

In Everything, **Give Thanks**

As we look over the accomplishments of 2023 and plan for the future of our ministries, we know that our LMM organizations — Lutheran Social Services, Filling Home, and Luther Home of Mercy — are driven by a strong sense of compassion and comradery, people working day in and day out to bring about positive change.

We are blessed by volunteers who selflessly dedicate their time, energy and skills. We are grateful to passionate donors who make it possible for our organizations to achieve ambitious goals in service to others. And we are fortunate to have many kindhearted individuals offering their unwavering support and encouragement. When joined by caring and dedicated staff, these are our strengths even in times of change or uncertainty.

We recognize that it is this compassion, kindness and selflessness that have allowed our organizations to thrive. Our success is not the result of a single person's work but rather a testament to the power of unity and community spirit. We are fueled by the enduring support of many incredible individuals who understand the strength of giving thanks and helping others to thrive.

This collective efforts of all involved has improved lives, created opportunities and brought hope to those who need it most. At our annual meeting this coming March, we will highlight some of these stories, creating a vivid picture of the incredible impact an organization can have when supported by such a caring community. We hope you will join us on March 11th!

In appreciation,



TERRI RODRIGUEZ LMM President and CEO



CHUCK WINTERS LMM Board President

About LSS

Lutheran Social Services of Northwestern Ohio provides mental health counseling, a food pantry, financial coaching, and an array of other services. With multiple service sites throughout Northwest Ohio, we serve all ages, faiths, races, identities and economic status with professional and confidential services.



The Messenger is published quarterly by Lutheran Social Services of Northwestern Ohio.

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Walking the path to stability with our clients



TRACIA JAKSETIC
Vice President of LSS

Jacia Jaksutis

Jaksutis

These difficult economic times have had an impact on everyone we serve at Lutheran Social Services of Northwestern Ohio. For those already struggling, it can be the breaking point and stress levels often lead to increased substance abuse and family or domestic violence.

The need for our services has increased significantly over the last year, but our staff works tirelessly to help individuals and families with obtaining or maintaining stability by coordinating efforts throughout our programs.

In this edition of The Messenger, you'll read about one of our clients, James B. who came to us in need of housing and ended up staying with us for our Behavioral Health and Financial

Stability programs. His is a success story you'll certainly want to read!

As the need continues to grow in our communities, LSS is striving to keep pace. We are actively interviewing for a new Group Facilitator role in our Fremont office. Our current clinicians at our four sites are bringing in new clients every week. Our Emergency Choice Food Pantry is as busy as it's been since the pandemic, serving around 900 individuals each month.

When we can assist our clients with their needs when they walk through our doors, whether it's financial counseling, a five-day supply of food, mental health services or assistance through the re-entry program, we are fulfilling our mission. There are times when the services at LSS are not enough for the individuals we serve, and we coordinate with other agencies in our office areas to connect those individuals to other services as well.

No one should have to face life's most difficult challenges alone, and we walk with these individuals and families along the way on their path to stability.



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LSS clients make most of opportunities presented by holistic care at our agency

When he was growing up, James B. watched his mom get assistance from various sources to help raise her children. He was bound and determined to not ask for help when he grew up.

Through the twists and turns of life, though, James eventually came to the realization that asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Sometimes, it takes true strength to reach out and seek assistance.

"Once I turned 18, I didn't want to be like my mom, needing assistance or any type of help," James said. "Now I wish I could tell my mom, I see why you had to do something stronger than I could ever be, which is break down and say you needed help to take care of not only yourself but us. When she was alive, I didn't realize that."

James is a client at Lutheran Social Services of Northwestern Ohio, receiving care in our Behavioral Health and Financial Stability programs. He found LSS in a roundabout way.

After getting out of prison, James went to another local agency looking for assistance in finding housing. He came to LSS when he was told he needed a Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT), which is assessment tool for agencies that work with homeless.

What he found was so much more.

"When I got here, I was offered much more than a SPDAT," James said. "When I came here ... I took a chance on the help they offered me. I was looking for housing but ended up with much more."

While he was in prison, James' father and grandmother both died. His brother died since he's been out of prison, so seeking the help of LSS clinician Karen Howard has been vital.

"James has demonstrated tremendous growth since I met him," Karen said. "He has great insight and self-awareness. He validates the importance of a healthy mind and how it helps to talk about it. He understands vulnerability as he had to break his own wall down to trust.

"He is currently housed and employed. He works hard every day to be able to provide for his children."

James had also lost his job during the COVID pandemic. Karen reached out to coworker Liz Eby in the LSS Financial Stability Program to help James maintain some financial stability.

"Since we work as a team with different departments, the tenant can benefit in many ways, including scheduling everything for the same day and around the same time," Liz said. "Many times a client of mine will go to therapy and after therapy walk down the hall to my office and before leaving they are able to pick up groceries from the food pantry. This helps support them in so many ways, including saving money for transportation as well as childcare.



LSS Client Assistance Specialist Liz Eby works in the Financial Stability Program.

"It is also very beneficial for the client when they have a team assisting them who can communicate with each other on various resources we have found for a mutual client. Many times a client will ask to collaborate with me and their therapist at the same time so that we can work together to support them."

Having multiple services at one agency is a game changer, according to James. Instead of going between agencies for support in various areas, James is comfortable knowing his information and care is handled all at one location.

"You have a one-stop shop," James said. "This place gives you a sense of security because your business isn't being tossed around from agency to agency; it's here.

"They help you with everything, from financial, social, physical, mental, you're not getting it like that anywhere else. I'm grateful for this place."

That help almost didn't happen for James, and not because of anyone besides himself. He said it's hard asking for help as a man, someone he grew up believing needed to take care of everything themselves.

So for anyone else struggling with life, James' message is fairly simple.

"They have to let go and try," James said. "Let go of yourself, of thinking you know it all and let somebody you don't know help you. Somebody on the outside can see where you're at. You don't see where you're at. You think you're here, and you're not."

If you or someone you know needs our services, please call 419-243-9178 or email toledo@lssnwo.org.



How did you get involved at LSS?

I used to go to St. Stephen Lutheran in Sylvania, and we donated to the pantry.

Volunteer Spotlight

Rod H.

What keeps you coming back to LSS? I like the other volunteers. They're good people. Good, quality people.

What is your favorite part about being at LSS?

Probably the other volunteers. I've met some very nice people, because I've done it for 10 years.

We always look for people with a servant's heart to help in our food pantry! For more information on becoming a volunteer, please contact Debbie Lisk, Food Pantry Coordinator at 419-243-9178 or email: dlisk@lssnwo.org.

If you had to convince someone to volunteer at LSS, what would you tell them?

I just did that a while back. I have a new neighbor. She came here from New England. I told her about it. I just tell them, it's something where you feel like you're doing good for other people.

LSS of Northwestern Ohio News In Brief

LSS adding new programs to meet needs in Fremont

There are some exciting new programs coming to our Fremont office in 2024 to help meet the needs of the community in Sandusky and Ottawa counties!

The Abusive Partner Intervention Program (APIP) and Anger Management classes have been utilized in our Toledo office for more than a year, with clients receiving quality care and graduating from the programs with great success.

APIP classes get closer to identifying the nature of abuse, the complexities of relationships, and that abuse is an act and not a person. The groups maintain a ratio of no more than 10 clients per group to allow healthy discussion. Individual APIP sessions are available for those who need a direct educational settina.

The Anger Management classes teach the tools people can use to effectively manage strong emotions. Small group ratios are also maintained in these classes, allowing for honest self-exploration.

To help support our new programs in Fremont, please visit our website at www.lssnwo.org and click on the "Donate" button.

For more information on our new classes, call our Fremont office at 419-334-3431.

New addition to Feed Your Neighbor family

We are pleased to announce the addition of St. John's Lutheran Church in Stony Ridge as the eighth member of the Feed Your Neighbor group of food pantries. It's the only FYN pantry located in Wood County!

St. John's is located at 5520 Fremont Pike in Stony Ridge. They serve the third Saturday of each month.

McCord "pitching in" to help LSS food pantry

Students at Sylvania's McCord Junior High School are hosting a "Tartans Pitch In" community service project, benefiting the LSS Emergency Choice Food Pantry and

the Advent Center Personal Needs Pantry. The students will bring in their own donations between March 18-20, and community members are invited to drop off donations to the school between 9-11:30 a.m. on March 21.

For more information, contact leanette Hrovatich at 419-972-4373.

Stock the Shelves 2024 coming up this spring

LSS of Northwestern Ohio is hosting its third annual Stock the Shelves drive-thru donation event from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. on Friday, May 17. We will accept food and monetary donations at our Toledo office during that time. In the previous two Stock the Shelves events, we raised more than 3,000 pounds of food and \$7,000 for our Emergency

Keep your eyes on our website and social media pages for exciting announcements about the event! If you'd like to learn more on how you or your business can help, please call our Toledo office at 419-243-9178 or email toledo@lssnwo.org.

Choice Food Pantry.

LSS Administrative Office 2149 Collingwood Blvd. Toledo, Ohio 43620



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INSIDE THIS EDITION



Volunteer **Spotlight** Meet Rod, one of volunteers in the Emergency **Choice Food Pantry**



New in Fremont! New faces, new programs highlight response to need in community



LMM Annual Meeting Join us at the LMM Annual Meeting on March 11 at The Pinnacle in Maumee









