



# LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES National Capital Area

Celebrating 100 Years of Serving Boldly

Issue No. 2 2017

## Making a Dream Come True

By: Valeska Fernandez, Staff

**Esperant Kazzembe** isn't your ordinary teenager. As a youth in the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) program, he's making huge strides towards independence as he dreams of being a neurosurgeon. Born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Esperant fled with his siblings to Uganda where he stayed for seven years before being accepted to the URM program. When asked about his expectations of life in America, Esperant was quick to respond.

*"I expected to go to school and get a job after, but I didn't expect to finish high school with scholarships and be on my way to college."*

Esperant's dedication to his dreams has been supported with several awards, including the 2017 Comfort Cases Scholarship, which will allow him to attend his first choice school, The University of Rochester.

His interest in the medical field developed after witnessing his family struggle to receive basic access to health care. Their struggle became Esperant's determination and inspired him to become a doctor, hoping to provide care to all people. Along with his conviction, Esperant admits that humility has been crucial to his success.

*"I grew up watching grandma being humble in everything she did. So I try to be that myself. It helps me hold on to my culture because I learned it from her."*

When speaking about which aspect of American culture he's adapted to the most, Esperant's grin grows wider.

*"Friendship. I thought I had to know a person before becoming friendly but they've shown me you don't have to know someone to smile at them."*

One of the greatest challenges Esperant faced while adjusting to life in America was acclimating to workloads in school, particularly the AP classes he took which "were never easy." Incorporating English into his day also proved difficult in the beginning though he'd already begun learning it while living in Uganda, where he also spoke French.

Despite challenges and class demands, Esperant still makes time for his hobbies. He enjoys listening to music and reading. Writing is his most enjoyable pastime and he has even created his own blog which he uses as an outlet for his thoughts and life experiences in America.

*"First thing is to be disciplined, which is a personal decision you have to make, but then hard work and hang on to your dreams. It's what's helped me overcome challenges. I saw the opportunities and I took them."*



Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area

LSSNCA.ORG

United Way #8146

CFC #78343

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**BE WELL AND DREAM BIG:  
SIDNEY'S JOURNEY WITH HIV**

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## Girl Scout *Do-si-dos* to *Welcome Notes* By: Kianoosh Asar, Staff



On a busy January day, in the midst of a month with over 100 refugee arrivals, I received a hopeful, bright email from Girl Scout Troop 3173 in Oakton, VA. The troop was interested in collecting donation kits and making welcome cards for refugee families who would soon arrive in Virginia.

While making the welcome cards, the girls discussed the importance of welcoming refugees and shared personal stories about their own families' journeys to America.

One of the Girl Scouts shared her mother's story of escaping Vietnam as a refugee and making her way to the United States by boat. These heart-warming personal stories were the Girl Scouts' inspiration in welcoming our new neighbors in Virginia.

LSS/NCA's partnership with the Girl Scouts resulted in more than

100 handmade, colorful cards that were later attached to welcome kits and warmly welcome refugees to their new home. Families of Troop 3173 continue to donate kitchen supplies, toiletry items, and other household items to help refugees on their path to self-sufficiency.

*Thank you Girl Scouts!*



## A Vehicle of New Opportunity

By: Mira Mendick and Tanya Vitusagavulu, Staff

For Ali and his family of seven, transportation has been a challenge in the United States. The family has settled in well since their arrival last October but Ali quickly realized that having a large family in the U.S. is difficult with limited sources of income.

Family outings have been limited to walking to the nearby Walmart and necessary travel to doctor appointments. Grocery shopping has been dependent on the compassion of neighbors and friends. Despite access to public transportation, it would take numerous bus transfers and several hours before reaching their final

destination. This was especially true for Ali's wife who had a throat infection and required a specialist for surgery and extensive follow up appointments several cities away.

In addition, the school activities of five children were difficult to manage without a car for late pick-ups or early drop-offs; and taking the whole family to a piano recital or dance concert was out of the question. Job prospects were limited for Ali since many employment opportunities required a personal car. Despite the challenges, they were grateful to find safety and opportunity in America.



This spring, a donor contacted LSS/NCA about gifting a van to a family in need. The van seated seven and we knew immediately that this generous gift would be the difference-maker for Ali and his family. Ali was over-joyed when we called to tell him. For Ali, this van is a vehicle of new opportunities, experiences and memories for his family to cherish!

**To donate a vehicle to a refugee family, please contact Susan at [Haines@LSSNCA.org](mailto:Haines@LSSNCA.org)**

## DC Redesigns Child Welfare System: How will this impact LSS/NCA?

By: Kichelle Coleman, Children's Services Director

In late March, the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), which currently contracts LSS/NCA to offer foster care services for District children, released a 'System Redesign.'

Currently there are approximately 936 youth in the District's foster care system. Of that, 465 are placed and managed among 7 providers, including LSS/NCA, in Maryland foster homes. The remaining youth are placed in DC homes and managed by CFSA. The redesign will contract with a single provider and is expected to be in full effect by January, 2018. At that time, the approximate 465 youth in Maryland homes will transition to be under the care of one single private provider.

Brenda Donald, the Director of the CFSA states "the strategy is designed to improve quality and outcomes for our children and families". LSS/NCA is in support of the intent to yield better results for the children and families it serves. However, due to the magnitude of change and potential risks to the organization, LSS/NCA did not respond to become the primary provider for District children.

The program sees this as an opportunity to explore the changing needs of the DMV community and to strengthen programming to meet those needs. LSS/NCA will offer to subcontract with the identified provider to offer our skills of training and supporting foster parents.



In addition, LSS/NCA is pursuing other opportunities such as growing the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) program and seeking foster care contracts with Virginia and Maryland.

The organization has served as a foster care provider for DC since 1956 and we are confident that LSS/NCA Children Services will continue to serve children and families over the next 100 years.

For more information please see our blog at [LSSNCA.org](http://LSSNCA.org).



## Be Well and Dream Big

By: Dara Yah'ya

Youth Haven's BE WELL retreat is very exclusive. Unlike many other Youth Haven events aimed at supporting the entire family, this 3-day overnight retreat is only for youth who are personally living with HIV. With young people ages 13-24 accounting for 37% of all new HIV diagnoses, LSS/NCA understands the need to encourage youth to take big and small steps towards their dreams, despite living with HIV.

Sidney, a BE WELL retreat youth, was talkative during the

introduction, team building and trust building activities. She actively engaged in creating her personalized self-care plan that included deep breathing, singing and bike riding to help balance her emotions. She was proud of her plan to work through her anger and confident that it would come in handy soon. But during the retreat she realized how difficult it was for her to express any emotions other than anger. During the support group discussion about choosing acceptance and adopting a positive outlook around life with HIV, Sidney was speechless. She didn't say a



word; she didn't make a move. It was as if she tried to disappear and was counting down the seconds until it would end.

Sidney, an 18 year-old high school senior and music-lover, was diagnosed with HIV this year. And though she isn't ready to talk about it, she is ready to receive the support that the Youth Haven family offers. We are grateful to walk with Sydney and her family on the path to wellness and healing, and thankful for your support.



# Celebrating 100 YEARS

## Happening NOW

**Images of Grace:** Public Design competition for new DC Office Mural

## Saturday, August 12

**Family Reunion:** Past and present LSS/NCA staff, supporters, volunteers, and clients are invited to a family fun picnic

## September, 2017

**Images of Grace Reveal:** New mural revealed on exterior of DC office: Winner announced

## Sunday, October 22

**500/100 Commemoration:** Pan-Lutheran concert to celebrate the Lutheran Reformation's 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary and LSS/NCA's centennial anniversary

## January, 2018

**Centennial Celebration:** Join us to recognize 100 years of offering hope and celebrate another century of serving boldly together

LSS/NCA is reaching out to the community to deepen partnerships and strengthen educational opportunities, hoping to reach a broader audience. The two events below highlight some of these NEW prospects. Have ideas for new partnerships? Contact Autumn at [ormeA@LSSNCA.org](mailto:ormeA@LSSNCA.org)

## Yoga to Support Refugees

By: Vanessa Brown, Volunteer

After hearing about several Executive Orders impacting vulnerable populations, Dan Carter, a professional yoga instructor in D.C., decided to hold an event that would have the double benefit of raising awareness and funds for refugees. On May 6, Dan partnered with LSS/NCA volunteer Vanessa Brown, to host "Get Woke Yoga: A Refugee Fundraiser" as part of LSS/NCA's service day *Into the Streets*. After a social justice-inspired meditation and fun work-out led by Dan, participants enjoyed a brunch donated by locally-owned Sylvan bakery & café. Vanessa shared the history of LSS/NCA as well as tangible ways that people can get involved by volunteering their time or donating to benefit refugees resettled in the D.C. metro area. As a result, many attendees immediately followed up with inquiries for more details on specific actions such as mentoring a family, donating furniture and more. Big thanks to Dan for donating 100% of his class proceeds and to Sylvan for their delicious in-kind contribution.



## Ford's Theatre: Ragtime 100 Years Later

In celebration of our centennial anniversary, LSS/NCA and Ford's Theatre partnered to provide the community a conversation about the differences and similarities between immigration today and a century ago. After the May 9 performance of *Ragtime*, an inspirational story of race and cultural relations in early 1900's America, LSS/NCA was invited to sit on a panel of experts. The panel discussed how refugee and immigration has changed over the past century and the unfortunate misconceptions that still exist.

## A GRAND FAREWELL By: Kiersten Rossetto Nassar, Staff

Kati Miller-Holland, Director of Church and Community Ministries, has left the LSS/NCA family for a new mission opportunity. Since joining the team 13 years ago, she has:

- Improved the resilience, self-care, and healthy habits of 667 children, youth and families impacted by stigma and/or HIV/AIDS through 15 Youth Haven children's camps and 22 Youth Haven teen retreats
- Promoted Disaster Preparedness through trainings to 238 faith groups, 1013 individuals, and collected 1087 disaster kits
- Recruited 4500 "Help the Homeless" walkers for 8 Walks
- Improved self-care knowledge and the availability of community resources for 276 caregivers through the Caregiver Support program
- Collaborated with 91 Lutheran partners around the region through LAMP (Lutheran Asset Mapping Project)



Kati's commitment to the ever-changing mission programs of LSS/NCA has impacted our community and changed the lives of hundreds. As Kati says good-bye to LSS/NCA, we will forever hold her in our hearts.

*Kati has been so nice, helpful, and encouraging throughout the years. It has been great to get to know her!*

—Melissa MacDonald

*Kati, you made a difference. Your work had a great impact around the region and you spread the Lutheran sense of grace to all the individuals and families that you touched.* —BA Cockburn

*Kati has been my guide through the ins and outs of social services and the importance of how best to navigate your heart through it all. Kati has played a huge role in my growth here and I will miss her dearly!*

—Kiersten Rossetto Nassar

## Deepening Connections with Good Neighbors

### Temple Shalom Partners with LSS/NCA to Offer Welcome and Comfort

By: Kiersten Rossetto Nassar, Staff

In response to an overpowering level of support from their congregation, Temple Shalom in Silver Spring took action to explore how they could help refugee families. As LSS/NCA Good Neighbors, they dedicated their time and resources to ensuring a refugee family would be fully supported and welcomed in their new community.

"You can never quite plan for something like this, there will always be things that pop up that you never thought would happen," explained Sara Nathan, Shalom Good Neighbor Coordinator.

Discovering the impact of cultural differences and understanding

the magnitude of paperwork and orientation is something that you can't easily grasp without the experience. Sara explained that a trip to run errands isn't simply a trip to run errands. Instead, a quick trip becomes a request to share some tea and visit, and then run all the errands. "We tend to have a faster pace here in this area and it is good to take more time to get to know one another. Too often we come in with a schedule to follow and forget to be relational in every aspect of our lives. It has helped all of us [on the Good Neighbor team] remember to take care of one another."

Sara added, "It is much harder to personify WHO a refugee is, but

when you are able to see a boy that likes to bike, a mom wanting to take care of her kids, and a family who enjoys drawing and making cookies, you are able to realize that they are human too." After guiding the family through their first months in DC, Temple Shalom has witnessed the family's success, struggle and discovery of what life looks like in America. From operating a cookie business to publishing a book about their journey through the eyes of their children – the family has made Maryland home.

**You can purchase the book created by the refugee family at <http://bit.ly/SyriaJourney>**

## The Cafritz Foundation Fills Gaps in Refugee Services

By: Kathy Jagow

LSS/NCA was awarded a \$50,000 grant to support the Refugee Resettlement Program by the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation. The Cafritz Foundation has been a long term supporter of the refugee program. In the past, this support has enabled the program to fill funding gaps and to provide more holistic, in-depth services to refugee families. Funds from the Cafritz Foundation allow the agency to provide client housing assistance, English language classes, vocational training assistance, and transportation subsidies. LSS/NCA is immensely grateful for this support. Since October, LSS/NCA has already served over 1,100 refugees.

The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation is the legacy of Morris Cafritz, one of Washington's leading commercial and residential builders from the early 1920's to the mid-60's. The Cafritz Foundation is committed to building a stronger community for residents of the Washington, DC area through support of programs in arts and humanities, community services, education, health and the environment.

**EXPRESSIONS OF ABUNDANCE**, annual fundraising breakfast, was hosted in Maryland for the first time last month. Thank you to all those who attended. Together we raised over \$80,000 for our neighbors in need.

*Thank You!*

## What's new with Vann?

By: Vann



**When does a van have 18 wheels?**  
**When it is delivering 7 brand new bicycles.**

Over the years I have carried a lot of children and families to many places in DC, Maryland and Virginia. But recently I had a first—I picked up 7 bicycles donated by Fannie Mae and delivered them to unaccompanied refugee minors all over the District. Oh, the smiles I saw!

It was lots of fun!

The bicycles were part of a gift of over 60 bicycles and helmets that LSS received in May. Luckily I had a lot of help from a giant U-Haul truck. The truck made 2 trips so we could get as many bikes as possible and give them to all our friends. That truck was packed with bikes of all colors so children could choose their favorite.

If you have any great gifts that need to be delivered—I am the Vann for the job.



## GIVE WHERE YOU WORK

Workplace giving programs like the Combined Federal Campaign and the United Way offer our supporters the convenience of payroll deductions. In fact, the most recent statement from the United Way of the National Capital Area named 40 donors who gave over \$13,000 to help refugees, families and children through LSS/NCA. Likewise, The CFC offers federal employees the opportunity to give where they work. In the past year, donations through the CFC totaled almost \$30,000.

Both the United Way and the CFC are gearing up for campaigns to encourage employees to give where they work. Please choose LSS/NCA as YOUR charity. If you are interested in inviting LSS/NCA to speak at your workplace, please contact Susan Haine, Director of Development at 202-723-3000 ext. 138 or haines@lssnca.org.

Look for us in the enrollment materials. Please sign up!

**United Way #8146**

• **CFC #78343**





## A Comment from Chris

Dear Friends:

For 100 years, LSS/NCA has chosen to **Boldly Serve**, confident in the knowledge that every small gesture is a miracle unto itself. Since the very beginning, LSS/NCA has collaborated with and connected individuals, groups and congregations, regardless of doctrine but united in the mission to serve; because together we are stronger, more vibrant and more capable than apart.

This summer's newsletter is a testament to our strength together. This year, our Centennial year, is trend setting as we create a record number of new partnerships in an effort to broaden our reach and deepen our services through increased awareness and support. Our developing Good Neighbor Program showcases our diverse growth--the story of Temple Shalom on pg. 5 is one of dozens of LSS/NCA Good Neighbors partners who have helped us resettle over 1,100 refugees already this year.

Several other partnerships have increased our ability to educate and inform a wider audience about our work. In a partnership with Ford's Theatre, LSS/NCA was invited to sit on a panel to discuss immigration and refugee resettlement. Similarly, a local yoga studio and instructor hosted a workshop to benefit refugee families and allow a safe place for discussion (pg.4). Meanwhile, a partnership with Fannie Mae resulted in 60 new bicycles for foster care and refugee children around the District (pg. 6).

By sharing the work we do, the lives we touch and the challenges we address now and in the future, we rally others to our side and together have the ability to do even more. With God's grace and through our collective efforts, nothing is impossible. We give our thanks to every community partner and to YOU for your continued support of our mission.

Blessings,

Christine P. Connell  
CEO

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## Girl Scout *Do-si-dos* to *Welcome Notes*



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### INSIDE THIS EDITION



## Making a Dream Come True

*An Unaccompanied Refugee Minor to Become  
a Neurosurgeon*

Read more on front cover

## SAVE THE DATES

June 27	Journey to Action (VA)
July 6	Good Neighbor Orientation
July 8	World Refugee Day Celebration (MD)
July 22	World Refugee Day Celebration (VA)
July 25	Journey to Action (MD)
Aug 4-5	LCMS Tending the Flame
Aug 12	LSS/NCA Family Reunion
Aug 15	Good Neighbor Orientation

For more information & events, visit  
[LSSNCA.org](http://LSSNCA.org)

**DC REDESIGN IMPACTS  
LSS/NCA CHILDREN  
SERVICES**

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TO RAGTIME**

4 CENTENNIAL

**DEEPENING  
CONNECTIONS WITH  
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5 COMMUNITY

**GIVE WHERE  
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6 DEVELOPMENT