



Inspired

“You are the light of the world...
let your light shine before others.”

– Matthew 5: 14-16

Foster Parents Make a Difference

A close family friend, a community member, and the great aunt of a baby yet born. These are just some of the foster parents at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) who answered the call to make a difference. May is National Foster Parent Month. As the largest private provider of foster care in Illinois, LSSI proudly honors its foster parents who open their homes and hearts to children in need. Here are a few of their stories.

Relative Foster Parent Jennifer and her husband became foster parents to their great nephew when he was two weeks old—but the journey began earlier. “It started before the baby was born,” she said. “You don’t take that question lightly—‘Can you foster?’”

When a child comes into care, LSSI first looks for relatives who may be willing to step in. They had time to consider the decision together. “I love my family and wanted to help,” Jennifer said. When the baby arrived at their home a day earlier than expected, LSSI staff were there to assist. “They talked us through everything,” she recalled. “It’s such a gift to help, care, and nurture.”

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David and Julie Luck Jensen: 2026 True Friend Honorees Live their Faith



Julie and David Jensen

Reflecting on their involvement with Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) and other service organizations, David and Julie Luck Jensen said their participation simply enables them to live their faith. The Jensens will be honored with the “True Friend” Award by LSSI at its 45th Annual True Friend Celebration on Saturday, Oct. 3, 2026.

That participation was sparked 50 years ago when David was asked to help lead a congregational fundraising effort for LSSI. He recalled, “When I first heard LSSI described I thought, ‘I’m sure I’ll be more involved in that someday.’ It seemed quite natural, as LSSI’s services are clearly responding to the Gospel.”

He couldn’t have anticipated how extensive that would be. David was later asked to serve in a succession of leadership roles on its Board of Directors and its management team spanning more than 25 years. Julie shares his commitment to the work of LSSI. “My concept of faith focuses on how one serves, and LSSI offers me many opportunities to do so.” Julie said.

Foster Parents Needed to Make a Difference

Much has changed in child welfare since LSSI was founded in 1867 as an orphanage for children who lost their parents in a cholera epidemic. What has endured is the organization’s commitment to find new and better ways to support children and families and the willingness of people who answer the call to become foster parents.

Foster parents are needed. In Illinois, nearly 16,000 children live in foster care.

Relative caregivers and traditional foster parents are the backbone of LSSI’s Foster Care Program. LSSI is the largest private provider of foster care in Illinois, serving 2,578 children last year. LSSI has 12 foster care offices serving 42 counties in Aurora, Canton, Champaign, Chicago, Danville, Galesburg, Marion, Moline, Nachusa, Rockford, Vienna, and West Peoria.

“We serve so many families, and our staff know so much,” said Chris Hawes, Statewide Foster Parent Licensing & Recruitment Manager. “We learn a lot from each other that we use to support our foster families. It takes a lot to be a

foster parent, and we know we must do

In the last decade, LSSI piloted and implemented a Therapeutic Foster Care Program to place children with emotional/behavioral needs in family homes. This program is a current evidence-based pilot program designed to reduce the amount of time children spend in foster care. LSSI provides short-term care to youth until a permanent placement is found.

The decision to become a foster parent is a significant one. LSSI provides information online and through our staff so people can learn more.

“The first step is asking questions,” said Chris Hawes. “If you’re considering being a foster parent, give us a call or look at our website.”

Learn more at [LSSI.org/FosterCare](https://www.lssi.org/FosterCare).

65 Years Later, a Never-Ending Legacy is Fulfilled

Julie and David both chose paths of service in their professional lives, as well. David as a finance executive with some of Chicago's leading nonprofit health care providers; Julie as an educator with a special dedication to addressing the needs of underserved students. Her volunteer work includes roles in state and local education associations.

The Jensens have served their community and their congregation, Messiah Lutheran, Park Ridge. The congregation collaborated with LSSI to transform Messiah's parsonage into LSSI's 10th group home for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, a project led by the church's late pastor, Rev. Lynne Morrow, and current pastor, Rev. Aneel Trivedi.

The Jensens' sons have also picked up the torch. Tryg worked at LSSI, and Tait is a member of LSSI's Associate Board.

David sums up the family's view of LSSI, "LSSI's mission is a clear response to the Gospel. It's been impossible not to be engaged with what they do."

When Katherine Nielson signed her will in 1961, naming the "Lutheran Home for Children and Farm School" as a beneficiary, little did she know she'd be helping a new generation of children in a new century—and every generation after that.

The "Lutheran Home for Children and Farm School" later became part of LSSI, and the program transformed into its foster care program. Katherine, from Galesburg, left in her will a trust to benefit her husband, then to her children, and then grandchildren. Those generations have passed away, and LSSI, along with three other organizations, will now receive 25% of the trust's income—not as a one-time gift, but as an ongoing annual distribution, in perpetuity. As long as the trust holds assets, Katherine's generosity will keep giving, year after year, without end.

"It's quite remarkable that Katherine had a vision for helping others that has endured so many years later," said David Novak, JD, LSSI's Chief Advancement Officer. "When people write their will, they have the power to impact lives decades into the future just like she did. In Katherine's case, that impact won't stop. It will continue supporting children and families for as long as the trust endures."

This thoughtful, forward-thinking is one of the reasons LSSI is still helping people 158 years after its founding.

For more information on how to leave a lasting legacy to LSSI, visit LSSI.org/PlannedGiving.

our part to support them."
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's Emergency Foster Parent Initiative
a permanent placement home

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ok at our website."



LSSI foster families enjoying a Halloween-themed bowling party.

Mindful Giving Provides Needed Items to LSSI Clients

Everyone knows the joy of receiving a package delivered from an online purchase. Mindful Giving is an easy way to provide that joy directly to LSSI clients.

LSSI's Mindful Giving web pages sync with Amazon, showing an active gift-list for program needs. Gift-lists are sorted by program and location. Items are tax-exempt, offer free shipping if available, and shipped directly to



Staff in LSSI's Moline Foster Care office have started receiving school supplies listed on the Mindful Giving pages.

LSSI's programs. Whether it's a backpack for a child in foster care or puzzles for one of LSSI's 10 group homes for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, people can purchase exactly what is needed.

"We were able to input our kiddos' wish lists into Mindful Giving, and specific donations were then ordered and sent directly to our Canton office where they were sorted and distributed," said Tori Sehr, Clinical Administrative Assistant. The process efficiently streamlined a time-consuming project. "Our youth had an incredible Christmas experience that is often hard to come by when in foster care," she added. "We're incredibly grateful to the people who gave."

Back-to-school items are now available for ordering, as well as lists for other program needs. *To make a purchase for an LSSI client, visit GiftList.LSSI.org.*

[FOSTER PARENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1]

Fictive Kin Adults with an established relationship to a child—a teacher or family friend—are known as "fictive kin." They're often asked after family to consider fostering. With three grown sons, an adolescent daughter, and a background in childcare, Sharron and her husband felt ready. "It's a big decision, but I've always had a passion for children," she said.

Sharron especially values LSSI's training opportunities. "The very first class they signed me up for was trauma-informed care," she recalled. "I would recommend it to anyone."

Traditional Foster Care "There are so many kids who need homes locally," said Lisa. After connecting with an LSSI licensing representative, she and her husband thought things over. Eventually, they moved forward in the licensing process. Illustrating the need for foster parents, they received a placement almost immediately and eventually accepted a second child who was reunified with her parents.

"Everyone worries about getting attached," Lisa said. "It's hard, but that is the goal." Her advice? "Reach out. Talk to a licensing representative. They have a wealth of knowledge. Talk to a foster parent. There are struggles—but there's also so much joy."

Watch foster parents share their experiences on our YouTube channel, including LSSI's "Coffee Break with Melissa" podcast.

Events

Saturday, October 3, 2026
45TH TRUE FRIEND CELEBRATION
EPIPHANY CENTER FOR THE ARTS,
CHICAGO

Honoring True Friends David and Julie Jensen.
Planning is underway! For more information, contact
Mariah.Heinz@LSSI.org.



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois does not discriminate in admission to programs or employment in compliance with the law.

