New Opioid Recovery Home Provides Healthy Start

At its current rate, the opioid epidemic will claim the lives of more than 2,700 Illinoisans in 2020, according to the Illinois Department of Public Health. Amid this epidemic, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) is a part of the solution, opening its Healthy Start West Recovery Home in March 2020 for adults receiving treatment for opioid addiction.

Located at LSSI’s Addiction Treatment Center-Elgin, the recovery home is part of the state’s Opioid Action Plan, providing housing for up to 22 residents (at this writing, with the COVID-19 pandemic, there are only nine residents).

“We’re looking at many paths up the mountain for residents in recovery,” said George Kollias, CADC, Supervisor of Elgin Outpatient Treatment and Healthy Start West Recovery Home. “We support our Healthy Start residents when they’re doing well and when they are struggling.”

The Recovery Home provides housing to individuals for up to a year while they receive medication-assisted treatment and gain employment, along with peer support, case management, and on-site outpatient treatment. Residents can practice what they learn in treatment groups.

(Continued on Page 4)
On a normal day working for LSSI’s Project IMPACT, a behavioral health crisis program in five Chicago hospital emergency departments, performing emergency psychiatric evaluations is a highly stressful job.

“As anyone can imagine, doing this job amidst the scare of COVID-19, in a setting with extremely high exposure, the stress is palpable,” said Julia Sobaski, Project IMPACT Supervisor, Community First Medical Center.

LSSI’s Project IMPACT crisis mental health counselors and social workers are essential workers in every sense. Any employee with cold symptoms cannot work and could be sent home for many days. Emergency department physicians and nurses depend on Project IMPACT counselors to evaluate and place patients needing psychiatric care quickly to keep the ER available for patients who may need COVID-19 testing and acute medical care.

As awareness about the crisis in Illinois grew, Project IMPACT workers answered the call immediately. Staff offered to work extra shifts for coworkers worried about their own exposure, those unable to work while being sick, or those who needed to stay home with children. “I am inspired by their strength and resilience through this tough time,” Sobaski said of her colleagues.

This is one of many examples of LSSI’s “healing heroes” who live out LSSI’s mission to bring healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities. Visit Facebook.com/LuthSocServIL for stories of Healing Heroes.

Pictured, Michelle F., Project IMPACT counselor.
Dear Friends,

As our nation responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, our first concern is for people in communities across Illinois—children affected by trauma, seniors needing assistance in their homes, and counseling adults and children with behavioral health issues. Many are feeling anxious about the pandemic.

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) established a Pandemic Plan Review Committee that has been responding to various levels of alerts related to COVID-19 to keep employees safe and available to those in need.

To help people remain healthy and safe throughout this pandemic, we continue to make program modifications where necessary. LSSI staff have risen to the occasion of providing services to our clients despite all the changes that have been asked and required of them during this pandemic. Some continue to provide in-person services where essential; others have adapted quickly to provide video and teleconferencing with clients. Well before the state’s shelter-in-place order, we opened a new program (page 1), a recovery home in Elgin for adults recovering from opioid addiction. While the program is not accepting new residents, we are providing services to those who were already living there.

These are uncertain times. I am reminded of Paul’s letter and instructions to the early Christian Church in Corinth, where because of an opposing force, the Corinthians’ faith had been shaken. “Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” (1 Corinthians 16:13-14)

We appreciate your concern for our staff and clients. We remain grateful for your ongoing support that enables us to provide critical services during challenging circumstances.

In faith,

Mark A. Stutrud
President and Chief Executive Officer

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Recovery

manager for a complete rehabilitation of two spaces—the pool table/recreation room and the primary meeting room. She recruited volunteers with expertise in drywall, painting, flooring, ceilings, electricity, and other tasks—including volunteers like Dale Wittenberg and Tim Herrmann.

“People volunteered their time and skill out of heart. They didn’t do it for any kind of accolades,” said Almeraz. “It’s our hope that being in a space like the meeting room, which is bright and calm, will help clients feel comfortable as they go through their process and try to heal themselves. In the pool table room, we hope they will have fun and relax and enjoy a very nice space for interacting with each other in a smaller-group setting.”

stand Firm in Faith

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

• Stand Firm in Faith

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Coronavirus Relief Bill Impacts Charitable Giving

The “Coronavirus Relief Bill,” signed into law on March 27, included charitable-related provisions. While “tax deductions” rarely are the primary motivation to making a gift to LSSI, these changes may be of interest:

**New Charitable Deduction for Non-Itemizers**

Taxpayers who take the standard deduction rather than itemizing their deductions will nevertheless be able to claim a charitable deduction of up to $300 for cash donations made in 2020.*

**Higher Deduction Limits**

Individuals in 2020 will be able to deduct cash gifts to the extent of their entire adjusted gross income. Typically, gifts of cash made to public charities are normally limited to 60% of adjusted gross income.*

**Required Minimum Distributions Waived in 2020**

For 2020, there will be no mandatory distributions from retirement accounts (whatever the age of the owner), thus allowing those accounts to recover. The minimum age for making a tax-free transfer from an IRA to a charity remains at 70½, and the annual limit remains at $100,000. However, since cash gifts are deductible in 2020 to the extent of adjusted gross income, a person could withdraw and then contribute a larger amount—with the deduction offsetting the taxable withdrawal. Please discuss with your advisors as to how this might impact or apply to your situation.

For more information, contact David Novak, JD, Vice President of Advancement at 847.635.4671 or David.Novak@LSSI.org.

*Gifts to Donor Advised Funds or Supporting Organizations, like The Cornerstone Foundation, are not eligible.

Events

**Saturday, May 2, 2020**

**VIRTUAL EVENT** Spring Fling: Blooms and Blessings Presented by the Women’s Network of LSSI

This year’s event will be held “virtually” online and also by mail. LSSI needs your support as we continue to provide critical services to people who are especially vulnerable during a time of national concern and restricted mobility. Funds raised will benefit our Behavioral Health Services. Make your gift at LSSI.org/SpringFling.

**Sunday, May 3, 2020**

Good Shepherd Sunday

On Good Shepherd Sunday, many congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) across the state celebrate their shared social ministry with LSSI. Please plan now to celebrate with LSSI during the 2020 Easter season. We will have resources available for your congregation to use on May 3 (including virtually) or on another Sunday during the Easter season. For more information, contact Susan.Greeley@LSSI.org or 847.635.4617.

**Tuesday, May 5, 2020**

Giving Tuesday Now

#GivingTuesdayNow is a global day of giving and unity that will take place on May 5, 2020, as an emergency response to the unprecedented need caused by COVID-19. Join us this day as we create awareness for LSSI’s programs and “Healing Heroes.” More information at LSSI.org

Of cash made to public charities are normally limited to 60% of adjusted gross income.*

We offer structure, accountability, and a safe environment,” Kollias said. “Clients receive understanding and support from our recovery counselors.”

Healthy Start West is housed in a wing of the Center that closed four years ago as a result of the state’s budget impasse. The program receives funding from the Illinois State Opioid Response Grant.

Additionally, The Grand Victoria Foundation has been a longtime funder of the Center. The Edwardson Family Foundation provided critical start-up funds, including renovation of rooms and common areas that was also supported by Lutheran Church of the Atonement (see church profile). The results say “welcome.”

“It’s a very homey place,” Kollias said. “It has become home rather than treatment for our clients.”