



A TALE OF *Two Sisters*

By: Llesenia Parrish

Jill had loving adoptive parents and was nervous about the challenge of reconnecting with her birth family. Would they talk to her? Would they accept her? Would they be disappointed?

After years of weighing her options and with constant support from her husband, Jill decided it was time to discover where she came from despite many questions and fears. LSS/NCA conducted her adoption decades before so Jill contacted us in hopes of opening her file and connecting with her birth parents.

After months of returned letters and failed internet searches, LSS/NCA staff received one hopeful response from a woman, Tonya, who claimed to be Jill's sister. Tonya explained that her mother had passed away but always talked about a daughter who was placed for adoption the same year Jill was born. Tonya grew up knowing she had a big sister and even helped her mother search for Jill on several occasions. Tonya was able to provide additional information to our staff ensuring that she was indeed Jill's biological sister.

Last month, we received the following email from Jill's husband:

"Good morning! I wanted to share a couple of videos and pictures with you involving my wife Jill and the reunion with her sister..."

He explained that after LSS/NCA staff located Jill's sister in South Dakota, the two sisters talked (and talked and talked). They instantly connected. About a week later, Jill's husband contacted Tonya and conspired a top-secret plan to help the two meet on Jill's birthday. He surprised them both with a "girls' weekend" that turned out to be an emotional and wonderful reunion.

"...I planned a weekend full of pampering: massages, manicures and pedicures (like sisters do), a day at Universal Studios (Tonya had never been to a big park like that) and finally on Sunday, I organized a brunch for just the women of our family to meet Tonya. Words can't describe how happy they are - due in very large part to LSS/NCA."

The sisters remain connected and have introduced one another to their extended family members. Moments and stories like this demonstrate the LSS/NCA mission of creating families and offering hope.

Your support creates families each and every day. If you are interested in becoming licensed as a foster parent/caregiver and joining LSS/NCA in offering hope and rebuilding lives, please contact Patricia at (202) 723-3000 x254



Refugee Arrivals Increasing Each Month: *Volunteers, Mentors, and In-Kind Drives are Crucial*

By : Razan Osman

At the beginning of our fiscal year, the government told us to expect to serve about 600 refugees between October 2015 and September 2016. By the end of December, we had served nearly 269 refugees, almost half of the total 12-month estimate! Recently, the government readjusted their initial estimate and has asked us to plan for roughly 900 arrivals, 50 percent more than previously expected.

These arrivals consist of families and individuals generally from Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq. Often times these refugees are Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, meaning they are highly educated and held professional careers in their country of origin: professors, interpreters, engineers, etc.

As a result of their assistance to the United States and our troops overseas, extremists have threatened their lives. Thus, many have had to make the difficult decision to leave home. These refugees are eager to begin new careers in our community where they will be able to apply their foreign accredited education and expertise, but this will take time. They usually spend their initial months in America in the first job they can find in order to provide for their family.

As in every case, all of our newly arriving families and individuals will need housing, furniture, linens, toiletries, mentoring, assistance in finding employment, and friendship as they rebuild their lives in a new and foreign country. Given the

high number of arrivals in the past few months and the many more expected to join our community in the coming year, your partnership and support is paramount to delivering the comprehensive services our neighbors need to gain self-sufficiency as quickly as possible. Every in-kind donation, volunteer, back-to-school drive, and Thanksgiving meal is a blessing to our families.

If your congregation, group, or family would like to help us welcome the nearly 900 refugees expected to join our community this year, please visit our website at lssnca.org to view the many ways you can help.

Résumé Building Empowers Refugee Neighbors

By: Nizama Tikvina

The LSS/NCA Employment Team hosted a resume building workshop in December 2015 in partnership with Stratford University's Career Services Coordinator Charles King. Mr. King generously donated his time and knowledge to teach newly-arrived refugees the secrets to creating a strong résumé that best presents themselves to future employers. As a career services coordinator at a well-known university and a self-empowerment coach with 20 years of human resource experience, Mr. King not only educated, but inspired, our

new neighbors by emphasizing their individual skills and qualifications.

LSS/NCA clients were guided through a one-hour presentation that emphasized the details of an effective résumé, including the use of key words, the importance

of grammar, and the value of proper résumé format and brevity. Empowered by the workshop, our new neighbors are now confidently navigating their employment search. Mr. King will continue working with our new refugee arrivals throughout the year.



Mr. King presents the fine details of resume writing to newly arrived refugees.

Santa's Workshop: *The Gift of Giving*

By: Patricia Britt

"It's not how much we give but how much love we put into giving." —Mother Teresa

Guided by the celebration's theme, "Gift of Giving," our foster care children were given a special opportunity at this year's holiday party. Each child experienced the joy of doing something special for someone else.

Over the holiday, the Foster Care and Adoption program created Santa's Workshop at Grace Lutheran Church in Bowie MD. At the workshop, each child was given a bundle of play money with which they were able to go "shopping" for gifts (provided by donors) for their foster parent, birth parent,

or other loved one who holds a special place in their heart. Each child was able to wrap the gift and create a handmade card at the celebration's art and craft table.

At Santa's Workshop, families also enjoyed food, games, and fellowship. Bringing a special end to this year's festivities, Santa Clause made a special appearance and had time to dance with and read to the children. Special thanks to Mrs. Kathy Harmon and Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Fairfax, VA, for donating toys and gift cards for all our children in care.



"LETTING GO"

By: Mary Tyson, Foster Parent

Mary Tyson has been a foster parent with LSS/NCA for 26 years and has fostered a total of 228 children. Below is her eloquent testament about the call to fostering and the requirement of "letting go."

Letting Go...is one subject that comes up more than any other when I am talking to potential foster parents. They want to know how they will be able to "let go" when it is time for the child to leave. People say, "I could never foster a child because I would love them too much and would not be able to give them up."

Unfortunately, this heartbreak is built into the responsibility. Foster parents are asked to open their homes and their hearts. A foster family builds bonds of love and trust because that is what the child needs to heal from the trauma they have experienced in their lives. The foster family does this knowing that reuniting with the birth family is the best possible outcome for a foster child.

As with most things, this potential heartbreak is not easy to explain to those who have not experienced it. I "let go" of one of my kids today. After 6 months in our home, my emotions are a tangled ball of yarn as I begin the process of readjustment. However, there is another side to this heartbreak and this is the reality of taking in a stranger's child to provide the love they need. When I "let go" of a child the feelings are always two sided: Sadness and relief. Stress and freedom.

Fostering encourages us to reach deep inside ourselves and act outside of our own interests and comfort zone, to truly and fully love a child completely and without self-interest. When someone asks me how I handle the heartbreak of



Mary Tyson (far right) and her family.

sending a child home, I tell them that I am sad and I am happy. I will miss Johnny and I will cry over that loss. However, I will be happy that he is on a new path, on his way home. I pray to God that he will always be with him. "If it did not hurt to let you go, I did not do it right."

The Season of Giving: *Honoring Youth Haven Volunteers*

By: Dara Yah'Ya

At our annual Youth Haven Holiday Reunion luncheon we honor the many volunteers that make Youth Haven a prized and rare jewel in our community. This year, our reunion was warmly hosted by Peace Lutheran Church, DC. Youth Haven families and volunteers were reminded of the importance of a supportive community and the blessing to have a place like camp to unplug. We watched video footage of the creative performances from the 2015 Kids Camp Talent Show, acknowledged camper and volunteer achievements, and congratulated the second recipient of the Renee M. Gonzales award,

which honors a Youth Haven parent hero. We also welcomed a new mentor to the team who became the perfect career-path mentor for one of our teens and initiated a group volunteer project.

As we prepare for the 2016 camping season we are eager to recruit more volunteers through LSS/NCA's new online volunteer application process (see page 5). Our vision is to leverage the gifts of the community and perfectly match your skills with our needs. There are opportunities for professionals and students: interning in the office, mentoring youth, serving as a camp counselor, assisting our



Youth Haven 2015 Holiday Reunion hosted at Peace Lutheran Church honors it's volunteers.

camp nurses, or leading career exploration workshops. With more than 2,500 volunteer hours available each year, we are excited to see new faces and offer new opportunities to help reduce the stigma of HIV/AIDS and its effects in our community.

"I learned so much! I wish more at our church could attend this program—it was very informative."

"My most important learning—rest and ask for help!"

"I'll use these tools to start having the conversations with my children concerning care."



Stress be Bygones for Caregivers

By: Katie Miller-Holland

LSS/NCA's Support U programming for family caregivers concluded 2015 with high-energy "Crash Course" sessions in the District of Columbia. Stress around holiday times is compounded when a family member is aging or chronically ill. Members of Peace Lutheran Church, DC invited friends and community members to join in two Saturday morning courses full of helpful information and caring conversation. For the coming year, they will be reaching out to involve more participants and neighbors.

The Support U Crash Course covers six topics in two half-day sessions. The presentations and discussions

include: Planning Ahead, Finding and Using Resources, Self-Care for the Caregiver, Family Dynamics and Communication, Dementia and the Family, and Financial Wellness. Leaders for the Crash Course are volunteers who bring both professional skills and personal experience as caregivers within their own families.

Churches or other groups in the metro-DC region may arrange to host the two-session Crash Course by contacting LSS/NCA's office of Church and Community Ministries (ccm@LssNca.org 202-723-3000 ext. 199).

Training consultant and family caregiver Dorrie Aldrich (foreground) leads a discussion on self-care.

Interfaith Collaboration Deepens Service

By: Kiersten Rossetto Nassar

Each year, we serve over 2,000 members of our community with the help of hundreds of volunteers. This community involvement in our work is essential in ensuring that those among us in need find hope and resources to help rebuild their lives. Network LOBBY is one of our newest partners in this effort.

Network LOBBY is a local Catholic social justice lobby that educates, organizes and lobbies for economic and social transformation nationwide. Determined and inspired by our vision of a society where the most vulnerable among us find wholeness, justice and self-sufficiency, Network LOBBY was eager to help serve our neighbors in need through LSS/NCA services.

With a large group of 18 volunteers, they were able to assist with projects for both our Youth Haven and Refugee and Immigrant Services programs. Volunteers created Christmas cards that were given to our families and children at the annual Youth Haven Christmas Party. While other volunteers assisted our Refugee Resettlement staff in organizing and ensuring the quality of in-kind donations. The day’s powerful experience, encouraged Network LOBBY to continue their service by organizing a community diaper drive for our newly arriving neighbors with young children.

If your group is interested in volunteering, please contact Kiersten Rossetto Nassar at (202)723-3000 ext. 284 or rossettok@lssnca.org.



Strengthening Our Volunteer Capacity

By: Kiersten Rossetto Nassar

Is your New Year’s Resolution to donate your time and talents to helping others? Now is the perfect time to meet your goal! Last month, LSS/NCA implemented new volunteer management software. This technology will help us improve our volunteer application process, coordinate our needs with your talents and availability, and strengthen our ability to communicate frequently and effectively with groups and individuals actively engaged in our mission.

When you visit our website and click the “volunteer” button, you will be asked to fill out an application that will help us determine the opportunities that match both your skills and your interests. You, as a volunteer, can also utilize your profile to communicate directly with LSS/NCA staff, sign up for volunteer activities, and track your hours. This new and improved tool has already strengthened the cohesion between our programs and is expected to deepen the quality of service we are able to provide with YOUR help!



Do You Have a Special Someone?

Want to sweep that special someone off their feet? With a \$20 donation to your sweetheart's favorite LSS/NCA program, we will send a customized Valentine e-card on the big day with a certificate revealing your gift and identity. Make a big difference with this small token of affection. This year, express love and compassion to both your special Valentine and our neighbors in need.

(To ensure your ecard is delivered on Valentine's Day, make your donation and selection prior to noon on Friday, February 12.)

Visit our website to choose a Valentine gift that is perfect for your sweetheart.



LssNca.org

What's new with Vann?

By: Vann



He was sitting in my backseat as he started to tell his story:

"I heard a loud boom and then saw orange fire with sparks of white shimmering off the home next to me," Abdul said, "people were screaming. The air was thick with soot. A man came running to my door. He said it was no longer safe for my family to be here. This was the only home I had ever known, this was Baghdad."

On that night nearly 10 years ago, Abdul grabbed his wife and woke his three little girls—all under the age of 7. The house was on fire. There was no time to pack or find family mementos. In their pajamas, they made their way through the alleys and dark corners of Baghdad. They had nothing but each other. Read about Abdul's courageous journey to America on my blog at <http://bit.ly/Abdulstory>.



The 1917 Society is named for the year of our founding 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.

Leadership Announcement, Board Chair

Dear Friends in Mission,

Throughout the fall I have been writing with updates about LSS/NCA's CEO transition. As many of you already know, we have hired our new leader Christine Connell who joined the LSS/NCA team February 1. I know you are anxious to meet her, and over the next few months I hope that you will accept our invitations to welcome her to LSS/NCA. Listed below is some additional information about Christine.



Christine P. Connell,
LSS/NCA CEO

Christine spent 15 years with Lutheran Social Services of New York (LSSNY), a human services nonprofit similar to ours. She led several of the organization's program areas including Family and Community Services, and Educational Services, and she was a lead developer of the agency's LIFE (Lutheran Initiative for Empowerment) Services Initiatives. For the last five years she served as LSSNY's Vice President for Agency Advancement, managing the organization's \$6M Faces of LIFE funding campaign and leading all new development projects and funding opportunities. Before working at LSSNY, she was the Executive Director of an emergency relief organization in York, PA that served low-income families and individuals.

I know Christine is very impressed with LSS/NCA's mission to walk with those in need and the services we provide. She is eager to meet not only our clients, but also the people who make our mission possible—our donors, volunteers, supporters, and partners. Over the next few months she is making it a priority to be out in the community to get to know as many of you as she can, and I am sure when you get to meet her you will be as impressed with her as the Board is.

Please join me in warmly welcoming Christine to LSS/NCA.

With Warmest Regards for a Happy and Healthy 2016,

Nels Hendrickson, Chair
LSS/NCA Board of Directors

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Find out how to send a special Valentine on page 6

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Save the Dates

- Feb 11 Compassion in Action Tour (MD)
- Feb 21 Refugee Compassion in Action Tour
- Mar 19-21 "College Sampler" Teen Retreat
- Mar 12 Support U Crash Course (Hyattsville, MD)
- Mar 14 Compassion in Action Tour (VA)
- Mar 19 Support U Crash Course (Hyattsville, MD)
- Apr 13 Compassion in Action Tour (VA)
- Apr 23 Support U Crash Course (Bethesda MD)
- Apr 30 Support U Crash Course (Bethesda, MD)
- May 11 Expressions of Abundance: Care. Give. Grow.
- Jun 4-6 Family Mini Camp
- Jun 20 World Refugee Day
- Jun 24-26 "Adventures in Leadership" Teen Retreat
- Aug 2-7 Kids Camp

For more information & events, visit LSSNCA.org.