call Maryann Aimone, vice president for Advancement/executive director, The Cornerstone Foundation, or Peggie Imhauser, development associate, at 847/635-4678 for more information about making an IRA gift or for information about making legacy gifts to LSSI.

## Read Good News in LSSI’s *Good Works*

Learn about the heart of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) — its people, its programs, its clients — through our biweekly e-update *Good Works*. Subscribe by visiting [www.LSSI.org](http://www.LSSI.org) and clicking on the *Good Works* banner. You can also review the archive of past issues of *Good Works* there. Congregations are also welcomed to put a *Good Works* “widget” on their websites — see widget instructions on [LSSI.org](http://LSSI.org) or call 847/635-4626 for more information.

## CareLogic System Enhances Care to Clients

In July 2012, LSSI implemented the first phase of CareLogic, an electronic health record system, the result of a collaboration of its Mental Health Services, IS and Finance departments.

LSSI’s SASS and Project HOPE programs (crisis intervention and life skills programs for children and youth), as well as

psychiatrists at LSSI’s Portage Cragin Counseling Center in Chicago, are now using CareLogic as the primary client record-keeping system. The new system helps workers comply with ever-changing Federal and State requirements. CareLogic makes workers more efficient and helps them provide better care to clients.

CareLogic also provides program directors and supervisors with tools that give them quick access to service, billing and outcomes data that are key to sustaining services for clients and building future services.

Implementation of CareLogic in LSSI’s other programs will continue in the near future.

## ‘Like’ Us on Facebook!

Stay current with all the great things that are happening at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois — program news, LSSI events and media coverage — via our Facebook Page. If you haven’t already, “like” us on Facebook, and invite your friends and family to like us, too! Thanks.

Connections. Her family has been making that trip on the Visits to Mom bus from Chicago to Lincoln Correctional Center three or four times a year. (Note: This family is experiencing what the media is talking about today with the closure of Dwight Correctional Center in early March. The families visiting women incarcerated at Dwight are facing a four-hour trip to Logan Correctional Center and back again. That is the same trip that Latice's family has been making.)

Last spring, Latice's son, Glenn, rode the bus in his prom "duds" so that mom could see how handsome he looked.

"I am so blessed that people have helped him," says Latice. "I am so proud of him [for going to college]. He has broken the generational curse. He went to college to set a standard for his little brother, Marco. He has stepped up and shown Marco how to be a man. And he has made my time [here] easier."

It sometimes happens that children become the inspiration for their parents. This is true for Sheryl as well. She has been struggling to get her GED for years.

"He (Lucien) has encouraged me even more," she says. "I have never succeeded in anything."

Raising children of incarcerated parents to become inspirations to their own parents is not what you read about today. Some statistics cite little hope for these children reaching their potential. With one in every 28 children having a parent in prison or in jail today<sup>1</sup>, the cycle of intergenerational incarceration looms large.

But the same research states that "Children [of incarcerated parents] who start in the bottom of the income ladder quadruple their chances of making it all the way to the top if they have a college degree." Having a parent in prison is not the last word, according to researchers, and also to Latice and Sheryl.

That has always been the belief at our agency. Since 1988, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois has been a physical connection for these children to their mothers. Taking children to visit their incarcerated mothers is based on the belief that the children will be riding home to a future that does not include prison. Latice and Sheryl are praising God, and so am I.

Our hearts are full. The circle is complete.

—Written by special contributor, Jane Otte, Executive Director, Prisoner and Family Ministry

**An Update:** When this issue of *Eye on LSSI* went to print, Glenn and Exavier were doing very well. Both are majoring in biology and nursing, and they finished their school year strong.

<sup>1</sup> "The Pew Charitable Trust: Economic Effects of Incarceration on Economic Mobility", Bruce Western and Becky Pattit.

## the big picture



ALLEN BOURGEOIS

### Fashion Show Supports LSSI's 'Bonding with Books'

More than 330 guests attended the 29th annual Women's Network Forget-Me-Not Brunch and Fashion Show on May 11, which supports Lutheran Social Services of Illinois' (LSSI's) Bonding with Books. From October to May, the program provides the agency's Head Start students with a new book every month along with special programming. The fashion show raised more than \$45,000 for the innovative literacy program.

LSSI staff at the fashion show included (from left): Marcia Weflen, senior associate executive director, Children's Community Services; Kim Shelton, Head Start education coordinator; David Jensen, interim president; Elizabeth Strain, Head Start health and nutrition coordinator; Emilia Espinal, Trinidad Head Start director; and Atiya Khan, Rogers Park Head Start director.

### MCS Youth Service Day Spruces Up LSSI Head Start Sites

About 130 youth and adult leaders from 11 Metropolitan Chicago Synod (MCS) congregations participated in the second annual MCS Youth Service Day on April 20. The annual volunteer event is a meaningful and enjoyable opportunity for youth to be of service in the community.

The volunteers cleaned and painted three LSSI Head Start sites — at Rogers Park, North Austin and Uptown. Olivia, one of the teens from Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Downers Grove, says, "After we cleaned [the site], I said 'Wow!' I really feel good volunteering, and I want to do it again!"

For more information, contact Joy Medrano at 847/635-4653.

# Doris Christopher: On Gratitude and Success ‘from Scratch’

Several years ago, Doris Christopher, founder of The Pampered Chef™, contemplated what Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) program she might support philanthropically. At the time, she could not have had the slightest inkling the difference that a gift from her family foundation would make in the lives of foster children.

Explaining what drew her to LSSI, “I was interested in the work of faith-based and social service organizations,” says Doris, a lifelong Lutheran. “I learned of the very expansive role that [LSSI] plays. My interest was born of gratitude — gratitude for my own life walk.

“I live with a focus that God is good,” Doris explains. “God is good, but we need to be his instruments and make sure that his goodness is experienced here. ... Of course, the world is a big place, so we have to support things that are meaningful to us — [giving] is not just out of a sense of responsibility.

“In figuring out what was meaningful to me, it always came back to children,” she continues. “I’m passionate about families. ... that’s what I have a heart for.”

Doris conversed with Pastor Frederick Aigner, who was president of LSSI at the time, about how she could best support the agency’s work. They discussed the challenges that foster children have to cope with.

“I can’t imagine the disruption [that foster children face],” Doris says. If a foster or adoptive home doesn’t work out, she asks, “Where does this leave the children? They’re back in the system again.”

Initially, The Christopher Family Foundation pledged \$1.25 million to fund LSSI’s Post-Adoption Program, which provides essential support and education for all members of the adoption triad — child, birth parent and adoptive parent.

“While the Christopher Foundation was funding us for our post-adoption services, we created the Lifebook training video, ‘Putting the Pieces Together: Lifebook Work with Children,’” explains Ruth Jajko, statewide director of LSSI’s adoption services. “Through that experience, we realized there was something much bigger we wanted to do with Lifebooks for the children we were serving in foster care.” (Read more on page 6.)

After learning about the potential of Lifebooks as a therapeutic tool to help foster children make sense of their lives, the Christophers were convinced they wanted to put their support behind the initiative.

“The Christophers stuck with us through our discovery and then funded what came out of that process — our Lifebook program for all of our kids in foster care, our companion curriculum for the video and our new



© THE PAMPERED CHEF

Lifebook, ‘My Awesome Life™,’” Jajko says.

“I said, ‘Let’s do something,’” Doris remembers. “When the Lifebook program came, it wasn’t ‘Should we do this?’, it was ‘We must do this for these children.’”

## Her ‘Awesome Life’

To understand why Doris and the Christopher Family Foundation chose to support Lifebooks — a program that could make a huge difference for children who have experienced the trauma and disruption involved with being in foster care — it is essential to have a sense of Doris’ life and core values: *faith, family and helping others*.

Born at the end of WWII, the youngest of three daughters, Doris grew up in a working-class family in Oak Lawn. Though her mom and dad worked long hours, life revolved around family. “I was always surrounded by people who cared about me,” she says.

Growing up, she attended a Lutheran school, and early on, she knew that she “loved teaching and cooking.” After receiving her degree in home economics from the University of Illinois, Doris started her career as a home economist and educator, first teaching high school and then working for the Cooperative Extension Service.

In 1980, with the goal of working at home so she could

*continued on next page*

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be with her two daughters, she conceived a business idea with her husband, Jay. Fueled by her entrepreneurial spirit, “dedication to preserving the tradition of family mealtimes” and \$3,000 borrowed from a life insurance policy, The Pampered Chef was born.

Doris says, “I had knowledge and training — I knew there were things that I could help with” in terms of kitchen tools and techniques that would make cooking easier, quicker and more enjoyable.

The Pampered Chef began selling high-quality cooking tools — from spatulas to stoneware baking dishes via in-home demonstrations called “cooking shows,” where a homemaker invited her friends over for a home party to learn about and try the cooking tools.

Fast forward to 2002. Twenty-two years after she and her husband, Jay, started The Pampered Chef, they sold the business — at the time, worth a reported \$700 million with 12 million customers annually — to Warren Buffet’s Berkshire Hathaway Inc. At the time, Buffet proclaimed, “Doris Christopher has created from scratch an absolutely wonderful business...”

Inducted into the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans in 2006, Doris says, “To be successful, you must feel that what you are doing helps others.”

### **Why Lifebooks?**

There is a clear parallel between Doris’ life work of providing homemakers with tools to help families come

together at the table and funding a tool that helps children document their lives and connections to family and other significant people.

“I’m a huge fan of Lifebooks. It’s a simple tool; it’s easy to use,” says Doris of LSSI’s Lifebook, “My Awesome Life.” “It gives children some sense of the context of their lives and the people who have been a part of their lives.

“I know foster kids have very complicated lives — a lot of moments have been bad for them,” she adds. “Those moments are easy to remember — they can consume so much thought and space that they can push out the good. If all we have is the negative, fearful and traumatic, it just makes it hard to frame a positive life. Hopefully, [a Lifebook] fills in the blanks that captures both the things that trouble them and those that give them joy.”

Doris is also enthusiastic about “My Faith,” a brand-new section in LSSI’s Lifebook. “It’s a natural. In lives that are complicated by so many forces, [faith] deserves attention as an important component,” she says. Also gratifying to her is that “My Awesome Life” and the support materials are not only being used to benefit children served by LSSI, but by child welfare providers and the children they serve around the country.

“The Christopher Family Foundation has been such a faithful partner,” says Jajko. “We had a dream — that all of the children in our program would have a Lifebook — and the Christophers helped make that happen.”