“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving.”

—1 TIMOTHY 4:4

Services for People on the Road to Recovery

Upon completing her stay at a residential treatment program for alcoholism, Amy Zagroba, 47, took an Uber straight to the door of the Healthy Start Recovery Home, part of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI). Since that day over a year ago, Zagroba has used a variety of LSSI’s services that help people start and maintain their sobriety.

Housed in LSSI’s Kenmore Addiction Treatment Center-Chicago, the Healthy Start Recovery Home assists people actively seeking to obtain or maintain a drug- and alcohol-free lifestyle.

“Our Healthy Start Recovery Home is important to our clients’ sobriety because they need a safe living environment where they can integrate back into society,” said Frank Harris, LCSW, CADC, LSSI’s Associate Executive Director for Home and Community Services.

Zagroba had a stable career and family. She didn’t start drinking alcoholically until her 40s. Her drinking went from having a few drinks occasionally to drinking every day, all day.

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In recognition of her dedication to LSSI's Storybook Project, Sharon Zuiderveld received the 2019 Volunteer of the Year Award from the Illinois Department of Corrections.

Zuiderveld, a member of Faith Lutheran Church, Jacksonville, has been the coordinator for her church's volunteer efforts with the Storybook Project since 2013. The Storybook Project is part of LSSI's Prisoner and Family Ministry. Volunteers conduct “Storybook events” at 18 prisons in Illinois, recording prisoners reading a book to their children (or grandchildren). The recording and a copy of the book are then sent to each child, free of charge.

Faith Lutheran has supported the project in many tangible ways, including donations of laptops, voice recorders, CDs, and financial support. Zuiderveld coordinates with the prison chaplain and volunteers. The most profound part of her volunteering is meeting the prisoners themselves. “They’re thrilled when we come,” she said. “Some pray, some cry, but they always thank us profusely and tell us to have a blessed day. We’d like to see the Storybook Project continue and grow. It’s such a wonderful program.”

Twenty-five former residents of Nachusa Lutheran Home, their families, and former staff gathered this fall for an informal reunion and tour of the campus that now houses a variety of LSSI’s children’s programs. The reunion grew out of a Facebook page for people who had lived at Nachusa Lutheran Home in the 1960s. People from as far as California, Arkansas, and Tennessee traveled to Nachusa to reminisce and tour the current-day campus.

Attendees recalled fond memories of lasting friendships and mentors. “There was a bond that we all formed from being here,” recalled Kathy Loitra.

One mentor included former maintenance manager Gilbert DeWitt, 97, who attended the reunion and enjoyed visiting with the former residents, all of whom he remembered. “I guess I substituted as a parent for them,” he said. “It’s something that I’ll never forget.”

Gary Oberg lived at Nachusa during the 1960s. Later, he served in the U.S. Navy for 22 years. He recalled the help and support he received from the home’s administrator in finding an apartment and securing a job at age 17. “What I took away from here was a sense of family,” Oberg said.

At the Central/Southern Illinois Synod Assembly, Pr. Adam Dichsen of Faith Lutheran Church, Jacksonville, recognizes Sharon Zuiderveld on receiving the 2019 Volunteer of the Year Award from the Illinois Department of Corrections for her work with LSSI’s Storybook Project.
Dear Friends,

As Thanksgiving approaches, we have much for which to be thankful!

On October 31, LSSI marked the 152nd year of its founding, and we celebrated with our 4th Annual Day of Giving. The generosity we were shown, and the awareness that was created about the more than 42,000 children, adults, and seniors helped by LSSI, was inspiring. This support from friends like you continues to sustain and grow our organization.

On October 12, we also celebrated the commitment and generosity of Eric and Jodie Draut when we honored them with the “True Friend” Award at LSSI’s 38th Annual Amicus Certus Gala.

The cover story in this issue about one woman’s success in sobriety through several LSSI programs personifies the work that we do. That woman, Amy, was helped by our Healthy Start Recovery Home, LSSI’s Walsh Residence for Sober Living, and Intensive Outpatient Treatment at our Addiction Treatment Center-Kenmore. Through this generative approach, LSSI makes connections for our clients that promotes their dignity, encourages their health and well-being, and enables each person to realize their hopes and dreams so that they might reach their full potential.

The other stories you’ll read here further define our mission: a homecoming of alumni of our Nachusa Lutheran Home, an award-winning volunteer from our Storybook Project, and our ever-faithful churches who help carry out our work.

LSSI’s work is rooted in the Gospel, and we are fortunate to have your commitment that enables us to live out our mission in communities across Illinois.

In Faith,

Mark A. Stutrud
President and Chief Executive Officer
LSSI Honors True Friends Eric and Jodie Draut

Before 250 Amicus Certus Celebration guests, LSSI President and CEO Mark Stutrud presented Eric and Jodie Draut with the True Friend Award, which honors “significant contributions to the human community.”

“They have a heart for service,” Stutrud said, “I can’t think of two people more deserving than Eric and Jodie Draut in recognition of the work, contributions, and support that they’ve given LSSI.”

Accepting the award, Eric Draut said they draw inspiration from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, “It is God himself who has made us what we are, and who has given us new life through Jesus Christ. Long ago he planned that we should spend these lives helping others answering God’s call.”

Jodie Draut recognized staff who work with the more than 42,000 people annually served by LSSI and applauded their “living, daily confidence in God’s grace.”

Elizabeth Vargas, award-winning journalist and author of Between Breaths: A Memoir of Panic and Addiction, gave the keynote address. “The work that [LSSI] does is absolutely extraordinary and is clearly changing lives,” Vargas said. “Part of the reason I didn’t seek help sooner is because I thought I was alone. By telling my story, other people out there who are secretly suffering might know that they’re not alone either.”

Julie Luck Jensen chaired the Amicus Certus Event Committee. The event raised $407,000, including a $152,000 matching gift by the Drauts.

“Whole person care is important in that addiction and other chronic conditions our clients face don’t happen in a vacuum,” said Harris. “Addiction is really no respecter of persons. It has no particular face. So, to see our clients’ wounds heal, that’s beyond words.”

Learn more about Amy’s recovery in the video “Strength Through Recovery” on LSSI’s YouTube Channel.