



The Medication-Assisted Recovery Team, from left, Vanessa Jones, Yolanda Nunez, Latonya Carter, and Monica Lopez.



“Service which is rendered without joy helps neither the servant nor the served.”

— MAHATMA GANDHI

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

LSSI Launches Medication-Assisted Recovery Program

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) recently launched its new Medication-Assisted Recovery (MAR) Program at its Portage Cragn Counseling Center on Chicago's Northwest Side, bringing vital support to individuals struggling with opioid use disorder.

The MAR Program uses Suboxone, a safe, FDA-approved medication, to reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms from opioids, lower overdose risk, and support long-term recovery. Medications for opioid use disorder decrease illicit opioid use, and reduce the risk of fatal overdose by about 50%. With a whole-person approach that focuses on harm reduction and accessible care, MAR is open to adults 18+ with current or recent opioid use, including pregnant women. Services are available in both English and Spanish.

“Our clients have long voiced frustrations about accessing MAR programs,” said Yolanda Nunez, the

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Called to Serve: John and Liz Rudy to Receive “True



Liz and John Rudy

John and Liz Rudy point to their lifelong Lutheran faith as the impetus for their commitment and support of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) and other nonprofit organizations, in addition to creating awareness for the groups' good works. The Rudys will be honored with the “True Friend” Award by LSSI at its 44th Annual True Friend Celebration on Saturday, Oct. 4, 2025.

Donating “time, talent, and treasure” was something embedded in the Rudys’ Lutheran upbringing. Their particular interest in LSSI started through the church they attended early in their marriage. The congregation had a long-standing relationship with LSSI, and the Rudys participated in many service projects. “We learned early on that our church supported LSSI and therefore we started to support LSSI,” said John, a retired executive with BMO Harris Bank.

Their commitment took on a new dimension when John joined the LSSI Board in 2009. “I worked my entire career for BMO Harris. The bank was serious about making sure their executives participated in nonprofit organizations at the board level,” he said. “It turns out that the bank had a

Intouch Home Care Assists Congregation to Provide

Since 1981, LSSI’s Intouch Home Care Program has helped older adults maintain their lives in the community and in their homes. Intouch lends its support to A Caring Place, a respite care program at Christus Victor Lutheran Church in Elk Grove Village. A Caring Place offers respite for family members caring for adults with mild cognitive or physical impairments, and a community of friends for its participants.

The caregivers of various participants shared the program’s impact on their lives: “A Godsend.” “Vital.” “A lifesaver.” “What a relief.”

A Caring Place, launched 20 years ago by Christus Victor’s Senior Pastor Stefan Potuznik and two community members, has 12 to 15 regular participants. It is led by Rosa Biondo, A Caring Place Coordinator, and staffed by Intouch Home Care Assistant Terri Lucas and 10 volunteers. Lucas has been a home care assistant with LSSI for 13 years. The program expands the personalized approach Intouch takes with clients in their homes.

“Intouch Home Care not only helps seniors maintain their independence, but also provides the loved ones and caregivers of our clients with support,” said Jeremiah Royster, Director of Intouch Operations and Growth. “Christus Victor has taken that same commitment into a community setting with A Caring Place. We’re so honored to lend our services to such a valuable, worthwhile program.”

A typical day’s activities include word games, trivia, and lunch. In between, there is laughter, an occasional nap, conversation, and a palpable affection between participants, volunteers, and staff.

“It’s good trying something new,” said participant Neil. “They take good care of us.” Neil enjoys the history games, intellectual challenges, celebrations, and friendships.

His wife Marie agrees that the group is good for him—and her. “There’s a lot of people going through this,” she said. “Even us talking about what we’re experiencing really helps.”

Friend" Award

longstanding tradition of executive representation on LSSI's Board."

John served for a total of 12 years on LSSI's Board beginning in 2009, including three years as Chair. He has lent his knowledge to a variety of the Board's committees, including: Finance, Property & Investment; Executive & Governance; Audit; and Retirement Plans. For a complex organization like LSSI, his leadership and input have been invaluable.

Liz and John also support LSSI philanthropically, including a gift to the successful Expansion of Our Hearts Gift Initiative. They have provided for LSSI's future sustainability with an undesignated bequest to the organization in their estate plan.

The Rudys, who met at Valparaiso University, also support their alma mater. Liz has served on the board of Hope's Front Door and has helped fundraise for this local organization that supports residents of DuPage County facing financial and health crises.

"That's what we're called to do," said Liz. "We're called to serve."

Respite Care



Rosa Biondo, left, A Caring Place Coordinator, and LSSI Intouch Home Care Assistant Terri Lucas provide respite care.

Thank You Foster Parents



Nearly 18,000 children live in foster care in Illinois. As one of the largest, private providers of foster care in the state, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) is grateful that May is designated as National Foster Care Awareness Month. It's an important reminder of the needs of these children and the critical role foster parents play in their lives.

LSSI's goal for children in foster care is to help them find their forever home through reunification with birth families or through adoption or guardianship. Both in Illinois and the nation, with so many children in foster care, the need for foster parents has never been greater.

Foster parents provide safe, loving, stable homes; help shape future generations; teach kids to connect with others; and provide positive support for biological families. With foster care offices located in 12 Illinois communities—Aurora, Canton, Champaign, Chicago, Danville, Galesburg, Marion, Moline, Nachusa, Rockford, Vienna, and West Peoria—LSSI serves over 2,600 children in 42 counties, determined to make a meaningful difference in every child's life. LSSI offers foster parents guidance and support every step of the way.

Whether someone is considering fostering for the first time or has previous experience, LSSI embraces individuals from all walks of life. LSSI also welcomes individuals and organizations that can help spread the word about the need for foster parents.

The month of May, or any time of year, is always a great time to say "thank you" to foster parents. They truly make a difference in the lives of children.

To learn more, visit LSSI.org/FosterCare.

Get Involved with a Thrivent Action Team

From purchasing paint to revitalize living spaces at LSSI's group homes, buying refreshments for a foster care informational fair, to providing Christmas presents for LSSI clients, Thrivent Action Teams inspire individuals and groups to partner with LSSI to support its clients.

Thrivent Action Teams fulfill unmet needs or provide extra support. Thrivent Financial members need only provide their ideas, inspiration, and a team of people to host a fundraiser, educational event, or service activity. Thrivent provides the resources—including up to \$250 in seed money—and T-shirts for the team. The real reward is making a difference in your communities.

To get started, contact Mariah.Heinz@LSSI.org or visit Thrivent.com.

Events

Saturday, September 13, 2025

**CHIP IN FORE CHILDREN GOLF OUTING
HIGHLAND SPRINGS GOLF COURSE
9500 35TH ST W, ROCK ISLAND**

Enjoy 18 holes of golf with friends, plus lunch and raffle prizes, all while supporting LSSI's Foster Care Program serving Rock Island, Henry, and Mercer Counties. Visit LSSI.org/Golf for more information.

Saturday, October 4, 2025

**44TH TRUE FRIEND CELEBRATION
EPIPHANY CENTER FOR THE ARTS
201 S. ASHLAND AVE, CHICAGO**

Planning is underway for this special evening!

For more information, contact Mariah.Heinz@LSSI.org or visit LSSI.org/Friend.



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@MeetLSSI



LSSI Board Member Beth Nelson Chase and her mom, Leona Nelson, formed a Thrivent Action Team to purchase diapers for children in LSSI's care.

[MEDICATION-ASSISTED RECOVERY PROGRAM, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1]

program's registered nurse. "Now, LSSI is able to meet that need directly and provide vital treatment and support to the community."

The new program addresses a pressing need in the communities LSSI serves and reflects its commitment to compassionate, evidence-based care. While therapy and support groups are available and encouraged through LSSI, they are not required for MAR clients—removing barriers that often prevent individuals from seeking help. The MAR Program is part of LSSI's Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) model.

In addition to Nunez, the program is staffed by a dedicated, experienced team that includes a nurse practitioner, certified recovery support specialist, and medical assistant. The program brings together their clinical expertise and lived experience.

"I walk alongside my peers and support them in their recovery needs," said Latonya Carter, Peer Support Specialist. "We're all about person-centered care, advocacy, mentoring, self-care, and recovery education. It is a great honor to be a part of the MAR Program where I can utilize my many skills toward the change we want to see in the community."

For more information on LSSI's MAR Program, call LSSI Connect at 833.610.5774.