

## Celebrating Life with a Bag Full of Popcorn

By: Mira Mendick, Staff

As I walked into the LSS/NCA World Refugee Day celebration this summer, I saw a room full of refugee families, children and adults. Most of these families I have seen in the office before, but this day was different.



One woman had been meeting with her Job Developer on a weekly basis. She was often stressed and nervous about finding a job. However, on this particular day, she did not greet me with her usual reserved hello, but excitedly embraced me with one arm while holding a plate towering with food in the other. Throughout the day's events, I continued to catch glimpses of her sitting with friends, laughing, watching a group of other families giving an impromptu cultural dance show.

Nearby, a small boy who is often sitting on his mother's lap during

her office appointments, was sprinting around World Refugee Day. He laughed and smiled as he bobbed back to his mother's lap with a bag full of popcorn—likely not his first.

It was heartwarming to know that despite the challenges these families face during resettlement, your support helped LSS/NCA offer a day of respite and cultural celebration. I am grateful that we celebrate our resilient families who we are proud to call our friends and neighbors.



## REUNITED: 6 Years and 3,000 Miles Away

By: Chloe Shiras, Staff

On July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017, an alert popped up on my computer; a new case had been scheduled to travel. Finally, Marianela's son, Alex, would be coming to the United States. I eagerly called Marianela to inform her that her 11-year-old son would be arriving in just two weeks. As I informed Marianela of the good news, she shrieked with excitement and the tears masked her words of gratitude.

Marianela had been waiting for this news for 5 years. She was forced to leave her son with his grandmother in El Salvador in search for a better life for her family in the United States. Marianela was only able to travel home to visit a couple of times and has not seen her son in three years.

Since arriving in the U.S., Marianela has built a successful life for herself and patiently waited the day her son would join her in a safe, loving environment. She wanted to give him a childhood free from the gang violence that persisted back home. LSS/NCA helped Marianela prepare for Alex's arrival and continues to support them as they begin their new life together in Virginia. Alex is thrilled to be reunited with his mother and will begin school in the next few weeks.

Alex was able to travel to the U.S. as a refugee through the Central American Minors (CAM) program facilitated through LSS/NCA. The CAM program provides qualified children a safe alternative to the dangerous journey that many Central American minors are forced to take each year. LSS/NCA helps



protect these children at risk of harm and death by assisting lawfully present parents in the United States to formally apply and request refugee status for their children still abroad in dangerous situations. We are proud to continue welcoming newcomers like Alex and reuniting families as they begin their next chapter in the United States.

# Their First Summer of *Family Vacations*

By: Rochelle White, Staff

Foster Care is designed to protect children and offer them the safety, guidance, and love that every child deserves. Sometimes, children are removed from their birth homes due to abuse or neglect, and a foster home is found for them while the birth parents rebuild their ability to care for their little ones.

This was the case for the Lee children, a young three-year-old girl and five-year-old boy. A couple of years ago, the children entered care for the second time due to physical abuse in their home and their birth mother's long history of mental illness. The children were placed in one of our licensed foster homes in Maryland.

The foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, took great care of them. They immediately fell in love with both children and wanted to adopt them. However, as with all children removed from their birth homes, the goal is to reunite families if possible when the children's needs, safety, and well-being can be ensured. After providing the birth mother case management, mental health services, and visitations for over two years, LSS/NCA determined the children would not be able to return to her care and were therefore eligible for adoption.

The Lee children and the foster parents were thrilled for the opportunity to become a legal



family; and Mr. and Mrs. Roberts immediately applied for adoption. After an 18 month adoption trial, the Roberts family officially grew by two. Together, they have enjoyed their first summer of family vacations and gatherings.

## Courage at Kid's Camp Receives a Thunderous Round of Applause

By: Dara Yah'ya, Staff

It takes courage to do something for the first time. Courage is the first leadership principle that Youth Haven explores through the Diamond principle "Try new things." At Kids Camp everyone is guaranteed to have a first time at something – sleeping away at an overnight camp, rock climbing, zip lining, fishing, letting an inch worm crawl on you, tie-dying, smelling birch twig, or performing at the talent show.

It takes even more courage to talk about your fears. Youth Haven creates a safe place at Kids Camp to express those fears and build skills to overcome them. Eight year old Sam,\* recently diagnosed with depression, talked about being lonely, his self-doubt about "turning out bad", and fear of not knowing how to be happy.

Sam's counselors made sure to teach him fun games that he could play alone or with others. They provided many opportunities for Sam to be a leader and then guided him to reflect on his strengths and areas of growth. The camp social worker provided Sam one-on-one counseling and his cabin counselor helped him discover things that brought him joy and gave him energy. Drawing was on top of his list. For the talent show he used a stuffed animal as a model for his live drawing performance. He received a thunderous round of applause for the display of his talent. The Youth Haven family was sure that Sam left camp with experiences that would remind him how great he is. Still a bit reserved at the end of camp, he gave out



HUGE hugs to each of counselor and shared lots of smiles and laughs with fellow campers.

Your donations this past year made it possible for Sam to come to camp. If you would like to sponsor a camper for the upcoming fall and winter retreats please contact: Susan Haine at [HaineS@lssnca.org](mailto:HaineS@lssnca.org)

*\*Name has been changed to protect camper's identity as requested.*

# LSS/NCA Awards First **BOLD JOURNEY** Scholarships in Centennial year

By: Susan Haine, Staff

Celebrating  
100 Years

Michael,\* a refugee from Afghanistan, was awarded a \$2,500.00 scholarship to pursue studies at a local university. He will be attending courses to receive GIS Certification which will enable him to continue to pursue his career in mapping. Michael was a geologist with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

While working for USAID in Afghanistan, he supervised 20 technical workers as they gathered information in the field. Michael was responsible for the creation of hundreds of maps compiled from the collected data, supporting the U.S. mission to empower the people of Afghanistan. Due to his

cause, his life was targeted and he fled with his wife in search of safety. Currently in the first few months of his resettlement, Michael works at a local outlet of a large national chain store but is thrilled to go back to school to do what he loves with the hope of better supporting his family.

LSS/NCA received over 30 applications from individuals who are or were recently clients of the Refugee and Immigration Services or Children's Services programs. It was an extremely difficult decision to select from among so many who had worked hard, achieved so much, and showed such great potential. Members

of the Scholarship Review Committee were impressed by the qualifications of Michael and the six other Bold Journey Scholarship winners of 2017.

This scholarship recognizes promising individuals who have demonstrated the ability to achieve in the face of adversity. It will enable recipients to pursue academic or vocational studies which will secure their future and change their lives. If you would like to contribute to the annual Serve Boldly scholarship awards, please contact Susan Haine at [HaineS@LSSNCA.org](mailto:HaineS@LSSNCA.org) or call 202-723-3000 x138.

*\*Name has been changed to protect Michael's identity as requested.*



## Lions, Tigers, and Puppy Faces...Oh My!

By: Toni Killinger, Board Member

**M**usic and happy voices greeted me as I approached the Carderock Picnic Pavilion, site of the

LSS/NCA Centennial Family Reunion celebration on August 12. Many people already had staked out "their" picnic tables in the pavilion and were enjoying visiting with old and new friends. It was an ideal setting for a picnic, with a large open grassy area adjacent to the pavilion where kids, big and little, could race around and play games. Children were treated to a talented face painting artist. One little girl was transformed into a puppy, complete with a panting tongue.

Staff and volunteers went above and beyond to make the event a wonderful celebration for current and

former clients, staff, and volunteers. We enjoyed hot dogs, shredded barbecue chicken and veggie burgers, accompanied by baked beans, green beans, potato salad, hummus and a variety of chips and huge cookies. (I volunteered to pass out cookies and enjoyed eating the crumbs, because everyone knows that cookie crumbs are calorie free!)

Once the feeding had died down, a Snow Cone truck pulled in to provide a cooling and surprising treat. The afternoon proved to be a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the first 100 years of Lutheran Social Service's mission and service to the Washington DC community. On behalf of the LSS/NCA Board, thank you for your support; a 100 year celebration is only possible because of you. If you missed our Family Reunion this summer, stay tuned for *Passport to the World* this coming fall!



## Sharing Stories and Strengthening Bonds on Capital Hill

By: Amy Meli, Staff

Earlier this year, Lutheran Church of the Reformation teamed up with several other nearby faith communities to create Good Neighbor: Capitol Hill. This unique partnership allowed congregations to join forces to help resettle a refugee family through LSS/NCA. Although the group expected to bond with our new refugee neighbors, the fostering of closer connections between faith communities right around the corner from each other was a beautiful and unexpected blessing.

In order to support the partnership, Good Neighbor: Capitol Hill, Story District, and LSS/ NCA teamed up

to present an evening of storytelling entitled *The American Odyssey: True tales about hospitality, homecomings & plunging into uncharted waters*. During the event, people who have migrated to the United States from around the world, LSS/NCA volunteers, and others who experienced personal journeys told their stories of self-discovery and community. Story District, a nonprofit based in DC that provides coaching, classes, and ongoing support to cultivate storytelling trained the evening's performers. Funds raised during the event were used to support the partnership's Good Neighbor Program efforts.



## Back to School with 75 Colorful Backpacks

By: Kianoosh Asar, Staff

On a warm summer Saturday, after months of planning and coordination between LSS/NCA and volunteers from Cherrydale Baptist Church, community members and refugee families with school-aged children all gathered at Cherrydale's gymnasium. The "Back to School" event marked Cherrydale's fourth year of serving Virginia's refugee youth, ensuring that every child starting school had the tools to succeed including backpacks, lunch pails and school supplies.

Because of the Cherrydale community and other donors in Northern Virginia, over 75 fun, colorful backpacks with supplies were distributed to LSS/NCA refugee youth. The children filled the room with energy and excitement during the entirety of this three-hour event – playing ping pong, painting faces, making crafts, and chasing soccer balls and balloons around the gym.

One volunteer reflected on the event, *"I love how soccer is an international language. I'm pretty sure I had as much fun as [the kids] did kicking the ball around, and I think it may have helped them feel comfortable and welcomed in their new home."*



Christine Chan Downer, a member of Cherrydale Baptist Church and an organizer of the event said, *"[Cherrydale] has enjoyed a close partnership with LSS for over four years now, and we love working with LSS staff, who are incredibly dedicated, compassionate, selfless, and hardworking."*

# Looking for ways to help?

As we move into the holiday season, several of LSS/NCA's programs are holding donation drives, including:

### Coats/Hats/Gloves:

Our Youth Haven program and Hyattsville refugee offices are collecting new or gently used winter coats, hats, and gloves for our families.

### Queen Sized Sheets/Blankets:

Our Falls Church refugee office needs Queen sized sheets and blankets for arriving refugee families as we enter the cold, winter months.

### Nonperishable snacks:

Our Youth Haven program hosts youth for weekly fellowship time at our DC office, and teenagers always come hungry! We're looking for donations of nonperishable snack foods and drinks that we can provide during the events.

**Want to make a donation?**  
Contact Amy Meli at [melia@lssnca.org](mailto:melia@lssnca.org) or 202-723-3000, Ext. 200

## WE NEED YOUR HELP to resettle more refugee families.

Host a coffee hour at your home for friends, neighbors, or family and encourage them to join you in collecting household supplies and furniture. LSS/NCA will supply refreshments, materials, and the presenter. You supply the venue and the guests. Together, we can provide homes for thousands!

Contact Mira Mendick at [MendickM@LSSNCA.org](mailto:MendickM@LSSNCA.org) for more information.

## Thrivent Action Teams to the Rescue!

By: Kathy Jagow, Staff

At this time of the year, I am busy getting used to the new school schedule and planning for the year ahead. My children, who are in 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade, both have community service requirements that they must meet. This year, I have a new tool in my school planning box to support their service requirements, Thrivent Action Teams!



Thrivent Financial is a not-for-profit membership organization and a Fortune 500 financial services organization. Thrivent encourages its members to serve their communities by offering them the opportunity to apply for Action Team funds each year. My husband and I are both Benefit members of Thrivent Financial and have the opportunity to apply for two \$250 Action Team Community Impact Cards to use to support charitable activities. **This means my family can apply for up to \$1,000 in total to support charitable work such as a fundraiser, service activity, or educational event.** We already used one of our Action Team cards to support Youth Haven's annual Family Mini-Camp by buying and filling supply bags for each family as part of LSS/NCA's *We Gather To Serve* event last May. This fall, we plan to talk with our children about the charitable causes they care about and apply for Action Team funds to support their service activities.

If you or a family member is a member of Thrivent, here are some ways you could use Thrivent Action Teams to support LSS/NCA and our community.

### Support Refugee Resettlement

Form an Action Team to gather apartment supplies for a new refugee family. Contact Kiersten Rossetto Nassar at [rossettok@lssnca.org](mailto:rossettok@lssnca.org) or 703-698-5026 ext. 284 to learn what supplies are most needed. Use Action Team funds to buy a portion of the needed supplies and gather volunteers to help organize them. There may be an opportunity to set-up and decorate an apartment for a newly arriving family with the supplies collected.

### Youth Haven

Youth Haven runs monthly health and wellness education events for participants. There are a lot of supplies needed to help teach these classes, ranging from seedlings for Youth Haven's garden plot to yoga blocks and running shoes. Youth Haven could also use December holiday donations and supplies for its February retreat including bath towels, wash clothes, and pillows. If you are interested in supporting Youth Haven through an Action Team contact Amy Meli at [Melia@lssnca.org](mailto:Melia@lssnca.org) or 202-723-3000 ext. 200.

### Foster Care

LSS/NCA's traditional foster care program and its Unaccompanied Minors program collect Christmas presents, school supplies, and other needed items for children in the program. If you are interested in volunteering or would like to use Action Team funds to help organize and supply Foster Care needs, please contact Amy Meli at [Melia@lssnca.org](mailto:Melia@lssnca.org) or 202-723-3000 ext. 200.

*To apply for Action Team funds go to [bit.ly/thriventActionLSS](https://bit.ly/thriventActionLSS). If you need assistance or would like to learn how to become a member, contact your Thrivent agent or call 800-847-4836 and say "Thrivent Action Teams". Only Thrivent members are eligible to apply. The number of teams each member can lead per year depends on his or her membership type. Benefit members are eligible to lead two Thrivent Action Teams per calendar year, and associate members are eligible to lead one per calendar year (maximum of three).*



## A Comment from Chris

Dear Friends:

As our centennial year comes to a close, we are excited about beginning a new chapter in LSS/NCA's monumental history. Over the past 100 years, we have touched tens of thousands of individuals, created hundreds of families through foster care and adoption and built new lives for thousands of refugees fleeing war and devastation. Recognizing that this is only the beginning is a humbling and inspiring testament to your support and the accomplishments we can achieve together.

Over the past year, we have celebrated our vibrant and diverse community at World Refugee Day (pg. 2). We have greeted new and old friends at our Centennial Family Reunion Picnic (pg. 4). We have shared stories on Capitol Hill (pg. 5) and have been blessed with new and continuing partnerships (pg. 5). It has certainly been a year to celebrate and a great springboard for the next 100 years.

Over the next few months, you will receive updates about our programming and strategic plan for 2018 and beyond. As we diversify our funding and restructure our services to ensure the future of LSS/NCA, your support is needed now more than ever before. Please join us at our *Passport to the World* event this coming March to help us ring in our own kind of New Year and pledge your support. Invitations and Save the Date cards will arrive in your mailbox soon. Because of you, LSS/NCA will continue to offer hope to the most vulnerable among us for generations to come.

Blessings,

Christine P. Connell  
CEO

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## LSS/NCA Offices

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

4406 Georgia Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20011  
(202) 723-3000

### MARYLAND

3799 East-West Hwy  
Hyattsville, MD 20782  
(240) 714-4034

2503 Belair Dr.  
Bowie, MD 20715  
(301) 809-5558

### VIRGINIA

7401 Leesburg Pike  
Falls Church, VA 22043  
(703) 698-5026

1601 Prince William Pkwy.  
Woodbridge, VA 22191