



MEDIA RELEASE

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Families Affected by HIV/AIDS Empowered through Artistic Expression *Family drawings representing courage and determination come to life through LSS/NCA and Budsies™ partnership.*

(Tuesday, September 22) Washington, DC—*“Our Budsie is about unity. Life can be hard sometimes so that is what the dark wing is for. And the good times is [represented] in the halo,”* said Devante as he explained his family’s Budsies drawing to the others.

[Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area](#) (LSS/NCA) partnered with [Budsies™](#)—a company that makes drawings into plush toys-- to give families living with HIV a unique experience to draw family mascots that represent their family goals, values, and attributes then have those drawings come to life.

This past spring, families gathered to discuss the symbolism of color, shapes, and textures and how those artistic elements represent their family. Budsies brought each family’s artwork to life by hand-making the mascots and turning them into tangible, stuffed toys. Last Saturday, families reunited for the reveal of their family mascot.

As Davante and three younger siblings finished telling the others about their family and their drawing, their mascot was pulled from a box and revealed to them for the first time. The children sat in silence with the biggest smiles across their faces as their arms reached out to hold the toy. Sharon Newman, the children’s mother, exclaimed “wow!” from the back of the room as she started to cry.



[Budsie is revealed to Devante and his siblings for the first time.](#)

“The Budsies project was extremely important for our families,” said Dara Yah’Ya, Youth Haven Program Manager, “It gives them something to hold onto during tough times—their own symbols of courage and strength. It reminds them to be led by their vision rather than their fear.”

"Budsies is honored to partner with LSS's Youth Haven Camps," said Alex Furmansky, Founder of Budsies. "Children and families impacted by HIV/AIDS deserve a safe, nurturing environment among peers. Each child's personal Budsie buddy will embody this supportive spirit outside the camp walls and bring comfort to the children for many years to come."

Every year, LSS/NCA sends more than 70 families to participate in Youth Haven Camps & Retreats free-of-charge. These retreats provide unique and unmatched experiences for children and families who often have no other resources or support networks. Youth Haven programming offers opportunities to share experiences, find comfort and hope, explore healthy lifestyles, and grow past the stigma of HIV/AIDS through peer support and professional mentoring.

“Our goal at LSS/NCA is to provide our Youth Haven families and children with experiences and education that support them in healthy relationships, standing against stigma, and building bright futures. Our partnership with Budsies gives our families a reminder that family and open communication strengthen each individual,” said LSS/NCA CEO Melissa Graves.

To give more youth the opportunity to make lasting memories and attend Youth Haven Camps and Retreats, please visit our [website](#) to learn how one small donation can make a difference in a child’s life.

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Video of the Budsies Reveal can be viewed on our [YouTube channel](#).

Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSS/NCA) has devoted nearly a century to walking with those in need and mobilizing community partners to provide services that offer hope and rebuild lives. LSS/NCA is a registered 501c3 nonprofit organization that serves more than 2,000 families and children in crisis throughout the Greater Metro-DC region through Adoption/Foster Care, Caregiver/Senior Services, Disaster Preparedness/Response, Refugee & Immigrant Services, and Youth Haven Camps for children and families affected by HIV/AIDS. LSS/NCA does not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, age, race, creed, gender, or sexual orientation.