Nothing is Impossible

When it comes to helping clients achieve success, Terra Dempsey has a list of guidelines that include “creativity may be necessary” and “nothing is impossible.” These strategies serve her clients—adults with developmental disabilities—well as she helps them forge independent lives.

Dempsey is director of the Sterling and Dixon Group Homes, and LSSI’s Community Integrated Living Arrangement (CILA) program in Carol, Lee, and Whiteside Counties. She oversees services for adults 18 and older with developmental disabilities in CILAs or Intermittent CILAs.

CILA provides adults housing in a group home with personal support services under the direction of a local licensed organization, like LSSI. Adults in intermittent CILAs live independently, but need some assistance to do so, based on their individual needs.

LSSI has had great success designing individualized programs for clients in its intermittent CILA program. Jerry* is one example. LSSI began working with him 10 years ago. He was unhappy living in a group home and insistent that he could live independently. Struggling with poor social skills, he had a reputation for entering homes and other places without knocking or being invited in. He meant no harm, but had

*Name changed to protect confidentiality.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 4]
Nurturing Human Connections

Stewardship and helping those in need has always been vital to the 145-year history of St. John's Lutheran Church in Springfield. A large part of their stewardship has been in partnership with LSSI. St. John's congregation is consistently among the top financial contributors to LSSI as a whole.

St. John's congregants feel a connection to LSSI's work. "There is a long history of nurturing inside of the church and to try to then reach the needs of the outside world," said Lead Pastor Rev. Greg Busboom. "We really try to live our ministry, and our congregation sees LSSI as an extension and reflection of that ministry."

The nurturing begins early—the church has an active children, youth, and family ministry. They have also been a part of LSSI's Storybook ministry since the program's inception in 1997. St. John's has fundraised, donated books, and sent congregants to local prisons to record inmates reading stories that are then sent to their children.

"St. John's has been a great foundation for our ministry," said Storybook Program Director Gail Beard. "They're a very active and supportive church."

"We love to see the human connections," Rev. Busboom said.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Food Pantry at Kingston Place

The second Monday of every month, Kingston Place residents are up and moving before most people are out of bed. Furniture is moved, tables are arranged, and piles of fresh, healthy food are moved in. Individuals from around Chicago's South Shore community grab a box and their pick of fruits and vegetables. By noon, all of the food is gone.

For 15 years now Kingston Place, an affordable senior housing property of LSSI, has welcomed all members of the community to their food pantry, run by residents with assistance from the Greater Chicagoland Food Depository.

On this day, over 400 families have been provided healthy, nutritious food that can be hard to afford at local grocery stores.

"This is all just a God-send," a recipient said, as she kissed a volunteer on the cheek. "God bless Kingston Place, God bless LSSI."

Kingston Place Social Coordinator Gabrielle Molden, who facilitates the proceedings, stressed the importance of connecting with the community and providing fresh, nutritious produce to those who can't afford it.

"We're able to feed people who aren't able to feed their children the right diet they need to be nourished," Molden said.

Kingston Place resident Katherine Lewis has helped with the food pantry for many years. She loves when parents bring their children.

"If it is a no school day, children come with their parents," Lewis said. "They get bright eyes when they see sweets, apples, oranges. For me, it is instant gratification knowing we are helping someone who just may be less fortunate."

ST. JOHN’S LUTHERAN CHURCH, SPRINGFIELD

Every child in LSSI’s foster care program receives a lifebook called “My Awesome Life” created by LSSI. A lifebook is a fun and healing tool to help foster children celebrate special milestones and understand difficult aspects of their lives. Since 2008, more than 3,200 lifebooks have been distributed to foster children in LSSI’s care.
Lenten Appeal Follow-up

In the months leading up to Easter, LSSI mailed its Lenten appeal. Donors responded with charitable contributions and special words of encouragement to share with our clients. Thanks to everyone who responded—your financial support and special intentions go a long way toward fulfilling LSSI’s mission to bring healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities.

“Seeing how deeply the fathers love their children—to be able to facilitate that human connection between parents and children—all have powerful stories about the connections they have made or seen through the Storybook Project.”

Offering Encouragement

Dear Friends,

“Encourage one another.” This brief Bible verse on the cover of this month’s Inspired newsletter gets to heart of our mission at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI). We respond to the Gospel to bring healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities.

The programs, churches, and people profiled here demonstrate the level of encouragement happening every day across Illinois between LSSI staff, volunteers, and clients.

Terra Dempsey, director of LSSI’s Sterling and Dixon Group Homes, and our Intermittent Community Integrated Living Arrangement (CILA) program in northwest Illinois, knows how far encouragement can take our clients. Terra works with individuals who can—and want—to live independently, but who need extra assistance—and encouragement—to make that possible. Each person has unique support needs to help them live on their own or more autonomously with a family member. Terra, along with other LSSI staff, make this happen. Part of her team’s and clients’ success is, she said, “believing that each individual has a plan for successful community living.”

Elsewhere across the state, members of St. John’s Lutheran Church, Springfield, are helping to strengthen relationships between incarcerated parents and their children by volunteering with LSSI’s Storybook Project. In Chicago, residents of LSSI’s Kingston Place offer support to community residents at the apartment complex’s monthly food pantry. In the Quad Cities, one volunteer helps LSSI respond to the community’s need for our services.

The people highlighted here represent just a few of the 73,000 individuals LSSI helps through its 190 programs at 85 sites across Illinois. With your partnership, we know that much can be accomplished when we encourage one another.

In Faith,

Mark A. Stutrud
Chief Executive Officer
Kathy Nelson

Kathy Nelson was first drawn to LSSI while at a presentation given by a behavioral health counselor from the organization.

“What stuck with me was the enthusiasm and passion this woman had about the ministry. It was exhilarating,” Nelson said. “She made me feel like I had something to give. I wanted to support that ministry so that others could feel like they mattered.”

In order to bring more awareness of LSSI to the area, her church, First Lutheran, partnered with two others in Geneseo to bring in programs and speakers from LSSI, resulting in a counseling center opening in First Lutheran’s former parsonage.

That was in the 70s. Nelson has served on a volunteer advisory committee, as well as the Cornerstone Board. Her specialties are outreach and advocacy, having spoken at over 40 outreach events and attended almost every Lutheran Day.

Volunteering with LSSI “opens your eyes to see clients’ pain and heartache,” Nelson said. “Supporting a program that can alleviate that pain so that suffering doesn’t dominate their lives is amazing.”

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