DANNY ENTERED FOSTER CARE AT AGE 3 when he and his siblings were removed from their mother’s care due to abuse. During the next 17 years, Danny experienced a multitude of foster family placements, including time in a residential group facility and psychiatric hospitals.

During this time, Danny spent six and a half years with one foster family, a single parent. He struggled there because she was unable to accept his sexual identification. “She tried to get me to be girly when that wasn’t me and it wasn’t what I wanted. I didn’t feel like she accepted me,” shared Danny.

Unfortunately, this resulted in Danny receiving care at a psychiatric hospital. When he was scheduled for release, Danny made the decision that he didn’t want to go back with that foster family. “I couldn’t go back to that same person because she wasn’t accepting of me and my gender. I can’t help who I am.”

According to DCFS, there are nearly 17,500 children in Illinois’ child welfare system. Research has shown that LGBTQ youth are over-represented in the foster care system and also face disparities, including being rejected or mistreated because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. The unacceptable reality is that LGBTQ youth—after facing the trauma that brought them into care—too often experience additional trauma from a foster care system that subjects them to further discrimination.

Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois has made an agency-wide commitment to being WIDE, which stands for Welcoming, Inclusive, Diverse and Equitable. As part of this initiative, LCFS engaged with All Children—All Families (ACAF), a project of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, to improve its practice with youth and families by promoting LGBTQ-inclusive policies and affirming practices.

Recently, ACAF honored LCFS with their 2019 “Innovator in Supporting and Serving LGBTQ Youth & Families Seal of Recognition.” LCFS is the only private child welfare agency in Illinois being recognized at this top tier.

“LCFS is very proud to receive the Innovator Seal from ACAF. It is core to our values that all people that come to us for service know that they are welcome, we value them, and we are privileged to partner in service with them,” said LCFS President and CEO Mike Bertrand.

In recent years, LCFS leadership made the commitment to embrace inclusion and diversity because it’s best to be of service to all children and families. As part of the process, the agency updated its policies to prohibit all discrimination.

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Planning for the future

LUTHERAN CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES OF ILLINOIS recently completed our three-year strategic plan. Over the past few years, we have evolved as an agency and this plan will guide us as we continue to be of service to the children and families of Illinois.

During the strategic planning process, we also took a look at our mission and vision statements, and determined that they didn’t adequately reflect the current breath of our ministry. So in conjunction with the Board of Trustees and Leadership staff, we decided to adopt a new succinct mission statement. To nurture and strengthen children and families in need. I believe this statement speaks to the heart of LCFS and our work. You will have a chance to read more about LCFS’ vision and our values in this edition of Tidings.

LCFS has also been actively ensuring that we are an organization that is WIDE- Welcoming, Inclusive, Diverse and Equitable. We are deeply committed to being of service to all children and families. To that end, we are happy to announce that LCFS achieved the All Children – All Families seal as an Innovator in serving LGBTQ children and families in Illinois.

I often share that there are so many children and families struggling in our state, and LCFS wants to be a part of ensuring that all children can achieve their God-given potential. As part of the LCFS family, you help us to achieve that goal. Thank you and God bless you and your family!

Every child
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In addition, widespread changes were made within the organization’s culture, practices and training in order to transform into a welcoming agency.

“We have gained so much, most importantly, a supportive and affirming environment for children and youth whose sexual orientation and gender identity and expression have been rejected previously by so many,” shared LCFS Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Beverly Jones.

While LCFS leadership are proud of the work that has been done to receive the seal, they understand that this is just the beginning and there is more work to be done. Bertrand explains that, “LCFS is committed to being an active part of a just society and we encourage others to join us in making a commitment to ensure we are welcoming to all.”

Today, Danny is in a new home with his LCFS licensed foster mom Karen. “It is the first time I have felt completely accepted,” said Danny. “She doesn’t judge me and accepts me for me.”

Together LCFS staff and Karen have helped to support Danny and provide him with an affirming home. “I think that all foster families out there should give youth who are from the LGBTQ community a try,” explained Danny. “You shouldn’t judge someone based on what they like. They still deserve to be in a good home.”

Thank you for being the power behind this important work.

About LCFS

OUR MISSION
To nurture and strengthen children and families in need.

OUR VISION
A world where all of God’s children have the opportunity for safe, healthy and meaningful lives.

OUR PURPOSE
Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois improves the well-being of people throughout the state by protecting children, strengthening families and building futures. We serve all faiths, races, orientations and ethnic backgrounds.

THANK YOU
With your partnership and support, LCFS will continue to be a place where children and families can find the help they need and hope for the future. To view our latest donor lists, visit www.lcfs.org/ThankYouDonors
AN ENERGETIC FUN-LOVING REDHEAD, Marian Fick is one of LCFS’ most dedicated and loyal supporters. Volunteering for over three decades, she is currently an active member of the Harvest Festival Committee and the LCFS Foundation Board.

“I started volunteering with the agency over thirty years ago. I knew about LCFS through my church and when someone asked me to consider co-chairing the agency’s biggest fundraising event, the Harvest Festival, I said yes. I had no idea that saying yes all those years ago would have led to this,” laughed Marian.

Over the years, Marian has been a strong advocate and ambassador by introducing her circle to the agency’s mission. “I love this organization and have gotten my family and friends involved because it’s just that good. My husband Bob was just as dedicated as I am. While he was alive, he used his passion, painting and drawing wildlife to connect with the young people in LCFS’ care who had experienced extreme trauma. His plan was to continue to make a difference for the causes that he was passionate about and so after making sure that he had taken care of us (his family), he made sure to leave a gift in his will to LCFS.”

“If you read the Bible, we have an obligation to take care of the poor, the underprivileged and anyone who needs help. That’s what LCFS does. Our gift was easy to do and I get to see my husband’s legacy in action through the people who come through LCFS’ doors for help.”

Many donors make a gift in their will to remember their favorite charities. It’s an easy way to support a cause that has been important in your life. If you’d like to make a gift in your will to LCFS, learn more at www.lcfslegacy.org or contact Marylyn Rodgers at (708) 488-5557 or Marylyn_Rodgers@lcfs.org.

TOGETHER WE ARE CREATING CHANGE

RACIAL INEQUITIES WITHIN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM are a huge issue. Youth of color remain in foster care longer and are less likely to find their forever families. This past year, LCFS made a commitment to improve permanency outcomes for youth of color within our care and we have already seen positive results.

LCFS is extremely proud that by focusing on the issue of racial inequity for youth of color in foster care, we have been able to identify barriers and create positive change in specific outcomes. We have already seen significant improvements in the trends of achievement of permanency (18% increase) and time to permanency (23% decrease in days) for youth of color.

LCFS leadership is committed to continuing our focus on this systemic issue that affects us all. We also look to be a leader within the state so that together we can help create system wide change. Ultimately, it is about ensuring all youth in Illinois have a loving forever family.
How will you plan for your future?

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE FUTURE WILL IMPACT your loved ones and your estate in countless ways. This is why careful planning is important to ensure that your loved ones are well cared for and your estate is not subjected to unnecessary and burdensome taxes.

We would like to help you organize and plan for the future by offering you a FREE Wills Planning Guide.

You can’t afford not to plan! Please contact Marylyn Rodgers at 708-488-5557 or marylyn_rodgers@lcfs.org to receive your FREE Guide today.

To learn more, visit www.lcfslegacy.org.