Helping youth build a brighter future

With you by our side, we can ensure foster children always have a stable, safe place to go.

MARCOS’ (NOT HIS REAL NAME) CHILDHOOD was surrounded with drugs, violence, and gangs. He and his siblings were removed from their families and placed in foster care. At the age of 13, the foster parents with whom Marcos was living were not able to cope with his emotional and behavioral challenges and as a result, he came to live at Southern Thirty Adolescent Center (STAC).

“I remember Marcos as a sweet, quiet and shy youth when he arrived,” shared STAC Supervisor Brittiney Higgins. “He had suffered a lot of trauma from his childhood and needed a stable, safe environment. That’s what STAC provided him.”

STAC is Lutheran Child and Family Services’ short-term emergency-shelter facility located in Mt. Vernon, Illinois. STAC serves youth between the ages of 11 – 18. The boys reside at STAC 24-hours-a-day, while the girls participate in the program from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and then return to foster homes. All of the children come with challenges as a result of trauma.

The goal of STAC is to provide an environment that is rapport building, non-judgmental and inclusive to everyone. STAC focuses on giving youth the tools they need to express themselves in positive ways and the life skills necessary as they transition to the next phase of their lives. “We want to teach them something positive that they can take with them when they leave.”

While at STAC, staff assess the youths’ strengths and long-term needs and create individual plans. The youth receive therapeutic services to help develop strategies and skills that will help them in the future.

During the Coronavirus quarantine, youth at STAC are struggling. “They’re scared because they don’t really understand what is happening. They’re also very frustrated that they haven’t been able to get out into the community for recreation, and they’ve missed being able to have face-to-face visits with their families.”

The dedicated staff at STAC are going above and beyond in order to help all the youth process the situation and release their frustrations in a constructive manner. “We try to get creative with activities that we can do on campus with the youth. We’re also setting up additional video and phone calls with family members so they can still stay connected.”

When Marcos resided at STAC, he participated in the on-site counseling offered by STAC’s therapist, as well as specialized counseling off-site. He also benefited from the consistent

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Continuing to serve

THOSE ARE CERTAINLY UNPRECEDENTED TIMES in our state, country and world. The COVID-19 Pandemic continues to have a significant impact on our communities and our daily lives. At the very beginning of the State of Illinois’ shelter-in-place order, the work of LCFS was deemed essential by the Governor, hence we remained open and operational. It’s no surprise to the LCFS family that meeting the needs of our children and families is indeed essential.

LCFS stepped up to the challenging situation and rapidly adjusted how we serve in order to ensure the safety of our clients, staff, and communities. While all LCFS offices have remained open, we’re limiting the amount of people in the buildings at any given time. We’re utilizing all available personal protective equipment (PPE) for our staff and families. Like almost everybody else, LCFS is also using virtual tools, such as Zoom, WebEx, and Microsoft Teams, to get a lot of our work done remotely. That being said, the work of LCFS is “people work.”

In this edition of Tidings, we’re pleased to tell you about our Southern Thirty Adolescent Center (STAC). This is our emergency youth shelter in Mt. Vernon, Illinois. STAC accepts all youth ages 11 to 18 who have no other place to go and has remained open and operational throughout the pandemic. LCFS is so blessed and proud of our staff at STAC who show up every day to ensure the youth there are supported and provided with the needed services to transition back into a home.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn’t comment on the recent unrest within our country surrounding the systemic racism that persists within our communities. Three years ago, LCFS made the decision to be an anti-racism organization committed to working toward dismantling systemic racism. We see every day the effects this has on our families, colleagues, and neighbors of color. It’s core to the LCFS mission that all people have the opportunity to achieve their God-given potential and that we be a part of eliminating the obstacles caused by systemic racism. We deepen our commitment to fighting racism and loving our brothers and sisters.

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
MANY OF LCFS’ DONORS HAVE BEEN SUPPORTING THE AGENCY for more than three decades. Marty Staehlin and his wife Rebecca are “newbies” officially joining our army of angels in 2013.

“I’d been aware of LCFS for a long time through church. And during Christmas, I would donate gifts to foster children in LCFS’ care,” Marty remembered. “But it really was a friend who served on the board that encouraged me to get more deeply involved.”

Since then, Marty’s passion has taken off. Now retired from healthcare consulting, he dedicates his volunteer hours to serving at his church and on the LCFS board. He is active in advocacy, fundraising, and governance — tirelessly bringing new ideas and connections to impact the children and families served.

Blessed by the financial resources that he has been given to take care of his own family, Marty feels grateful that organizations like LCFS exist to help others who may not have as much.

“Jeremiah 29:11 says God has plans for each of us,” Marty quoted. “My son had tremendous difficulty and struggled in the public school system. Labeled a ‘problem kid,’ he was treated in a way that didn’t support his academic or social growth. Because of our resources, we were able to get him the treatment and care he needed so that he could move forward in life. I devote my time to LCFS because they inspire hope for so many who face challenges on the road to finding their place in life regardless of their ability to pay,” said Marty. “In order to reach their potential, kids need someone to care and programs that can assist in helping them to get on the right path.”

In addition to volunteering, Marty busies himself looking after one of his grandsons. “I plan to be around for another 30 years, continuing to help in roles at LCFS where I can have an impact,” said Marty. “Recently, we decided to leave a gift in our will to support LCFS because it has been so important in our lives and so many people’s lives around the state. There’s a great need to care for children in Illinois. I feel good knowing that LCFS adapts and makes the tough choices to keep up with the challenges faced by families and our state.”

Whether you’ve been supporting us for more than three decades or less than one, you can leave a lasting legacy that will have an impact on children and families for years to come by leaving a gift to LCFS in your will. To find out more visit www.LCFSLegacy.org or contact Marylyn Rodgers at 708-488-5557 or marylyn_rodgers@lcfs.org.

See the Change has gone virtual

LCFS IS BRINGING OUR POPULAR SEE THE CHANGE TOUR to the comfort of your home!

JOIN US AT A TOUR
You can experience this new virtual one-hour “tour” of our mission through first-hand accounts from the people we serve. Our next tour is scheduled for Thursday, August 27th at 6 p.m. Register now using https://cutt.ly/VpVV5Shp.

For dates of other upcoming virtual See the Change tours, check out LCFS’ calendar of events at www.lcfs.org/events or follow our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/LCFSIL for the latest updates.

HELP SPREAD THE WORD
During these uncertain times, now more than ever, we need your help spreading the word about the good work of LCFS. Are you willing to take on the very short-term role of being a Changemaker volunteer and hosting a virtual See the Change tour?

Here’s how it works. You pick a date with LCFS, invite 10 to 15 of your friends and family to join you on a Zoom call to hear the people LCFS serves share their stories of the change they brought about in their lives with the help of LCFS. No need to worry about commutes, cleaning your house or providing snacks.

It’s just that easy. The time commitment and effort are minimal, but the impact for the children and families we serve is great. Please consider being a Changemaker today!

For questions or to schedule your own tour, contact Leslie Lopez at Leslie.Lopez@lcfs.org or 708-488-5568.
LCFS WILL HOST ITS 31ST ANNUAL HARVEST FESTIVAL on Friday, October 23 and it will look a little different this year — intimate, accessible and ready for your personal stamp!

We’ll host the virtual event, and you’re invited to join us from the comfort of your home by tuning in at 7 p.m. via Facebook Live or YouTube Live. You also have the option to “gather for the good” with a small group of your family and friends and host a home party. If you invite 10 people (including yourself) who purchase tickets, you’ll receive a special thank you gift. Your entire ticket price of $125 is a donation to LCFS and you’ll be entered into a raffle for a prize valued at $1,000.

The virtual LIVE event will feature a fun, professional production with:

> A mission message from a person served by LCFS
> Silent and live auction, paddle raise and raffle drawings

Tickets can be purchased at www.lcfs.org/harvestfestival. Contact Mandy Widtfeldt at mandy_widtfeldt@lcfs.org or 708-488-5558 with questions.