Building forever families

With you by our side, we are helping children join their “forever families” through adoption.

NOVEMBER IS ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH, and Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois is celebrating all the “forever families” that it has helped bring together through adoption.

The adoption journey has changed over the years, but what remains the same is that adoption is both a brave choice made by birth parents and a beautiful way to build a family.

At the age of 12, Leanne needed a copy of her birth certificate for a class trip. She noticed it was missing information. When she questioned her parents about it, they told her that she was adopted.

The news didn’t make Leanne love her parents any less, but it did cause her to have questions. “All of a sudden the fact that I was adopted became a huge thing in my life, because I hadn’t known. I wondered if my friends would still want to be friends with me after they found out.”

As Leanne grew up, she continued to have questions about her adoption, and wondered if her birth parents ever thought about her. She began hoping to someday connect with them and have her questions answered.

Later in life, Leanne made the decision that she wanted to be an adoptive parent herself. “I told my husband, Herb, before we got married that I wanted to adopt one or more of our children.”

When Leanne and Herb were ready to grow their family, they turned to LCFS for help.

“LCFS has always been an integral part of our family’s adoption story,” shared Leanne. “Not only was I adopted through the agency, but they also guided my husband and I through the adoption of our daughter Gabrielle.”

Shortly after starting the home study process with LCFS, Leanne and her husband were introduced through a family friend to an expectant mother considering adoption. “We connected immediately. She allowed me to come to all her doctor appointments, and I was even able to be in the delivery room when Gabrielle was born. We became very close and still are.”

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LUTHERAN CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES OF ILLINOIS is governed by a volunteer board of trustees. One of their roles is to establish our organizational values, which guide us and how we interact with all of our stakeholders, including those we serve. One of those values is Innovation. The trustees task us to be an agency that creatively develops new programs, services and methods in responding to the needs of clients, communities and the Agency itself.

In response to that value, LCFS created our Regenerations program to serve youth involved in both the foster care system, as well as the juvenile or criminal justice system. Many felt these youth were too far gone and beyond help. As an agency of faith, tasked with the value to innovate, we created one of the first programs specifically designed to work with these dually-involved youth. The Regenerations program was designed to get youth released from correctional and detention centers faster and into a family-like setting, so that they can reach their potential. We have demonstrated great success with the program, and in October, it was awarded the Council on Accreditation’s (COA) 2019 Innovative Practices Award.

The COA’s Innovative Practices Award identifies, documents, and celebrates examples of successful approaches to management and service delivery practices. This year’s evaluation process began with 75 programs applying; six were selected to move forward. The final case studies were reviewed by a team of expert judges and also voted on by the public. It was a tight competition with many strong submissions, but LCFS’ Regenerations program came out on top.

I am so proud to receive this honor on behalf of our donors, board of trustees, the staff of LCFS, and the wonderful youth whom we are blessed to serve.

Leanne knew because of her own experience, that she wanted an open adoption for her daughter. “We have always shared Gabrielle’s adoption story with her and answered all her questions. She has grown up knowing her birth family.”

After adopting Gabrielle, Leanne decided that it was time to find her birth parents. LCFS assisted Leanne in accessing her original birth certificate and the adoption records that were available to her. Eventually, Leanne was able to find both her birth mom and dad.

“My birth mother told me that she thought about me every day and had even saved items from my birth at the hospital.”

Today, Leanne has a close relationship with her birth mother, but it will never replace the love she has for her adoptive parents. “My mom is my mom and she was there for everything. Having a relationship with my birth mother doesn’t change that.”

Since finalizing Gabrielle’s adoption eight years ago, Leanne has participated in panel discussions for LCFS’ Adoption Seminars. She shares her own story, as well as her daughter’s, so that other families considering adoption can learn from them and make an informed choice.

LCFS helped Leanne and her family by providing the guidance, training, safeguards and emotional support they needed as they navigated their adoption journey.

“I will always be grateful to LCFS for the role they played in my daughter’s adoption and mine.”

Thank you for being the power behind this important work.
Plant Seeds and Harvest Hope

GENEROSITY WAS IN THE AIR AS LCFS SUPPORTERS CAME TOGETHER AT City Winery in Chicago for the 30th Annual Harvest Festival. Guests enjoyed a fun evening filled with food, drink, raffles, an exciting live auction and music by The Scott Hamilton Band.

“The Harvest Festival provides the opportunity to celebrate a legacy of service that goes back almost 150 years and bring attention to our work of ensuring all children are well cared for and safe,” says Mike Bertrand, LCFS President and CEO. “We thank our many generous sponsors, including presenting sponsor Balance Inc., for helping to make the event a success.”

The mission of LCFS was at the heart of the evening. LCFS foster and adoptive parent Jillian Sawyer shared the inspiring story of her family’s foster care journey. “Too many times you hear negative stories about foster care. We want people to hear our story and understand that amazingly good things come out of foster care,” shared Jillian. “By supporting LCFS, you are ensuring that people like my husband and I can do what we are called to do.”

Moved by Jillian’s story, guests raised their paddles and generously gave $40,000 to help LCFS ensure that all children are safe, well cared for and nurtured. A special thank you to the Guthrie Family in central Illinois for their generous matching gift of an additional $10,000. Proceeds from the evening plant the seeds that bring services, hope and brighter futures to at-risk families and foster children around the state.

Thank you to everyone involved: Harvest Festival Committee, Board, sponsors, guests, volunteers, and staff. Check out photos from the event at www.facebook.com/LCFSIL.

An IRA charitable rollover is a very simple gift to make

If you are 70½ or older and own a traditional IRA, please consider making an IRA charitable rollover gift. You can make a gift of up to $100,000 from your IRA to charity this year. Your gift to a nonprofit organization like ours will:

• not be included in your taxable income.
• satisfy your required minimum distribution (RMD) for the year.
• reduce your taxable income, even if you do not itemize deductions.
• not be subject to the 50% limitation on charitable gifts.
• help the work of our organization.

An IRA charitable rollover is a very simple gift to make. Please contact Marylyn Rodgers at (708) 488-5557 or Marylyn_Rodgers@lcfs.org for assistance in making a gift from your IRA or learn more at www.lcfslegacy.org.

A TAXWISE giving OPPORTUNITY

Don’t miss the chance to make a charitable IRA gift this year!

VERNA EHLERS, A RETIRED SPECIAL EDUCATION school teacher and volunteer for LCFS always takes her time to think through decisions. “I have to muddle things over before I take action,” said Verna.

A few years before she turned 70, Verna learned she could use her IRA to support charitable causes in which she had a strong interest and belief.

“The more I learned about it, the more it appealed to me,” Verna recalled.

“I learned that I didn’t have to take the entire required minimum distribution and that I could spread it out to support more than one charity. It was important for me to know that if something came up, I could switch things around. I also loved that by supporting charity, I could reduce my gross income and therefore my taxes.”

“Later, when I turned 70 1/2, I was ready,” said Verna; “I choose to support LCFS because it’s a faith-based organization that puts faith in action. I served on the board in the 80’s, and I was impressed and inspired with how the staff and volunteers carried out LCFS’ mission and served people of all races, faiths, ethnicities, and zip codes”.

Verna says her philanthropy is an extension of her values; “I give because God has directed us to love thy neighbor. I am grateful for organizations like LCFS that have the confidence, the expertise, and the experience to do things that I cannot do on my own. Giving to LCFS through my IRA allows me to love my neighbor and make a difference.”

If you are 70 ½ years old or approaching it and want to learn more about how you can put your faith into action by using your IRA to make a gift to LCFS, visit LCFSLegacy.org or contact Marylyn Rodgers at (708) 488-5557.

Don’t miss the chance to make a charitable IRA gift this year!
Bring smiles to children this holiday season
Donate Christmas presents for local foster children.

Your gifts will bring comfort during what can be a difficult time of the year. Visit www.lcfs.org/ChristmasDrive for more information including specific needs by age, drop-off locations and donation deadlines contact Leslie Lopez at (708) 488-5568 or leslie_lopez@lcfs.org. Thank you.

To make a cash gift, mail this form to Attn: LCFS Christmas Drive, One Oakbrook Terrace, Suite 501, Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181 or donate online at www.lcfs.org/ChristmasDrive

Yes, I want to bring a smile to a child this Christmas

- $100
- $50
- $25
- Other

I want to make my donation via

- Check Please make checks payable to LCFS.
- Credit Card
  - VISA
  - MasterCard
  - Discover
  - Amex

CARD NUMBER

EXP DATE

SIGNATURE

AMOUNT

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