Supporting Adoptive Families Well-Being

A 10-year-old girl has been acting out to her parents, leaving the house without permission, and even threatening suicide. Her adoptive parents struggle to make her feel like part of the family. A pair of brothers experience serious neglect in an international orphanage during early childhood and develop Reactive Attachment Disorder, hindering their ability to bond with their adoptive parents.

“Families that have adopted have unique challenges and may need help at times to increase family stability,” said Diane McKillop, program director for LSSI’s Adoption Preservation Services based in Peoria. Children may have experienced years in foster care, been isolated in international orphanages, or fought through difficult years without parental love and guidance. Some children just need help adjusting to their new home.

For more than 20 years, LSSI’s Adoption Preservation Services have provided that extra support for families who have made the choice to bring a child into their home. The six staff members provide care for over 45 youth and families throughout the state.

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

—JEREMIAH 29:11

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Building Community

Jesse Hilton first heard of LSSI’s Spring Ridge Senior Housing in Rockford before it even opened.

“I wanted to retire, but I was living alone, and I could not afford to stay in my apartment unless I continued to work,” Hilton said. She was one of the first residents to move in and has “been a happy camper” ever since.

Spring Ridge is one of 21 affordable housing communities owned or managed by LSSI.

“It’s like our own little neighborhood.”

Hilton was attracted to the affordable rent and an active community of residents who are involved with their local churches, communities, and families. A few continue to work and others volunteer throughout Rockford.

Hilton stays active with her pet Chihuahua, Ginger, or keeps track of her family and finances with social media and online banking. She has recently been helping a neighbor with her cat, as they are away helping a family member who is ill.

Hilton said that each floor at Spring Ridge has the feel of a neighborhood.

“I truly think mine is one of the best halls in the building, but everyone thinks that about their hallway!” Hilton said. “It’s like our own little neighborhood.”

Neighbors to All

It’s typical to find members of St. John’s Lutheran Church, Sterling at a Sunday morning worship service, a Gospel study, or a church council meeting. Their ministries, however, don’t end there—they stretch far beyond the church’s doors.

“It’s in our DNA,” said Pr. Mark Oehlert as he ticks off the many community organizations that meet at the church, including several LSSI programs. “It’s a generous church and an out-looking organization.”

St. John’s supports LSSI philanthropically, and encourages volunteer support and advocacy for clients and programs. The church has held appreciation dinners to honor LSSI staff. Youth groups from St. John’s, St. Paul’s Lutheran, and Immanuel Lutheran, annually collect money and go Christmas shopping for residents at Choices, LSSI’s treatment program for teenagers at Nachusa Lutheran Home.

Whether in St. John’s backyard or across Illinois, Pr.

A Responsibility to Care for Others

LINDA FALOTICO

Linda Falotico’s involvement with the Women’s Network of LSSI is so deep-rooted, she chuckled when trying to recall why and when she first got involved over 14 years ago!

Falotico’s church, Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church, Arlington Heights, has long been affiliated with LSSI, offering members the opportunity to support programs, volunteer, and learn about the people the organization serves. That’s how she initially became involved. The Women’s Network offered additional opportunities to support LSSI’s mission.

“It’s our responsibility to provide for our communities and help the least among us,” Falotico said. She, and her husband Dan, believe that historically and fiscally, LSSI is highly qualified to provide for people in need through its services statewide.

The Women’s Network organizes several fundraisers each year, and members also participate in hands-on projects to

“Recovery is beautiful. I feel so much better. I feel alive, and do everything I need to there for you than not have anyone a
Oehlert said LSSI is important to residents of the state. “LSSI has Lutheran roots. Our bishops serve on the board,” he said. “We’re caretakers for the least of these, and it’s too big of a job to do alone.”

St. John’s generosity and involvement shows what it means to be a follower of Christ, Pr. Oehlert added. “God gives us so much,” he said. “To not share would be against Biblical teaching.”

St. John’s youth group members, including Jonas Hicks, Mathew Hicks (back), Luke Steinke and Andrew Ivarson (front), complete their Christmas shopping for teens in LSSI’s Choices program.

Others

help LSSI clients and hear directly from staff about the organization’s programs. Falotico serves on the group’s “Spring Fling” fundraising luncheon committee and is working with members to assemble “Welcome Kits” for children in foster care served by LSSI.

“The Women’s Network helps to get the message out that there are real people whose lives are affected with LSSI’s services,” she said. “LSSI really does support the work of Christ. We’re proud to be associated with them.”

The Women’s Network’s Spring Fling is May 7. For more details, see the Events listed on the back page of this newsletter or visit LSSI.org.

Dear Friends

For 149 years, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) has responded, grown, and changed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable residents of our state.

In early 2016, we faced more change. Due to the unprecedented, extended state budget impasse, LSSI announced in late January that it was closing 30 of its programs throughout Illinois. These decisions were made after lengthy and thoughtful consideration.

With difficult change often comes innovation. Many intense and rapid changes are happening in health and human services. People have expressed a greater desire for services to increasingly be delivered in the home, in a natural setting.

This requires a coordinated network of services operated, in partnership with other organizations, government, businesses, churches, and individuals. Our vision is focused on creating new models of care to serve the whole person with greater impact and lasting change.

This issue of Inspired highlights a variety of LSSI programs that continue in communities statewide. We remain grateful for the collective support of churches, volunteers, and philanthropic partners like you who have placed their trust in LSSI, enabling us to continue our mission now and into the future.

In Faith,

Mark A. Stutrud
President and Chief Executive Officer
“We promote stability, ensure safety and permanency, and increase the well-being of the family as a whole,” said McKillop. “We work to preserve the family unit.”

Services start by providing counseling to the adopted child, but extend to weekly family counseling, support groups for parents and youth alike, and mentorship programs with local volunteers. The team also is able to provide crisis support, offer assistance for camp services, and provide respite to parents.

While the success of the program rides on many factors, the results are always unifying. McKillop sees development in coping skills, older teenagers becoming independent and taking ownership of themselves, and families working on Lifebooks together in order to better understand their journey.

After counseling with LSSI staff, the 10-year-old girl now has special one-on-one time with her adoptive mother each day. She is “learning to love myself and my color,” and each night asks for mom to tuck her in to bed.