Building a Foundation for Families

Janie Murphy struggled with depression during her pregnancy. Doctors prescribed several medications, and she became addicted to pain medication, which spiraled into other problems that threatened not only her but also her three other children as well.

“I love my job, because I’m able to connect with the families.”

— Lee Taylor, Child Welfare Specialist, Intact Family Recovery

“Drugs became a huge part of my every day,” she said of an addiction that lasted over five years.

Murphy found help with LSSI’s Intact Family Recovery Program, which provides parents with needed support such as case management, referrals to treatment programs, and guidance from caseworkers—all while keeping the family together, thus minimizing trauma for children.

When she enrolled in the Intact Family Recovery Program at LSSI, Murphy was terrified. “And then I met my caseworkers,” she said. “They were amazing.”

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)
Helping People Flourish

At LSSI’s Mental Health Group Homes, adults living with a mental health diagnosis not only have a home to call their own, they’re given opportunities to thrive.

Located on Chicago’s northwest side, each of the three homes accommodates between 9 and 12 adults living with a mental health diagnosis—such as major depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia—who benefit from a supported community living arrangement.

Residents have their own bedrooms. The home atmosphere includes shared living spaces—dining room, kitchen, and living room—and staff on-site 24/7. At regular house meetings, residents discuss meal planning, activities, and household chore schedules.

“It’s rewarding to see a new resident move into their own room,” said Program Director Nancy Milam, MS, LCPC, LPHA. “We see them flourish.”

LSSI’s commitment to Whole Person Care is evident at the Mental Health Group Homes, said Milam. Staff work with residents to establish personal goals based on their individual situation and help them achieve those goals. For some, that might ultimately be living independently. For others, a goal might be learning to take public transportation.

Residents attend day programs or group sessions, many offered through LSSI’s Portage-Cragin Counseling Center, and staff are in touch with each resident’s case manager and counselor. Some residents attend school or have jobs.

“It’s rewarding to see our residents’ progress,” Milam said. “Their self-efficacy improves. They feel like they’re part of the community.”

Hope Moves

What began as a modest undertaking three years ago by a small group at Northeast Christian Church, Rockford, has turned into an annual tradition and a growing church ministry.

Led by congregation member Bob Coffey, an LSSI Rockford Foster Care Licensing Representative, the small group hosted a holiday dinner for LSSI foster parents in 2017 with just 15 volunteers. In December 2019, 100 volunteers from the church were needed to serve at their third dinner, which hosted 200 foster parents and their children.

“Our congregation donated over $5,000 to supply every family at the dinner with gift cards,” said Coffey. “We added gift cards that LSSI donated, so each home received $100 in gift cards to help with the holidays.”

Coffey drives a larger mission at Northeast Christian Church to support foster parents in other ways, largely partnering with LSSI, to provide annual events like their summer Foster Parent Picnic, a Parents’ Night Out, and trauma-based training for foster parents and staff.

The church has no budget for any of these activities. They continue to seek generous supporters to help offset their costs.

“Our group at church has taken on the name ‘Hope Moves’ because we do not plan to just sit and hope!” said Coffey.
Networking for Good

Patti Carroll is living proof of the power of networking. After hearing several inspiring LSSI speakers at her congregation, Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in Arlington Heights, a friend and member of the Women’s Network of LSSI invited her to the network’s annual summer luncheon in 2017. She decided to join the group.

“The Women’s Network is an important organization because we support many of LSSI’s programs, which are very helpful to people in need,” said Carroll. “I am retired, and now that I have more free time, I’d like to use it for a worthwhile cause.”

As part of the network, Carroll has participated in planning several of LSSI’s annual events, including Spring Fling and Amicus Certus, as well as attended and worked both events.

“All the women are passionate about LSSI and supporting programs like the foster care program and the Elgin Treatment Center, for which we hosted a shower of gifts recently,” she said. “These women are always trying to find where there is a need for assistance and then figure out how they can help.”

For Carroll, that’s what it’s all about. “I enjoy helping people,” she said. “By being a member of the Women’s Network, I’m able to do that.”

Patti Carroll, center, with members of the 2020 Spring Fling Event Committee, Terri Gens (from left) Gail Price, Carolyn Blair, and Linda Falotico. Not pictured: Anita Cannella and Michele Nelson

Building Community

As Program Director for LSSI’s Children’s Community Services in Rockford, it’s not uncommon to get asked what my job entails. Our Rockford office has nearly 60 staff who oversee Foster Care, Intact Family Services, Therapeutic Foster Care, and Adoptions, so oftentimes, for a short answer, it’s easiest to say, “I help build communities.”

In Rockford, LSSI’s Children’s Community Services are an extension of community partnerships that are prioritizing the safety and wholeness of families. Our work is a true testament to LSSI’s mission to bring healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities.

This issue of Inspired illustrates how LSSI builds communities. In the cover story, Child Welfare Specialist Lee Taylor from our Intact Family Recovery Program, provided support to Janie Murphy and her children—including accompanying her to her daughter’s school—and also encouraging her in her personal growth and sobriety. By truly engaging families in our care, we are helping to transform communities.

Closer to home, I had the honor of witnessing one of our staff rally a group ministry at Northeast Christian Church (see Church Profile, page 2) into a volunteer crew that has planned several events for our local foster families. Their attention to detail was phenomenal. The events were something we could not have accomplished on our own.

The Bible verse from Ecclesiastes on the cover begins, “Two are better than one...” We certainly find that to be true in our work at LSSI. Whether it’s our colleagues, other nonprofits volunteers, or donors, the strength we find in each other is one of our greatest resources!

Sincerely,

David Hicks, MS
Program Director
Children’s Community Services, Rockford

“The Women’s Network is an important organization because we support many of LSSI’s programs, which are very helpful to people in need.”

— Patti Carroll, Women’s Network of LSSI
Events

Saturday, May 2, 2020
Spring Fling: Blooms and Blessings
The Westin Chicago Northwest, Itasca
Presented by the Women’s Network of LSSI

Join women of all ages for this charming event featuring boutique shopping, raffles, lunch, and entertainment with Dueling Pianos! All proceeds, including 20% of shopping purchases, benefit the Behavioral Health Programs of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit 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, 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 or on another Sunday during the Easter season. For more information, contact Susan.Greeley@LSSI.org or 847.635.4617.

SAVE THE DATE!
Saturday, October 10, 2020
Amicus Certus
Union League Club of Chicago

For more information, contact Mariah.Heinz@LSSI.org or 847.635.4656.

It’s Free Money, Don’t Waste it!

Are you eligible for Thrivent Choice Dollars? Choice Dollars can help support LSSI. All remaining 2019 Choice Dollars must be designated by March 31, 2020. You can learn more at thrivent.com/thriventchoice or by calling 800.847.4836 and saying “Thrivent Choice” after the prompt. You have the power to bring hope and well-being to the people LSSI serves.

Start a Fundraising Campaign

Be a part of LSSI’s life-changing work and start a personal fundraising campaign! Celebrate a birthday, honor a loved one, or create your own that will help you make an impact.

To get started:

• Visit justgiving.com/lutheransocialservicesofillinois
• Click “Fundraise for us.”
• Create a campaign as an individual or group.
• Customize your page, and tell what inspired you.
• Share on social media, email, or text using your personalized link.

For more information, email Mariah.Heinz@LSSI.org.

Murphy’s primary caseworker, Child Welfare Specialist Lee Taylor, met with Murphy and her kids regularly. He accompanied Murphy to her oldest daughter’s school to help connect her with a counselor, so she could get the help she needed but was afraid to ask for.

“I love my job, because I’m able to connect with the families,” Taylor said. “I’m able to understand how they function on a daily basis and offer support.”

Murphy’s outlook changed dramatically in the three years she’s been sober. “Since I’ve been a part of the LSSI program, it has not only helped me to have confidence but also pushed me to get back out there,” she said. “Helping other people is what I love to do. I found my passion.”

Taylor is proud of Murphy’s progress and noted she has successfully completed the program. She also secured a job and recently got a promotion. “Janie is doing everything possible to build a foundation. Her loving environment for her children is present, and now she’s giving back to the community,” he said.

“It doesn't matter how many times you fall,” Murphy said. “It matters what you do and how you get back up.”