

the Messenger

Winter 2026

A quarterly publication of Lutheran Social Services of Northwestern Ohio

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A Year of Success

Stories of Triumph!

Lutheran Ministries of Mercy

SEEING FAITH IN ACTION

Dear Friends, Families, and Supporters,

Each day in our ministries, we are privileged to witness small, but meaningful steps toward change. With the steady support of our staff, a client attends counseling regularly for the first time, learning healthier ways to manage stress and rediscover hope. Another secures an ID, keeps a case management appointment, or takes the courageous step of asking for help at our food pantry. Others, living with significant disabilities, are learning how to form friendships, enjoy life in the community, or simply feel safe, supported, and cared for. These moments may appear modest, but they are powerful milestones on the journey forward.

Rooted in compassion and guided by faith, our programs meet people where they are. We strive to remind each person they are not alone, they matter, and they are deeply valued by God and by their community. Over time, these small steps add up. With consistent care and practical support, lives once shaped by crisis or uncertainty can begin to reflect hope, connection, and stability. Often, the change is not only in circumstances, but in how individuals experience life itself—meeting challenges with growing confidence, trust, and resilience.

The impact of this progress extends beyond the individual. Positive change ripples outward to families, friends, and neighborhoods, strengthening the fabric of our community. As we notice and celebrate everyday acts of kindness and service, we are reminded that faith is lived out in small gestures of love, woven together by God into lasting change. For these moments, and for the lives they touch, we give thanks today and always.

Best Wishes for a Happy 2026!

Sincerely,



Terri Rodriguez
President and CEO
Lutheran Ministries of Mercy

We welcome you to be a part of

Rejoicing in
HOPE

2026 Annual Meeting

Monday, March 9th at 2:00 PM
The Pinnacle in Maumee, Ohio

R.S.V.P. today!

lutheranministriesofmercy.org

Come be inspired and enjoy fellowship and food with mission-minded people like you! Hearty appetizers and desserts will be served, along with a coffee station. Our guest speaker is Toledo Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz.

Tickets are \$20.00 each, and Pastors are our guests at no charge (we would love to have pastors and two representatives from each church present for voting).

Please RSVP online through our site, lutheranministriesofmercy.org, or call Karen Shaffer at 419-972-4394.



Filling Homes, Luther Home of Mercy and Lutheran Social Services of NWO are working together under the Lutheran Ministries of Mercy umbrella to share resources. These combined efforts allow us to foster hope, create change and meet the needs of individuals and families in our care. Visit our website at lutheranministriesofmercy.org to learn more.



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YES, We're Virtual!

Did you know? LSSNWO currently provides individual mental health counseling services both in person or virtually?

Please call our intake specialists to schedule an appointment at 419-243-9178.

LETTER FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

Finding Success at LSSNWO



TRACIA JAKSETIC

Vice President


Tracia Jaksetic

What is Success? In this edition of the Messenger newsletter, we're taking a closer look at the successes that our clients have achieved. Success, it's a word we hear often, yet its true meaning can feel elusive. So, what does it really mean?

At its most basic, the dictionary defines success as "the accomplishment of an aim or purpose." However, success is deeply personal, and it looks different for each of us in our personal lives. While we often look at success in terms of tangible milestones, such as career promotions, financial gain, or public recognition, these external markers don't always capture the full picture. Success is subjective. It takes shape in a variety of ways and at different times in our lives.


What success looks like for one person might be completely different for someone else. It could be a sense of inner peace, the pursuit of a lifelong dream, or the ability to balance work and personal life.

As you read about the clients featured in this edition and their achievements with the support of the caring staff at LSSNWO, I invite you to pause for a moment and reflect on your own journey. What does success look like to you?



LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES
of Northwestern Ohio
Strengthening People in Body, Mind and Spirit

SAVE THE DATE

5th Annual

2026


STOCK THE SHELVES

FOOD DONATION EVENT


11 AM - 1 PM on Friday, May 15, 2026

2149 Collingwood Blvd. Toledo, OH 43620

Shop our Amazon list before the event!



Make a monetary donation to LSSNWO!



For more information, to donate, or sponsor:
Call: 419.243.9178
Email: Monique at mward@lssnwo.org

Uplifting Success Stories at LSSNWO

At Lutheran Social Services of Northwestern Ohio (LSSNWO), our clients in our Toledo, Fremont, and Tiffin offices have experienced profound success through the Anger Management, Substance Use Disorder, Reentry, and Education group programs. These programs provide a supportive environment where individuals can learn essential coping skills, gain insight into their behaviors, and take steps toward lasting personal growth.



From Unsure to CDL Certified (Education Groups)

“I did not go into the program open minded and wanted to just complete it so I can get on with my life. But during the program, it opened my eyes to the many different situations other people go through. After relating to so many, and wanting to better myself, the classes gave tools to navigate through situations and gave self-awareness that can be used to protect myself and others from bad predicaments. I have now gotten my CDL, looking to further myself into owning my own trucks and have structured visits with my kids.”

You Aren't Alone (Substance Use Disorder)

“I have been to LSS in the past, so when I relapsed with alcohol I knew where to go for help. I now come on a monthly basis to get things off my chest, that could lead me to relapse again. I realized that I need to be able to come and talk about things that are triggering me instead of just trying to deal with it on my own. I feel that my life has improved and I tell others about the services when they are having issues with substance usage.”



From Pain to Prosperity (Mental Health)

Two of our therapists in our mental health program shared:

My client stated that he attributes the improvement in his mental health largely in part to Lutheran Social Services. “I have learned how to combat my negative thoughts into more positive ones that could lead me to relapse again.”

I had the pleasure of working with a someone who came to me with obsessive thoughts of death due to a background of trauma. During the course of treatment they discovered the ability to let go of avoidance patterns that occurred over a period of years. This person is now able to carry out the activities of daily living without the debilitating thoughts and behaviors that were limiting their activities. Treatment works when consistent effort is applied and in this case there were rich payoffs in the process of change.

Building My Future (Reentry Case Management)

“When I first came to Toledo, I was in recovery, on probation, and had nowhere to call home. I had been struggling to find anyone who would look past my background. I didn't know what to expect when my recovery counselor referred me to the Lutheran Social Services Reentry Program, but during my first meeting, I felt a sense of hope. My case manager didn't make promises, but she stood by me and became my biggest advocate. When red flags threatened my housing approval, I watched her fight for me, refusing to let me get discouraged after every ‘no.’ After five months of searching, she overcame the final hurdles to get my housing approved, even securing the deposit and furniture I needed. Today, I finally have peace of mind. Because I no longer worry about where I will sleep, I can finally focus on building my future.”



A Warm Hand This Winter Employee Resource Network (ERN)

“Colder weather can present its own set of challenges for many individuals. Recently, the Success Coach from LSSNWO’s Employer Resource Network had the opportunity to assist a client in need of warm essentials to face the elements. Through the LSSNWO Clothing Closet, which is available to all active LSSNWO clients, the Success Coach provided the client with a winter coat and other warm clothing. This gesture not only offers physical warmth but also fosters confidence and hope in the face of adversity.”



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VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: GLORIA J. TISDALE

This month, we are grateful
to highlight LSSNWO
Food Pantry Volunteer,
Gloria J. Tisdale.

**Gloria, how long have you volunteered with the Choice Food
Pantry? How did you get started?**

Gloria: I've been volunteering with the pantry since June 2025. In January of 2025, I retired, so from January until June, I was looking for something to do. LSS is right by my house, so one day I stopped by, and introduced myself to Debbie. I told her that I would like to volunteer and do something low-key like answering phones. I love it here!

What do you love about volunteering here?

Gloria: I love the clients, talking with them, sometimes I pray with them. I like for the folks on the other end of the phone to feel special, that someone cares about them, and gives them hope. That could have been me on the end of that line.

How often do you volunteer at our pantry?

Gloria: I'm here 2 days a week. I come in on Mondays and Wednesdays to answer phones and take appointments. I have 50 years of previous customer service experience.

**Are there any encouraging words that you would like
to share that may inspire others to volunteer at the
pantry?**

Gloria: Those of us who have talents, who have been blessed with gifts, should use them to bless others. Be a volunteer and pass on that blessing by spreading hope to others.

**If you are interested in joining our LSSNWO Food
Pantry team, call 419.243.9178 and ask for Debbie Lisk.**

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