Inspired Stories of healing, justice, and wholeness

FALL 2014

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

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MISSION STATEMENT
Responding to the Gospel, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois brings healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities.
Dear Friends,

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) serves a large number of people with varying needs across our state, and we’ve found common themes among both our talented staff and the individuals they serve—commitment, opportunity, faith. This issue of Inspired magazine shines a light on our programs that make a difference in the lives of our state’s most vulnerable residents and how the dedication from our staff is matched by the clients we serve.

I feel a great sense of pride when I see the commitment of our staff as they work alongside individuals working to break free of addictions at our Kenmore Center on Chicago’s north side (page 10) or children in foster care defying odds and boldly attaining positive life achievements in the Steps to Life program (page 2). One of our clients at LSSI’s Single Parent program in Peoria called her caseworker a “life support.” A teen in foster care pointed out how much LSSI staff truly care about her success. As an organization, we are fortunate to have such a high level of dedication amongst our employees.

As much as I am proud of LSSI’s staff, I am further inspired by the clients themselves. The men, women, and children we serve make a commitment when they become involved with our programs. Whether it’s a commitment to sobriety or a pledge to make other important changes in their lives, we provide the tools and encouragement, but our clients do the hardest work. Most often, they succeed despite challenging circumstances in their lives.

If I am going to talk about service and commitment, I would be remiss in not mentioning our volunteers statewide who help LSSI live out its mission to “bring healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities.” Whether it’s advocating Illinois lawmakers for human services funding at Lutheran Day or making philanthropic gifts to support LSSI’s good works, our volunteers help sustain our many programs with their steadfast faith, dedication, and generosity.

I particularly would like to recognize LSSI Board Chair Eric Draut. Over the past year, Eric has volunteered as part-time Executive Chairman while LSSI conducted a search for a new Chief Executive Officer. Eric has a deep commitment to LSSI’s mission and a willingness to serve in any way. We are grateful to have someone with his leadership and management talents serving our organization. Eric was a recent recipient of the President’s Call to Service Award, a high honor given to Americans who improve their communities through volunteer service. Having witnessed his commitment first hand, I know he is a deserving honoree.

Finally, much like the students starting a new school year at one of LSSI’s Headstart programs, I am anticipating the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for LSSI. I am pleased that on Oct. 1, we will be adding a new asset to our team as Mark Stutrud joins LSSI as our new Chief Executive Officer. Mark brings with him a strong track record of leadership within both Lutheran and social service organizations. His wealth of experience and demonstrated success make him uniquely qualified to lead LSSI. As Mark gets started, you will be hearing more from him about his vision for our organization.

With deep gratitude for your partnership in serving people across Illinois,

David M.A. Jensen
President/Chief Operating Officer
Steps to Life program empowers children at risk in foster care to attain positive life achievements

BY BARB HAILEY

It is a late spring afternoon inside a community room at Salem Lutheran Church on Chicago’s south side where Steps to Life, a program of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), is under way. Several teenage girls are practicing a dance routine. Nearby, some adults carry on a conversation with a group of teenage boys. The aroma of a spaghetti dinner being prepared wafts out from the kitchen.

To a casual observer, the scene looks like a typical after-school program, and in many respects it is—except the stakes are much higher for the students who participate. It is a lifeline for children in foster care who have been exposed to traumatic situations beyond their control. Students like Michelle*, 15, who was removed from her mother’s care at a young age and has lived in several foster homes. She’s a poised young woman who smiles easily, but she will be the first to admit this wasn’t always her demeanor.

“I was immature,” she says. “I was a know-it-all, and I thought I could say whatever I wanted to say. I used to get into fights.”

Michelle has been attending Steps to Life for four years and with its support, she turned the corner at a critical time in her life. “One day I decided, ‘Get it together,’” she says matter-of-factly. “I didn’t want to be another statistic—dead or in jail.”

Michelle credits the compassion and understanding of the Steps to Life staff for helping her deal with the traumatic events in her life, encouraging her interests, and showing her hope for her future. “A child knows when someone cares,” Michelle says. “At Steps to Life, they care, and they show you.”

LSSI is one of the largest foster care providers in the state, caring for more than 10 percent of all foster children in the Illinois child welfare system. Steps to Life helps at-risk children in LSSI’s foster care program with activities and support designed to impact, empower, and challenge them to constructively build character for positive life achievements. Weekly meetings are geared toward various age groups—Little Learners, boys, ages 6 to 8; Boys Group, ages 8 to 12; Girls Group, ages 8 to 12; and the co-ed Teen Group, ages 13 to 18. While the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services applauds the program, no additional funding is provided to implement the services. Steps to Life is funded solely by LSSI and charitable contributions.

Giving 110 percent

“These kids deserve for us to give 110 percent,” says Patti Zullo, a Placement Stabilization Coordinator at LSSI’s Augustana Open Arms location in Chicago. “We are their last hope.”

Steps to Life participants are conventional kids in many ways, yet their lives have been touched by experiences that are anything but typical. As children in foster care, they have been exposed to disturbing situations that can range from abuse and neglect, separation from families, and violence at home and within their communities, to parents with alcohol and drug addictions. And while the goal for children in foster care is to find stable living placements, many have lived in multiple foster homes, creating a thread of uncertainty that runs through their lives.

Zullo’s role is to find the best fit between foster children and foster parents. She also facilitates the Steps to

*Name changed to protect confidentiality

LSSI Youth Coordinator Arthur McGriff helps build confidence and self-awareness with teens in foster care who participate in the Steps to Life program.
An Opportunity for Children to Find Themselves
to Life group for girls ages 8-12, working with girls like Michelle before transitioning them to the Teen Group. Zullo recalls Michelle’s volatility, but over the years, she’s seen the positive change Steps to Life has made in the teenager’s life.

“Michelle has worked hard. She learned how to advocate for herself. She’s blossomed into a young lady,” Zullo says with the pride of a parent. Indeed, Steps to Life staff treat the kids in their program like their own children.

Part of the work between the kids and staff happens at weekly gatherings. Teens meet for two hours each week, while the younger groups meet for an hour. LSSI staff pick up the participants from school and take them to the meetings, where a snack is provided. Important discoveries—for children and staff—happen in these group meetings. “The group setting mirrors their school environment and real life,” Zullo says. As the group sheds light on each child’s needs, staff can address underlying issues that might contribute to problems they are having, whether it’s fighting at school or being disruptive in their foster homes. The program includes a school liaison, who is closely involved with any meetings or plans regarding each child’s educational needs.

Zullo says Steps to Life provides the intervention that can make a profound difference in the lives of the children in the program. She reflects on this when she reads about teens and young adults who commit acts of violence, and thinks about how positive intervention could have made a difference. “When I look at the climate in our communities and the violence that exists, I think about kids who fell through the cracks,” she says. “For each child I interact with, I want them to know that they matter.”

Children and teens are involved in Steps to Life voluntarily, having been referred by their case worker or their foster families. The program provides positive interventions in a variety of ways, introducing new experiences to kids beyond their immediate environment, and allowing them to participate in cultural enrichment outings to museums, restaurants, and businesses. These activities might seem ordinary for some families, but a majority of these children have not had the opportunity to experience them. The staff help youth develop and improve skills for self-identity, self-expression, and communication. Throughout, these encounters are helping prepare the children and teens for the next phase in their life. For the teenagers involved, the next step is adulthood outside the boundaries of foster care.

Opportunity

Arthur McGriff’s dedication to Steps to Life and its teen participants is evident as soon as he starts talking about the program. When pressed to sum up the program in one word, he immediately says, “Opportunity.” A Youth Coordinator for LSSI who oversees the Steps to Life Boys Group and Teen Group, McGriff adds, “It is a great opportunity for these teens to meet new people, and be molded and guided. It provides them with an opportunity to step out of their communities and gain life experiences.”

Teen Group participants are picked up from various Chicago neighborhoods and suburbs, and are transported by LSSI Children’s Community Services staff to Salem Lutheran Church on Chicago’s south side. Upon arrival, teens have a chance to unwind from their day before they gather for a discussion. On this particular day, McGriff and the Steps to Life staff lead a conversation about the recent death of a 14-year-old Chicago girl, shot by a peer who was jealous because they both liked the same boy.

The story, played out on a local newspaper’s front page, is a great entry point for discussion about conflict resolution. It’s an important topic for this group, many of whom see this type of violence first hand in their own communities. This dialogue allows the teens to open up about what’s going on in their lives.

Many of the teens have had a hard time fitting in because they’re in foster care. “It’s so important to meet other kids in the same boat,” McGriff says. “Every kid has a different story. We deal with who they are right now. We mentor them on issues they’re facing. We want them to have confidence to come here, and say what they want, and be who they are. It’s amazing for the short amount of time we have them, how much we do. This program keeps them from getting lost. They can find themselves here.”

Michelle has found herself in Steps to Life. She’s come to live by the group’s mantra: Never let your situation take control of you—you take control of it. Her days of fighting in school are over. She’s learned to channel her feelings through journal writing. “That’s the best way for me to get my feelings out,” she
Michelle also succinctly articulates her goals: to get good grades, finish high school, go to cosmetology school, and then take business administration classes to one day own a hair salon.

McGriff says the Steps to Life staff work hard to help their teens more clearly envision their goals. One enrichment activity will be to visit an independently owned and run salon. “If one of our kids comes in and says, ‘I want to join track’ or ‘I want to be an architect,’ we try to help feed them as much information as they can have to explore those interests and dreams,” he says.

With staff assistance and monitoring, the teens develop life plans, with personal goals and the specific steps needed to achieve them. In addition, pre- and post- surveys are given to gauge Steps to Life’s impact in relation to teen behavior in school, at home, and among friends. Last year, 100 percent of participants remained in school and 90 percent demonstrated a reduction in negative behaviors at school.

McGriff and the staff try to develop themes for each month’s activities. One month they might cook a meal together, have a cooking demonstration, or eat at a restaurant. Teens learn money management and how to balance a checkbook. “We’re a big advocate of life skills—budgeting money, washing clothes, taking the train from one side of the city to another—knowledge to do what so-called ‘normal kids’ might learn from families,” McGriff says. “Overall, my goal is for them to be more confident and self-aware.”

The program also develops empathy for others. Last year, all of the program participants volunteered with a food program for those in need. At Christmastime, it was Michelle’s idea for the group to assemble a holiday basket for a family in need.

Michelle demonstrated confidence many adults might struggle with when she spoke to members of Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in Arlington Heights last spring as part of their Lenten focus on the Steps to Life program. Understanding the value the program has to children at risk, the congregation raised more than $11,000 to directly support Steps to Life.

She shared some difficult details of her life with a positive affirmation of what Steps to Life has helped her become and shared the pitfalls the program has helped her avoid. “God is awesome in so many ways. We just don’t realize it,” she told the congregation. “I’m here today to let you know that I’m a living testimony of what not to be. I’m not pregnant, I’m not on drugs, and I’m not wild and out of control. I’m in a stable placement. That’s my testimony.”

LSSI wishes to thank all of the following individuals and organizations for their recent philanthropic contributions to the Steps to Life program.

A special thanks for these leadership gifts: Daniel and Linda Falotico, Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust, Herschel E. Rives Charitable Fund, and Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in Arlington Heights and their members.

Artwork created by a student in Steps to Life sums up the many facets of the program.
Churches and individuals find success in organizing fundraisers to benefit the programs of LSSI
The Power of Working Together

By Barb Hailey

When the members of three Lutheran churches in northwest Illinois organized an evening of food, music, and fun last March, they were doing more than trying to beat the winter doldrums. The group found an innovative way to raise money for the vital community services that Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) provides in Lee and Whiteside counties.

Increasingly, individuals are pooling their talents, resources, and giving hearts to organize fundraising events—both large and small—to benefit LSSI’s more than 190 programs at 85 sites across Illinois. Called third-party events, these fundraisers are conceived and implemented in a grassroots manner by committed people who want to sustain and enhance the vital services LSSI provides to children and adults.

The three churches—Immanuel Lutheran in Rock Falls, and St. Paul’s and St. John’s in Sterling—collaborate regularly in a ministry called “Bridging the Rock,” which is designed to build up the area’s Lutheran community. Representatives from the group meet once a month, and the churches collaborate on events and programs that benefit from the pooled resources (both human and financial) of their three congregations.

“At one of the meetings, the group posed the question, ‘How could we make a difference?’ knowing the challenges facing social services agencies in our area,” says Rev. Mark Oehlert, pastor of St. John’s in Sterling. “There’s no question that the services LSSI provides are needed in our community.”

The idea of a dinner with music, a raffle, and silent auction was decided. The event, held on March 4 and called “March 4-ward for LSSI,” flowed from there. “We found success in dividing up the jobs,” says Rev. Oehlert. “Once we realized not one of us had to do everything, we found a renewed energy. It gave us purpose when we realized the power of working together.”

The group kept their costs low, with volunteers working to secure donations of needed items and prizes. Area organizations helped provide food at a low cost. A wide variety of musical acts from a barbershop quartet, to a dulcimer group to a praise band provided entertainment. A 50/50 raffle and a silent auction rounded out the fundraising activities. There was no charge—guests were asked to make a free-will offering.

Seeing as it was the group’s first fundraiser for LSSI, Rev. Oehlert says he kept his expectations in check, thinking perhaps the event might raise a few thousand dollars. Imagine his surprise when the event raised $8,000. “I was blown away by it,” he says.

March 4-ward is one of many examples of how committed individuals can make a difference in the life of their community, says Kathy Hall, Assistant Vice President for Advancement at LSSI. “From infants to seniors, LSSI serves people of all ages, all faiths, and all walks of life,” Hall says. “They all need support. Not only did the event help make a difference for people in our community, it helped create awareness for the services that are offered here.”

Many of LSSI’s programs are funded solely through charitable contributions. In instances where programs receive state support, charitable gifts can help enhance programming or bridge the gap.

(Bottom) Pedal for a Purpose organizers, Rev. Adam Dihczen and Rev. Scott Egbers, raised money for LSSI on a cross-state bike ride in 2013.
between actual costs and the government funding that is received.

**Across the state, great things can be done**

Anthropologist Margaret Meade once said, “Never underestimate the ability of a small group of dedicated people to change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” LSSI has been fortunate to have the support of dedicated people whose commitment has helped sustain and grow its programs.

Rev. Oehlert sees support from groups of caring individuals as crucial to LSSI’s mission “to bring healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities.” It is work the Gospel calls us to do, he says, referencing the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus reminds his followers that whatever they do to the least of those among them, they have done to Him.

In June 2013, Rev. Adam Dichtsen, pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Jacksonville, and Rev. Scott Egbers, pastor of First Lutheran Church in Beardstown, bicycled more than 300 miles across Illinois to support several LSSI programs. Their “Pedal for a Purpose” ride, which included 11 other bicyclists, raised $14,000 for two LSSI programs: Washington Place, a group home in Beardstown for adults with Prader-Willi syndrome; and the Storybook Project, a program offered by LSSI in 16 correctional centers across Illinois that connects incarcerated parents and their children through reading.

Like the March 4-ward event in Sterling-Rock Falls, Pedal for a Purpose raised needed funds for vital programs while increasing awareness of these services. “These third-party events highlight a sense of fellowship and community,” says Hall. “Through their efforts, both organizers and participants demonstrate their shared responsibility for people in need in their communities.”

There is no limit to how people can help those in need, Hall says, highlighting a variety of third-party fundraisers that have been organized on LSSI’s behalf. For example: Papa Murphy’s, a pizza restaurant in Sterling, donated 10 percent of its sales to LSSI’s Senior Services in December 2013; for the last several years, LSSI donors have organized “Get on the Bus” parties in their homes to raise money for LSSI’s Prisoner and Family Ministry program that provides bus rides for children to visit a parent who is incarcerated, and one year, at harvest time, farmers in northwest Illinois each donated a portion of grain sales to LSSI. Car washes, bake sales, and walk-a-thons are but a small example of other third-party fundraisers.

“At one of the meetings, the group posed the question, ‘How could we make a difference?’ knowing the challenges facing social services agencies in our area.”
**Tips to Host a Third-Party Fundraiser**

Kathy Hall, Assistant Vice President of Advancement at LSSI, and Rev. Mark Oehlert, Pastor of St. John’s Lutheran Church in Sterling, offer the following tips to organize a successful third-party fundraiser for LSSI.

- Contact LSSI to let us know about the event you are planning.
- Pick something simple and doable to start with—you can always add on to the event the next year.
- Choose an activity or event that you or your group enjoys.
- Tap into the talents and resources of the group.
- Have fun!

LSSI can assist groups and individuals planning fundraising events on its behalf in the following ways:

- Offer event planning expertise and advice.
- Provide LSSI representatives to speak at an event (schedules permitting).
- Supply limited amounts of promotional items and informational brochures.
- Help promote your event on our Facebook page and website.

For more information on hosting a third-party event, contact Kathy Hall at 815.284.7796, extension 2018.
Project LEAD (Leaders Encouraging Abstinence from Drugs) received the 2014 Frederick Aigner Program Innovation Award at the Spring Cornerstone Society Luncheon on Thursday, May 15, held at LSSI's Gable Point in Crystal Lake. Project LEAD is a coalition-based project in which Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) partners with local mental health providers, schools, juvenile justice systems, businesses, parents, and youth to assess and develop preventive approaches to reduce the negative impact of drugs and alcohol, and to promote youth abstinence.

“This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.’ There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

—ACTS 4: 11-12

The Frederick Aigner Program Innovation Award Fund was established by a resolution of LSSI Board of Directors in conjunction with Pr. Aigner’s retirement. Pr. Aigner promoted innovation, and he often stated that innovation requires risk and dollars. The Fund recognizes a program or support function that demonstrates innovation in either delivering services, or implementing support structures for those services in response to the LSSI’s mission.

In addition, Jeffrey K. Semler, former Cornerstone Foundation Chairperson, was honored with the President's Call to Service Award in recognition of his dedicated service to LSSI and The Cornerstone Foundation.

The President's Volunteer Service Award was created to recognize the best in American spirit and is bestowed to Americans who improve their communities through volunteer service.
Breaking the Cycle of Substance Abuse

Kenmore Center helps men and women seeking freedom from addiction
Kristen is a nurse. She's also a heroin addict. The fact that she's not ashamed to state her name and declare her drug of choice highlights the progress she's made as a resident of the Kenmore Center in Chicago, part of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI). Kristen came to the Kenmore Center in Chicago after a relapse sent her back to drugs and away from her two young children.

Much like Kristen, Lanice is a mother who chose crack cocaine over her full-time job. A previous stint in rehab failed to stem her addiction.

Now, after seven months in Kenmore Center's residential treatment facility, both women are on the path to sobriety—and they're not looking back.

**Making the choice for recovery**

Research shows that most individuals need at least three months in treatment to significantly reduce or stop their drug or alcohol abuse—the best outcomes occur with longer durations of treatment and additional interventions. Services targeted to an individual's particular problems and needs are critical. These services must be available the moment drug-addicted individuals are ready for treatment. Counseling and other behavioral therapies are essential components to effective treatment, as well as follow-up services.

The Kenmore Center has been serving greater Chicago for nearly 40 years. It's the only center on the city's north side that includes detox, residential rehabilitation, and halfway house/extended care treatment services. Detox is the first step in the recovery process, helping individuals to first rid their bodies of drugs or alcohol. Residential rehabilitation and extended care treatment provide long-term assistance to help individuals be successful in recovery. For women like Kristen, 42, and Lanice, 48, Kenmore has been the only way to recapture their once-thriving lives.

Kristen lost her nursing license because of her abuse; retail theft fed her addiction and landed her in jail for five months. That's when she realized she needed Kenmore.

"I feel strong and grounded in this program," Kristen says. "With a spiritual foundation, Kenmore has helped me in every aspect of recovery. The emotional support is something I hadn't experienced before."

Kristen says emotional support is crucial because as an addict, her guilt is overwhelming. She regrets the damage she's done to herself and to the people she loves.

“When I was no longer numb from drugs, I had to start dealing with my emotions,” she says. “The only way I could do that is with the help of counselors and the community of women here who understand the struggle.”

Kristen is gaining the tools she needs to be disciplined and accountable. “For more than a year I tried to beat addiction by myself,” she says. “I have two young sons, yet all I could think about was getting a fix. Now, I am focused on doing the next right thing and being the mother I know I can be.”

And because of what she can prove that she's accomplished at Kenmore, the Illinois Department of Financial & Professional Regulation has reinstated her nursing license. Having her nursing license reinstated is one less hurdle toward finding employment when she completes Kenmore's treatment program.

For Lanice, recovery is a road she's been down before. She left a 28-day program only to return to a toxic environment that eventually sent her back to rehab. This is not uncommon among people in addiction recovery. Kenmore offers an extended-stay treatment program to help clients ease back into a life of sobriety.

"I am now open-minded to sobriety," Lanice says. “That might seem odd to people who have not been here. But before, I was not open to the possibility of life without drugs—drugs were my outlet. When I lost my job, I needed drugs even more than before. It took strength to get here, and it takes strength to stay. I am surrounded by 17 women who are all committed to sobriety. Learning about their addictions has taught me a lot about my own. This is the best kind of therapy.”

Upfront, the residential commitment at Kenmore can feel too long for someone facing addiction—especially for a mom—but it was the only way to break the cycle of substance abuse.

“I didn’t want to be away from my son for that long,” she says, “but if I didn’t do this, I wouldn’t be a good mom. I was not a nurturing person in my condition.”

If Lanice didn’t have Kenmore, she says she would not be in recovery.

“I didn’t deal with my addiction because I had an outlet—my job,” she says. “Losing my job was humbling. It forced me to face my life. Recovery has been incredibly difficult, but worth it.”
Reconnecting lives

What makes Kenmore special, says Frank Harris, Director of Clinical Services, is that detox is just the beginning of treatment.

“In our setting, the real work begins after detox,” Harris says. “That’s when we focus on connecting clients to resources to lessen the chance that they’ll return to substance abuse and instead continue recovery. That could be child care, or counseling, or the next level of treatment.”

The strength of the Kenmore program is continuity of care, from detox to residential treatment and finally, the recommendation to outpatient care. “Multiple levels of care give us a better chance to remain engaged with clients,” Harris says. “Our clients have a choice to come here. It is our honor and privilege to serve them as they reconnect their lives.”

The Women’s Residence halfway house is special. “This is where you see the reunification of families, of people regaining their purpose,” Harris says. “To be part of that process is an amazing gift.”

Harris is grateful to the philanthropic support Kenmore Center receives from private foundations and individuals. Such generosity plays a critical role in helping people on the path to sobriety. “Mental health programs, including addiction treatment, always seem to take the first budget cuts,” Harris says, referring to the partial state funding the

Kenmore Center: First Step on the Path to Sobriety

LSSI’s Kenmore Center is located on a quiet, residential block in Chicago’s Edgewater neighborhood. The Center’s vintage façade belies the powerful force its programs have had in supporting people to recovery for nearly 40 years.

The Kenmore Center is often the first step for men and women on the path to recovery. Last year, a total of 1,742 individuals received treatment. Of those, 1,467 men and women took the first important step of their recovery process.

The Kenmore Center’s residential and extended care services ensure that basic needs are met, permitting individuals to concentrate solely on their healing. In 2013, armed with hope and support, 221 men and women transitioned into our 28-day inpatient program, Passages, to continue their path toward sobriety. Through the Women’s Residence program, 54 women were guided and coached on rebuilding relationships, securing housing, and seeking employment while maintaining their sobriety. The majority of clients at Kenmore Center are economically disadvantaged and have difficulty accessing treatment due to limited resources and availability of affordable treatment programs.

LSSI is grateful to the following private foundations and individuals whose philanthropic support helps sustain and enrich the programming at the Kenmore Center: Ellen Ann Bechthold, Edwardson Family Foundation, Gerald A. & Karen A. Kolschowsky Foundation, Jeanne Sullivan, Thorek Memorial Foundation, and Wohlers Family Foundation.

“Once you get into recovery, you don’t care who knows of your substance abuse... You want the world to know that this has worked for you, and if someone else needs it, to be their inspiration to make the choice for recovery.”

—KRISTEN
Kenmore Center receives. “It is only through private partnerships that we can provide affordable services for people seeking freedom from their addictions. Without Kenmore, this city would experience a tragic gap in services.”

Removing stigmas

Removing the stigma around substance abuse is part of the Kenmore Center’s mission, Harris says. “I have diabetes. If I eat a brownie, my wife might wag her finger at me, but that would be the end of it,” Harris says. “If I’m a substance abuser and I relapse, my morals and character are questioned. I didn’t choose to become diabetic. Our clients did not choose to become addicts.”

Kristen and Lanice are examples of that stigma removed.

“Once you get into recovery, you don’t care who knows of your substance abuse,” Kristen says. “When you have cancer, you don’t hide in the shadows. You want help. It’s the same with substance abuse. You want the world to know that this has worked for you, and if someone else needs it, to be their inspiration to make the choice for recovery.”

“The social setting here creates an environment where people understand and accept you,” Lanice says. “We are treated with respect and dignity. This is a safe place for recovery that helps us deal with the issues that led to our addictions. Here we can prepare to return to our lives and our communities much healthier and happier because of our experience here.”

Frank Harris (top) leads a group session for women at the Kenmore Center, which treated 1,742 individuals last year, including Theresa Scott (bottom).
Advocates Raise a
On Lutheran Day, people come together to raise a collective voice and be counted for the sake of God's precious children, youth, women, and men in need of special care.

On May 13, 2014, Lutherans gathered at St. John's Lutheran Church in Springfield to worship, hear a keynote address about Abraham Lincoln and his views on the government serving the common good, and prepare for visits to legislators at the state Capitol. Friends from across Illinois came together to express a common commitment to the care of people in our communities.

Attendees represented social ministries and human care organizations, different political affiliations, and Lutheran congregations throughout Illinois to exercise Christian vocation and to speak out for justice and compassion for all people, especially for those who are most vulnerable.

Advocacy is essential

Janet Kittlaus of Glenview has attended many Lutheran Day events over the years. Involved in the ministries of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) for more than 40 years, she remembers a time when advocacy was not considered an important supplement to the church's social ministry.

“It took us a while to understand that loving thy neighbor requires involvement in the public arena, involvement which seeks justice especially for our most vulnerable neighbors,” she says. “Lutheran Day helps us develop and hone our advocacy skills. To do advocacy well requires learning about important policy issues and building relationships with public officials. Lutheran Day shows lawmakers that Lutherans are committed to the common good. And Lutheran Day, through worship, fellowship, and of course, food, builds camaraderie among Lutheran advocates in Illinois.”

Years ago, Janet became involved in LSSI’s Prisoner and Family Ministry. That involvement helped her see the injustices suffered by many in our society. “It also convinced me that advocacy is an essential part of our ministry as Christians,” she says. “We are challenged to follow the example of Jesus who served those on the margins of society and spoke out when those in authority abused power.”

Kittlaus got involved because “it’s one of the things we do as Christians. I knew the good work LSSI was doing and in particular got involved in prison and family ministry, believing in justice and mercy, and becoming a strong proponent of abolishing the death penalty.”

In her experience, it’s a myth that people want to be dependent on the government. “People want to help themselves,” she says. “Getting someone back to work, keeping a family together, helping people to become better parents—all of these create a more stable community. And when folks no longer need support services, they become contributing, taxpaying members of the community! There is a social and economic advantage to that.”
Julie Hamos Receives Paul Simon Courage in Public Service Award

Julie Hamos, Director of the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS), was the recipient of the 2014 Paul Simon Courage in Public Service Award.

The award, presented at Lutheran Day 2014, honors the memory of the late U.S. Senator Paul Simon, who served the people of Illinois with courage and with a dedication to public service for the common good.

HFS is the largest state agency, with management responsibility for the Medicaid Program and Child Support Services, a $17.7 billion budget, and a staff of 2,400. Hamos was appointed to her position in April 2010.

Hamos was recognized for successfully launching a major expansion of care coordination and managed care for Medicaid clients, planning for national health care reform, and crafting a bipartisan legislative plan to rescue Medicaid by closing a $2.7 billion budget gap.

For more than 20 years, Hamos has championed public interest policies and community issues as a public interest attorney, legislative counsel, community relations consultant, and advocate. Hamos received a B.A. from Washington University and earned a law degree from George Washington University National Law Center.

Hamos and her family escaped from Hungary during the 1956 revolution when she was just 7 years old. That experience taught her a lesson about courage and determination that remains the driving force behind her work.

benefit to helping others.”

This is why advocacy and events like Lutheran Day are essential.

“We must convince our fellow citizens and our lawmakers that we are a stronger, more prosperous society when we provide for the common good,” adds Kittlaus.

“Our legislators want to hear from us. Lutherans have an enormous impact when we engage in the ministry of advocacy.”


2014 marked the 10th anniversary of Lutheran Day.
Those are the lofty purposes the people of the state of Illinois set for our state government when “we, the people” approved the state constitution of 1970. The responsibilities vested in our state government were vast. And aspirational—eliminate poverty and inequality!

What we did not cede to state government was all responsibility with regard to helping disadvantaged people in our state rise to their full potential. In 1970, and today, the responsibility is shared. The public sector (government) and the private sector (charitable organizations, human service providers, faith-based organizations, etc.) share responsibility for ensuring that none of our neighbors fall through the safety net. We, as individuals, are called to do our parts in both sectors to enable them to be effective.

We are now engaged in an election cycle, including a gubernatorial contest in which the two major party candidates offer very different perspectives of how best to fulfill the state’s responsibility for people in need. I encourage each of you to consider candidates’ plans for funding human services, and other plans for fulfilling our shared goals as an important part of your own decision-making as a voter. Take the initiative to ask candidates how they intend to fund vital services, such as healthcare, education, human services, and public safety, and otherwise help improve the lives of the disadvantaged.

The largest threat currently facing human services in Illinois is the income tax rate reductions scheduled to go into effect beginning Jan. 1, 2015. If that tax cut goes through as scheduled, state government could lose between $2 billion and $3 billion in revenue this fiscal year, and nearly $7 billion in the next fiscal year!

Therefore, of major importance in this year’s campaigns are the issues of extending the current tax rates, or letting them decline, as planned, and the resulting spending for vital state programs that will result. As someone who has seen the good human services does for 30 years, I encourage you to listen closely to what each candidate says about public funding of human care services. It is important to challenge candidates to be as clear as possible on how they intend to balance the state’s budget and invest in human services that individuals desperately need. Specifically, the services that LSSI provided to over 96,000 people last year.

Our active participation in the electoral process is a great responsibility. We can help fulfill our common goals, as expressed in our state constitution, including to eliminate poverty and inequality. LSSI pursues this mission every day, and we appreciate your participation in it, as well as a supporter, as a concerned citizen, and no doubt in many other ways.

—Pastor Daniel Schwick
VICE PRESIDENT FOR CHURCH AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Hands@Work Forums coming to your area this fall

Watch your church bulletin or newsletter for a schedule of Hands@Work forums in your part of the state. The forums will be two hours long. Most will be on Saturday mornings, though there will also be weekday evening forums in a few places. There is no cost for participation. Teams from congregational social ministry committees or the like are encouraged to attend together. Mini-workshops will include:

- Deepening your congregation’s connection with LSSI
- Volunteer opportunities through LSSI
- Disaster Preparedness and Response Training
- Public Policy Advocacy
- Strengthening local church-based human care ministries

For more information, please feel free to contact:
Pr. Daniel Schwick
Vice President for Church and Public Engagement
847.390.1418 or Dan.Schwick@LSSI.org

—PREAMBLE TO ILLINOIS STATE CONSTITUTION
Keeping Families
“Before I started to work with the Single Parent Program, I didn’t think I could go on. I didn’t think I could be a good mom to my son,” says Stephanie.* “Now, after a year of working together, I am hopeful. I am confident. I am ready.”

Stephanie’s story is an all-too-familiar one across Illinois. She is a single parent who at one time faced what seemed like insurmountable challenges and was referred to the Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) Single Parent Program, where she found the support she needed.

LSSI’s Single Parent Program strengthens families by fostering self-sufficiency and helping parents cope with the demands of parenting. The program serves people who are separated, divorced, widowed, or never married with support groups, parenting and vocational education, and individualized home visits.

Sometimes a single parent needs help through a traumatic event, like losing a job or facing a medical crisis. In other instances, it takes more time and resources to help a family regain well-being and balance.

**Keeping families together**

Torri Smith is the Director of the Single Parent Program in Galesburg; Jill Foster holds the same position in Peoria. Tara Johnson-Sparks is the Single Parent Program Coordinator in Peoria. Linda Crandall is her counterpart in Galesburg. Both coordinators see more than 40 families each year.

Through one-on-one home visits, as well as collaboration with other community service organizations, the Single Parent Program helps clients make life-altering changes to improve their family’s future.

Home visits and direct services focus on practical and immediate responses to clients and their children that address the issues and unique needs of single parenting. Those can include finding permanent housing, job skills training, employment referrals, medical referrals, parenting skills, and addiction counseling services.

“Often, our service begins with crisis intervention,” says Crandall. “Our priority is to address the situation that contributed to that crisis. Then we help single parents find support and self-sufficiency so they are not living from crisis to crisis but rather developing skills that will allow them to provide for themselves and their families.”

**No program like it**

There are many reasons a family might need help. Loss of a job or mounting medical issues and expenses means the family is constantly struggling to catch up. Abuse has kept a mom or a dad from creating a healthy environment for their children. Poor choices in situations like these can cause long-term, detrimental effects.

“Prevention is always less expensive than intervention,” says Smith. “The Single Parent Program is the only program in the Peoria tri-county area, along with Knox and Warren counties, that offers these services designed to prevent abuse and neglect.”

*Name changed to protect confidentiality

“Tara is the reason I have a safe place to live,” says Stephanie (left). “She gave me the confidence to be independent.”
Research by Prevent Child Abuse America demonstrates the need for agencies to provide community-based programs that offer support and education to both children and parents to create healthy family functioning. The organization notes that agencies can prevent child abuse by “providing life skills training to equip children, adolescents, and young adults with interpersonal skills and knowledge that are valuable in adulthood and to provide children with skills to help them protect themselves from abuse.”

Jere Moore, Associate Executive Director of LSSI’s Children’s Community Services, Central Region, believes that’s why communities are invested in LSSI’s success with this program and why that support is crucial to the future of the Single Parent program.

“We have a great relationship with United Way. They offer financial support for both Single Parent Program locations. With the state’s budget crunch, few preventive programs remain fully funded, and we count on private funds to continue to support these families on a path to independence,” Moore said.

**Measuring success**

Research confirms that children in low-income, single-parent households are at risk for a variety of issues, including academic difficulties, unemployment, and becoming single parents themselves. The Single Parent Program helps at-risk single parents reduce the negative behaviors that can result in children being placed in foster care and increase motivation for the entire family to remain in school, find steady employment, and lead healthy lives. The numbers tell the story. The Single Parent Program is performance-based (families evaluate the services) and outcome-based (making sure the dollars invested are used to make the most impact and progress).

While the programs in Galesburg and Peoria are very similar, each has its own unique features based upon geographical areas and families. Both are achieving significant outcomes:

- A full 100 percent of Single Parent Program clients report that they are more aware of community resources and understand how to access them for their own family needs.
- Through its Single Parent Program, LSSI connects clients with community resources that assist with challenges around employment, education, housing, advocacy, and emotional stability.

**Support takes many forms**

“Support can take so many different forms. What each family needs is unique to them,” Johnson-Sparks says. “These families do all of the work to accomplish their goals. I’m just here to help.”

When Johnson-Sparks met Stephanie, a single mom to Freddie*, age 5, Stephanie was recovering from brain surgery and a stroke that took much of her independence. She had escaped an abusive relationship but was still living in fear.

**Using regular assessments, which are initiated the day a family enters the program and continue throughout the year and after the family’s exit, the program thoroughly measures outcomes in two areas:**

- **Family functioning:** How a family functions, and if they are addressing the specific issues that brought them to the program, such as employment and housing
- **Financial education:** How a family budgets household resources to ensure smart financial decisions

“Tara is the reason I have a safe place to live, and that I have the resources I need to manage daily living for myself and my son,” says Stephanie. “She gave me the confidence to be independent. She told me I could do anything I wanted to do, that I had the strength to handle life’s challenges. And that’s exactly what I am doing. We are succeeding as a family.”

Stephanie has advice for others. “Reach out,” she says. “Do not be afraid to ask for help. I felt dark. Now I feel light. I saw no future. Now I am full of hope, for me and for my son.”

“Stephanie is a brave woman,” Johnson-Sparks says. “Like so many of our single parents, she wants to make positive changes that create a healthy home for her child. She is sharing a painful story so she can help others with the message that there is help, and there is hope.”

LSSI is grateful to the following organizations whose philanthropic support has helped sustain and enrich the Single Parent program: Galesburg Community Foundation, Community Foundation of Central Illinois, United Way of Knox County, United Way of Warren County, and Immanuel Lutheran Church in Altona.
More than 750 Backpacks Given Out to Foster Care, Community Children

On Aug. 6, over 750 children attended the 2014 Health and Education Expo hosted by Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) at De La Salle High School in Chicago. Students ages 3-21, along with their families, were welcomed to the expo in an effort to help them prepare and get excited for the upcoming school year.

Attendees received a range of materials and services to get them ready for the start of school. Students were given standard immunizations, vision and hearing screenings, and physical and dental exams. The highlight of the afternoon for most was the distribution of backpacks donated from congregations throughout the area.

“The kids loved the backpacks!” says Ruth Jajko, Senior Associate Executive Director of LSSI’s Children’s Community Services network. “I noticed kids who put theirs on immediately and would NOT take them off.”

Thank you to the six congregations who donated the backpacks: Assembly of God Church of Lombard; Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St. Charles; Grace Lutheran Church, Elwood Park; Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Libertyville; Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Schaumburg; and St. Luke’s Lutheran Church, Park Ridge. We appreciate the generous support from Staples, who donated the school supplies and the volunteers from Rust-Oleum in Vernon Hills who helped prepare the backpacks. A total of 38 vendors participated, offering a variety of services.

Thank you to the following foundations and organizations for their generous support that helps LSSI live out its mission to “bring healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities” throughout Illinois:

- Dillon Foundation
- Aileen S. Andrew Foundation
- G.J. Aigner Foundation
- Helen Brach Foundation
- Kitchen Gardens International—Sow It Forward Grant
- Poshard Foundation
- Sage Foundation
- Smart from the Start Grant
- The Herschel E. Rives Charitable Fund
- The Reuben Kruggel Fund
- Thomson Community Fund
- Thorek Memorial Foundation
- Thrivent Financial: Matthew 25: Neighbors in Need
- Wheat Ridge Ministries Grants Plus
- Winnebago County Bar Foundation

LSSI Executive Chairman Eric Draut Recognized for Volunteer Service

Eric Draut, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) Executive Chairman, was recently honored with the President’s Call to Service Award in recognition of his dedicated service to LSSI, the Cornerstone Foundation, and the thousands of clients served annually by the organization.

The President’s Volunteer Service Award was created to recognize the best in American spirit and is bestowed to Americans who improve their communities through volunteer service. Lifetime achievement is recognized with a special President’s Call to Service Award, which honors those who have provided more than 4,000 hours of service during the course of their lifetime.

Thank You!
LSSI honored retiring board members Jeanne Rapp and Ronald Schultz at the June 2014 meeting of the Board of Directors. Rapp and Schultz both served on LSSI’s board after their professional careers had come to an end.

Rapp, a retired organization consultant, had served on the LSSI Board since 2008. She served as secretary of the Board from 2010 to 2012 and was a member of the Leadership Development Committee from 2008 to 2013. She is a member of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Pontiac.

Schultz, a retired attorney for the city of Rockford, was also elected to the LSSI Board in 2008. A member of Rejoice! Lutheran Church, Geneva, he was the chair of the LSSI Board Leadership Committee from 2009 to 2013 and was a member of the Operations Committee from 2013 to 2014.

“We are grateful for Jeanne and Ron’s leadership at LSSI during their tenure as board members,” said David M.A. Jensen, LSSI President/COO. “Their contributions have enabled LSSI to sustain the breadth and quality of programs for people in need across Illinois.”
Research Shows Lifebook Makes a Difference

A recent study measured the positive impact of LSSI’s Lifebook program and its effectiveness to reach its desired outcomes. LSSI’s Lifebook, “My Awesome Life,” celebrates a child’s life through photos, drawings, and journal pages that explore the child’s thoughts and feelings. The Lifebook is geared toward children in foster care or those who have been adopted as a way to understand difficult aspects of their lives by encouraging exploration of losses and disappointments—even traumatic experiences—while celebrating the child’s strengths and providing hope for the future.

The study’s research was conducted by Courtney Clark, MA, LCSW, Director of Clinical Counseling Services for Children’s Home + Aid, and Tina Dorrow, MSW, LCSW, a faculty member at the Erikson Institute. Clark and Dorrow attempted to answer the questions of whether children’s functioning improved if they believed that the book helped children’s functioning in four of six areas (stress, attention, relating, and helpfulness). The children agreed, and even added a fifth category, emotion. This was a very measurable difference compared to the control group. When asked about their personal histories, 82 percent of the children studied responded positively, while 73 percent knew more about their birth families.

The biggest take-away that Clark and Dorrow found was that foster parents and children alike found themselves much more comfortable talking about previous placements and birth families as a result of Lifebook services. Overall, participants were highly satisfied with Lifebook and would recommend the services for others. For more information, or to purchase a Lifebook, visit LSSI.org.

Resources

Below is a list of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) programs featured in this issue.

Breaking the Cycle of Substance Abuse (page 12)
- Residential Rehabilitation, Chicago ........ 773.275.7962
- Residential Rehabilitation, Elgin ........ 847.741.2600
LSSI’s highly successful residential program provides a safe, caring environment for people wanting to reclaim their lives from the grip of addiction.

Keeping Families Together (page 20)
- Single Parent Program, West Peoria ........ 309.671.0300
- Single Parent Program, Galesburg ......... 309.343.7681
The Single Parent Program helps single parents become self-sufficient and cope with the demands of parenting. This program is offered at LSSI’s Galesburg and West Peoria offices for residents of Knox, Peoria, Tazewell, Warren, and Woodford Counties who are separated, divorced, widowed, or have never been married.

An Opportunity for Children to Find Themselves (page 2)
- Foster Care Services ..................... 888.322.5774
LSSI provides placement and casework services for children who have been removed from their birth families due to abuse or neglect. As one of the largest providers of foster care services in the state, we serve approximately 10 percent of Illinois children under the guardianship of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

The Power of Working Together (page 6)
- Advancement Office ..................... 815.284.7796, ext. 2018
LSSI is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, and money raised through third-party fundraising events assists in fulfilling our mission to bring healing, justice, and wholeness to people and communities.

Advocates Raise a Collective Voice (page 16)
- Office of Government Relations ........... 847.635.4653
Through its advocacy efforts, LSSI works to strengthen the public-private safety net for Illinois residents in need.

Subscribe to Good Works

Good Works, a biweekly e-newsletter, features a variety of inspiring stories about people served by Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), along with news of good things that are happening throughout LSSI and its programs. To sign up, email info@LSSI.org.
Early in her 25 years of being involved with Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), Marj Nielsen found herself moved to tears following a day volunteering with mothers who were incarcerated. Nielsen, a Rock Falls resident, has also been moved to action—continuing her volunteer work serving on LSSI’s Board of Governors and the North Central Advancement Council, making recurrent charitable contributions to help LSSI live out its mission, and joining the Cornerstone Society by providing for the organization in her estate plans.

“Friends tell me I always jump into things feet first,” Nielsen laughs. Her first volunteer experience with LSSI, as part of the Prisoner and Family Ministry program, was working to arrange rides for children to visit their moms in prison. She oftentimes saw how a lack of opportunity and interventional support resulted in the women’s imprisonment, and as a mother, she empathized with them. “Sometimes I cried when I came home,” she recalls. “Those mothers loved their kids as much as anyone.”

Seeing LSSI’s programs up close as a volunteer, and subsequently from a board member’s perspective, strengthened Nielsen’s dedication to the organization. “All the programs contribute to the health of our community,” she says. Recently, she was part of a committee of three churches, including her own, Immanuel Lutheran in Rock Falls, organizing the March 4-ward fundraising dinner and auction for LSSI (see story, page 6). The event raised money for LSSI programs in the area. Nielsen has been active in all manner of fundraising activities and appeals that support LSSI programming in her community.

“I’m so proud to be a part of an organization of people who are so committed to their mission,” Nielsen says. “LSSI does touch a lot of people.”