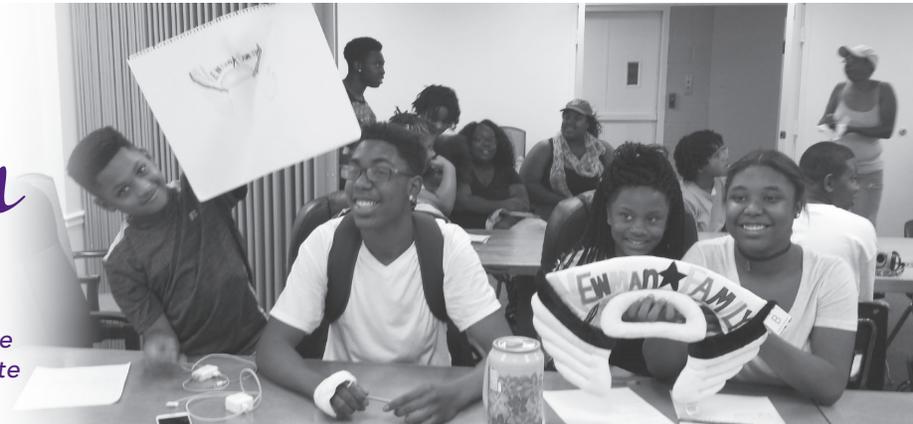




YOUTH HAVEN FAMILIES EMPOWERED THROUGH

Artistic Expression

"Our Budsie [drawing] is about unity. Life can be hard sometimes so that is what the dark wing is for. And the good times are [represented] in the halo," said Devante as he explained his family's drawing to the others.



Devante and his siblings receive their Budsie pal

LSS/NCA's Youth Haven program is partnered with Budsies™—a company that makes drawings into plush toys—to give families living with HIV a unique opportunity to draw mascots that represent their family goals and values then have those drawings come to life.

Last spring, families collaborated and discussed the symbolism of color, shapes, and textures and how those artistic elements represent their family in their unique illustrations. Budsies brought each family's artwork to life by hand-making the mascots and turning them into tangible, stuffed toys. Families reunited in September for the reveal.

As Davante and his siblings finished telling the others about their family and 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. Sandra, the children's mother, exclaimed "Wow!" from the back of the room as she started to cry.

"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, Youth Haven serves up to 95 youth and parents. Youth Haven's goal is to encourage healthy, connected and successful young people living with or affected by social stigma. Activities which involve family units provide an extra level of support. Services include camps, retreats, workshops, year-round mentoring, and volunteer opportunities. Strongly supported by local Lutheran congregations, it is the only program in the Washington, DC region that provides supportive overnight youth development activities to youth living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.

Video of the emotional Budsies Reveal can be seen on our YouTube channel. <http://bit.ly/LSSMother>

Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area www.lssnca.org United Way #8146 CFC #78343

**AN OPPORTUNITY TO REUNITE FAMILIES
ACHIEVING THE "IMPOSSIBLE"
REACHING BEYOND THE CAMPSITE
WE'VE MOVED!**

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CEO TRANSITION UPDATE

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REUNITING FAMILIES: *A Small Window of Opportunity*

By: Nina Simon, Volunteer

CAM



Children from Central America often flee their homes atop a train dubbed “La Bestia” (The Beast) because it is known for taking hundreds of lives every year. Children often fall from the train from exhaustion or overcrowding. CAM will help these children legally reunite with their families in the U.S.

Last summer, thousands of youth fleeing gang violence in Central America poured across the southern border of the United States seeking refuge. As a result, in December 2014 the Obama administration launched a new humanitarian program to assist parents in lawfully bringing their children to the U.S. from three Central American countries—El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.

Since the program’s inception, LSS/NCA and other refugee resettlement organizations have been tasked with reuniting families and helping bring these children to safety. After enlisting the assistance of Spanish-speaking volunteers and attending government trainings, staff began serving clients last February through the Central

American Minor’s Program (CAM). Since then, an overwhelming number of families have knocked on our door asking for help. For many, this program offers the first opportunity to bring their children to the United States. Due to earthquakes or other traumatic events in their home countries, many parents have a “Temporary Protected Status” that allows them to lawfully reside and work in the United States, but not to bring their children here. Through this new program, unmarried children under age 21 are eligible to obtain visas; grandchildren and spouses are also eligible on a case-by-case basis. Despite the limitations, CAM offers an opportunity to legally reunite with loved ones, and families are eager to apply.

In our case reviews, many applicants have described heartbreaking situations that their children are facing in their home countries. These children have been drugged, raped and threatened with violence or death by gang members and are often subject to extortion. For many, even a trip to school or the market is fraught with danger.

We have completed more than 100 applications and eagerly await our family reunions as the children begin arriving. However, due to a lack of staffing resources and language barriers, we currently have a wait list of well over 200 cases.

If you would like to volunteer and help these children find a safe haven in the arms of their mother or father, please contact Jessica Cuellar at cuellarj@lssnca.org or 703-698-5026 x. 113.



Foster Care Youth Achieves the "Impossible"

By: Rochelle White

We celebrated a momentous occasion when one of our foster care youth graduated from high school in June. For the past seven years, D has been in our care and has found "home" with multiple of our most dedicated foster families.

When D entered into the LSS/NCA foster care program, her relationship with her birth family was strained, and emotional past experiences required her to receive mental health support. She hated school and never thought about going to college. She thought that a good future was "impossible."

Since then, we have seen her grow into a wonderful young woman. Because of the influence of foster families and the guidance of her social workers, D has accomplished what she thought was impossible. Not only did she graduate, but she was accepted to Allegany College and will begin classes this fall. D will be the first in her family to attend college, and we are so proud of her accomplishments.

In addition, a relative of D's is currently pursuing legal guardianship to provide D a forever home. D says that she is eager to begin this new journey and is excited about the "possibilities."



Your support helps us create families each and every day. If you are interested in becoming a licensed foster parent/caregiver and joining LSS/NCA in the effort of creating families, please contact Patricia Britt at (202) 723-3000 x254



Recruiting Foster Families at Every Opportunity

By: Patricia Britt

The District's Barbeque Battle has become one of the largest and most unique food and music festivals in the country. The *Huffington Post* lists it as "One of the Nation's Best Food Festivals." This year, LSS/NCA had the privilege to be an Empowerment Zone Exhibitor to showcase our impact on the local community.

What seemed like hundreds of people visited our booth to learn more about our programs and opportunities to get involved. A few interested couples and individuals signed up to learn more about becoming a foster parent right there on the spot!

Special thanks to our staff for attending the event despite some heavy rainfall. Keep your eyes on the LSS/NCA website event calendar to see where we will be next.

Reaching Beyond the Campsite Into the Home

By: Dara Yah'Ya



FLOURISHING FAMILIES PROJECT

Ms. Greenwood is a mother of six and a grandmother of 10. She lived in the same home for 15 years, sharing it with her two youngest children, a high school junior and a recent high school graduate. It's more than a roof over their heads. For a decade she'd run an in-home daycare that provided year-round care for children infants-12 year olds.

Recently Ms. Greenwood and her children were displaced from her home and place of business, causing emotional hardships and financial challenges. They lived with family for nine months until the three of them settled into a small apartment.

While thankful for her own space, the new apartment does not accommodate her childcare business, so she is considering alternative options: licensing on-call childcare services, renting additional space, or even switching gears and helping young mothers care for themselves and their unborn child. Regardless, she's determined to get back on track.

Youth Haven recently won a Wheatridge Burst Grant to help families like the

Greenwoods by providing deeper, more holistic services to help them rebuild their lives. This grant created the *Flourishing Families Project*, allowing LSS/NCA to reach beyond the Youth Haven campsite and into the family home.

The families in the pilot group were selected because they experienced trauma and adversities due to a lack of resources, in addition to managing a combination of HIV, cancer, diabetes, and stress-related disorders. With this Project, the Youth Haven nurse and social worker visit each family quarterly to provide health education and assess what resources the family needs. In addition, routine support sessions encourage family members to work toward personal and economic goals while offering resources to effectively manage their physical and mental health.

Ultimately, the *Flourishing Families Project* helps caregivers achieve their own success and overall wellbeing to lead their family by example, just as Ms. Greenwood is doing.

UPDATE: CEO TRANSITION

Join us for the CEO Farewell on Tuesday, November 10th at Washington Nationals Ballpark to recognize the past achievements and future innovations of LSS/NCA.

RSVP at LSSNCA.org

A few months ago Melissa Graves announced she is resigning as CEO of LSS/NCA at the end of 2015. She has been a powerful advocate of our mission and the underserved in our community and will be leaving an indelible mark on our organization.

The Board is committed to ensuring LSS/NCA's mission and vision continue with the next leader. The Transition Committee and I are fully engaged in finding Melissa's successor. We hired Diversified Search, a firm with more than 40 years of experience placing executives with faith-based human service organizations across the country. We are in the process of evaluating resumes,

following up on referrals, and conducting phone screenings. We have been very pleased with the quality of candidates and referrals we have received, which speaks to LSS/NCA's highly regarded reputation.

The Transition Committee, the Board, and I thank you for your support and your dedication to LSS/NCA's mission and the neighbors we serve, particularly while we make this important decision.

In Peace,

Nels Hendrickson, Chair
LSS/NCA Board of Directors

A Reflection on Youth Haven from a Volunteer Nurse

By: Claire Smith, Youth Haven Camp Volunteer

This summer, I had the privilege to volunteer as a summer camp nurse assistant and counselor at the Youth Haven Kids Camp. This gave me a unique perspective of the young children in our community whose lives have been impacted by HIV/AIDS.

The campers' curiosity, vulnerability, and wisdom shone through daily. There were bumps and bruises along the road, but every day the resiliency of the campers astonished me. A variety of activities were planned for the campers from hand hygiene education workshops to an immensely creative talent show on the last night of camp. I watched the kids navigate "The Nesity," a course with wooden boards held by ropes about 15 feet above ground where the participant must rely on his/her mates below to help keep the ropes steady. I listened to the teens talk about their struggles at home and their dreams for the future. In some form or fashion,

all of the campers faced their fears and always triumphed.

But above all, I experienced a form of community that I have not felt in any other experience. From the camp preparations to the camp clean up, it was evident the amount of care and consideration that went in to making the best possible camp experience. The volunteer counselors constantly amazed me—creating a fun, safe, and supportive environment. The nurses were not just nurses. They were present for the kids in whatever capacity the campers needed them. The compassion of the "unseen helpers" was also apparent in the pillows, medication boxes, toiletries, art supplies, and camp necessities that were donated from local congregations and individuals. And at the center of this synergistic energy was the staff of LSS/NCA, providing positivity, guidance, and support.



I write this article for all of those supporters and friends of Youth Haven who may not have the opportunity to see the smiles, hear the laughter, or witness the growth and transformation that one child experiences at camp. I have been and seen your compassion in action, and its inspiration is something I will never forget. Thank you for giving me this opportunity and for giving dozens of children more than just a childhood memory.

Thank you for changing lives.

If you are interested in volunteering for LSS/NCA, find opportunities at LssNca.org



Starting October 15, our Baltimore/Central Maryland and Montgomery/Prince George's Offices will be located in a consolidated space at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Hyattsville, MD.

The two offices are merging in response to the state of Maryland's new refugee resettlement process, which no longer requires service providers to co-locate with other refugee resettlement agencies. This new process will help refugees better integrate into their community and receive services closer to where they live.

"Redeemer Hyattsville is a congregation with a long history of reaching out to the immigrants and refugees in our community," said the congregation's Pastor Eric Lithicum. "We are thrilled to partner with such a dedicated organization as LSS/NCA."

LSS/NCA's new Maryland address is 3799 East-West Hwy, Hyattsville, MD 20782.

1917 SOCIETY

The 1917 Society is named for the year of our founding nearly a century ago and honors LSS/NCA donors who have made planned gifts to our organization either through their estate or through life-income gifts. Standing behind LSS/NCA's tradition of serving our neighbors in need, these visionary donors are helping us answer the call of service and plan for the future with optimism and confidence. **We appreciate honoring those who have made LSS/NCA part of their estate and gift planning and want to ensure their gift is used as they wish.** Please let us know if LSS/NCA is part of your estate or planned giving.

The most common planned gift is a bequest.

Sample Language for an Undesignated Bequest to Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area

I hereby give and bequeath _____ to the Board of Directors of Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area, Washington, DC, to support the mission of the organization.

Please note: Donors and/or their legal counsel are encouraged to call the Office of Development before writing a will that includes a restriction or designation and to confirm the feasibility of a particular fund being established. For assistance, please contact Director for Development Summer Parrish at ParrishS@LssNca.org or (703)698-5026 x138.

What's new with Vann?

It's Getting Chilly and We Need Your Help

By: Vann

It was a bitter cold day last fall, when my passenger door opened and in flew dozens of winter coats: some brightly colored, some with hoods, some for little ones, and others that were so long they dragged along the garage floor. I remember making several stops that day and at each one, more and more coats were piled on the seats.



I heard the staff talking about the churches and schools that had answered the call for winter coats. Every year, LSS/NCA resettles about 600 refugees. Each person, young and old, comes to the United States with only a small bag of belongings and many come from extremely warm climates, thus none of them are prepared for our cold and snowy winters. Our staff does the best they can to find them coats, mittens, and scarves to keep warm through the winter but we need your help.

It's starting to get chilly again and I'm preparing for another load of coats. If your neighborhood or congregation would like to help by having a winter coat drive for our families in need, please contact Jessica at CuellarJ@lssnca.org or 703-698-5026 x.112.

Become a Vann Fan!

Set up a recurring monthly gift of \$25 or more, through our website and you can become a Vann Fan. It just takes one quick and easy visit to our website to give all year round.

What are the benefits?

Just \$25 a month for one year can:

- Offer six refugees three months of English lessons
- Fund a weekend college exploration workshop for one youth affected by HIV/AIDS
- Reconnect three adoptive children with their birth families

Become a Vann Fan by visiting our donate page at

LssNca.org

Message from Melissa, CEO



Dear Friends in Service,

"When God closes a door, he opens a window." Ever since we were young, we have heard this homily time and time again. Our parents would say it when we experienced our first heartache. Our mentors would say it when we got the rejection letter from that college we aspired to attend. Our pastors say it to ensure us that hope still exists even when we may feel defeated or lost.

As we approach the last few months of the year, my vision of that open window is strong not only for me personally as I transition from my role as CEO, but for the whole of LSS/NCA. We are closing the door on the first 100 years of service, and opening the window to the next century as we celebrate our centennial in 2017. For each neighbor in need, we are closing the door on challenging journeys, and opening the window to new homes, new families, and new beginnings. We are closing the door to stigma and presumptions, and opening the window to strengthened community partnerships and innovative ministries. And as we turn the clock to 2017, we will be opening a window to new leadership, new ideas, and a revitalized future in walking with those in need.

All the accomplishments we have achieved thus far are evidence of a strong and compassionate community. Together, we have built the ladder to help us reach that open window of tomorrow's possibilities. Because of you, we are certain that a bright future lies ahead not only for this organization, but for each individual who comes across a closed door.

It has been a pleasure serving alongside LSS/NCA's amazingly talented staff, in partnership with many dedicated board members, and representing our compassionate community. Thank you for 15 inspirational years and the chance to lead this organization for nine.

In Peace,

Melissa K. Graves, CEO

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Melissa K. Graves, CEO

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Artistic Expression

Encourages Healthy Family Communication

More about a recent innovation partnership on the Front Cover

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- Oct 18 Gifts of Hope Benefit Concert
- Oct 20 Foster Parent Training Fall (Class 7 of 10)
- Oct 22 Compassion in Action (VA Office)
- Oct 27 Foster Parent Training Fall (Class 8 of 10)
- Nov 3 Foster Parent Training Fall (Class 9 of 10)
- Nov 5 RSVP Deadline for Melissa's Farewell
- Nov 10 CEO Melissa Graves Farewell**
- Nov 12 Compassion in Action (VA Office)
- Nov 17 Foster Parent Training Fall (Class 10 of 10)
- Nov 21 National Adoption Day
- Dec 17 Compassion in Action (VA Office)

For more information & events, visit LSSNCA.org.