

FALL 2019



— LS —

BOLD JOURNEY



SUMMER CAMP'S 20TH YEAR

We held our 20th annual Kids Camp at the Mar-Lu-Ridge outdoor education center in Jefferson, Maryland, July 29 - August 3. During our annual camp retreat, 24 campers between the ages of 7 and 14 joined us in the beautiful Maryland countryside to explore, learn, push themselves, and form lifelong bonds. Kids Camp remains a unique opportunity for our youth to explore nature and make connections apart from the bustle of their home cities, Washington DC and Baltimore, MD.

Over the five-day adventure, activities were a mix of physical, creative, and social interactions. Some of the campers' favorite activities this year included: nature studies, video production, the dance party, campfire with s'mores, the talent show, swimming, olympics day, the high ropes course and zip line, rock climbing, and hiking.

Our volunteer senior counselors worked tirelessly throughout the days and evenings to ensure the campers had a structured and enjoyable experience. A unique aspect of our Youth Haven (YH) program and camps is the inclusion of Leaders in Training (LITs). LITs, all former camp participants, are able to connect more easily with campers sharing their own experiences and challenges. Our 4 LITs all started in the YH program when they were between the ages of 8 and 10, and are now 15, 17, 18, and 19. Each did an excellent job of supporting the young campers by modeling the camp's "precious gems" principles: Ruby - we treat each other with love and respect; Emerald - we leave our space better than we found it; Diamond - we try new things; and

Platinum- we treat others how they want to be treated. We hope that opportunities like counseling and emotional guidance of our younger kids allow these teens to develop into leaders and change-makers.

According to LIT Donovan: "The experience I had was like a roller coaster; you have your ups and downs but at the end of the day, we are all there to make sure the kids have a good time. The importance of this camp, in particular, is that we take children who are less fortunate to a place where they can find themselves, or just get away. I'm glad to participate in the camp and glad to help the camp." This was a very safe and warm place for our campers to venture to new heights (LITERALLY!).

We are grateful for our generous organizations, sponsors, volunteers and donors who continue to make this camp possible. Thank you to our senior camp counselors, LITs, volunteers and staff. Thank you to Johns Hopkins University Hospital for continuing as a major sponsor of YH camps. Thank you for the generous donations of supplies received from Clinical Care Options LLC, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Falls Church, Virginia, Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in McLean, Virginia, and the Dunn Loring Dolphins swim team. And thank you to Mar-Lu-Ridge for hosting us once again! Finally, this camp would not have been possible without the support of grant funding through the George Preston Marshall Foundation. Without this annual support, we would not have been able to host the camp, celebrating our 20th year.

24 CAMPERS

6 FIRST-TIMERS

6 COUNSELORS

4 LITS

YOU GAVE REFUGEES WARMTH THIS FALL

On Wednesday, October 23, our Hyattsville office held its annual Winter Coat Drive for refugee families. Staff and volunteers welcomed over 220 newly-arrived refugees to help prepare them for their first winter in the U.S. Our event not only prepared our guests for the weather ahead, it was an opportunity for a joyous welcome and thanksgiving. During this event, along with the positive



atmosphere of welcoming and togetherness, there was an excitement of what to expect from winter in the U.S. and the new life ahead for many of our families. Most, being from warm or tropical climates, have never seen snow in their home countries. “I don’t really know what to expect from the incoming winter, but it seems to be promising!” said an Afghan father jokingly. “In Afghanistan we had winter, they were cold, and we had snow but it was almost non-existent and would reach to, at best, two inches in my region just on the outskirts of Kabul.”

Clients generally use their social networks of friends and family, who lived here prior to their arrival, to understand and prepare for the weather. “I have friends who came here before me and described for me the weather. Therefore, I prepared with some heavy clothes, but not much”, said one of our guests from Afghanistan who arrived a few months ago.

Without the generous support of our community, this event would not be possible. Over 700 coat donations were gathered from several of our devoted partners: Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Bethesda, Trinity Lutheran Church in Rockville, Christ Lutheran Church in Washington D.C., Lutheran Church of St. Andrew in Silver Spring, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Alexandria, and the Chinese Bible Church in Rockville. Additionally, we received private donations from nine individuals: Lacy Perry, Grace Leung, Chun Kin Julian Lui, Lok Yan, Hue Ha, Clive Leung, Chin K Sit, Man-wah Loo, and Man Hin Cheung. We are also thankful for our

In 2019, our Maryland office received 168 individuals from Afghanistan, Africa, and Latin America.

company sponsors who provided food and beverage for the celebration: Mezeh, Bagel Palace, Trader Joe’s and Giant Food. And a huge shout-out to the energetic Starbucks volunteer team, continuing in their tradition of providing guidance and support to the refugee community.





A MOTHER INSPIRED TO ADOPT A SON

Author: Kimberly Williams-Jenkins

As we move into November, National Adoption Month, the stories of love, hope and new connections are near and dear to my heart because in addition to serving on the LSS Board of Directors, to help serve and love boldly, I myself am an adoptive mother.

Over a decade ago, Coleman and I saw an article in the newspaper. The headline read, "Woman convicted of killing foster kids and storing them in freezer." We had talked about becoming foster parents in hopes of supporting vulnerable children and in meeting a special little boy to make our family complete. We could not help but think that our inaction could allow this horrible crime, and others, to happen. We signed up to be foster parents that day.

Within six months and five kids into being foster parents, we received a phone call about a 5-year-old boy who needed a home and was also available for adoption. The moment we met Lavontay, I bent down to look him in the eyes and he gave me the biggest, most heart-warming smile. We'd heard from Amy, our social worker at LSS, that Lavontay loved to smile. Indescribably, I knew at that moment he was going to be our son and we were going to be his forever family.

We were also told Lavontay had behavioral challenges and it was true! His elementary school teachers called almost every day with news of inappropriate classroom behaviors. But that never deterred Coleman and me from our decision to adopt. We invested in the work that lay ahead, to provide love,

guidance and support throughout Lavontay's life's journey. Lavontay chuckles today when he thinks about his kindergarten and first grade years, saying "Mom, how did you and Dad make it with me, I was really bad!" As a parent, we knew that Lavontay was a perfect blessing from God.

Today, Lavontay is not so little anymore! He is now 13 years old and in middle school. He loves learning, playing basketball, swimming, helping others, and still loves to smile. We are indebted to LSS for making our family whole.

Our family, with support from our daughter Celina, continues to provide foster care for DC children through the National Center for Children and Families, and we have been blessed to provide a home for 24 children throughout that time. Each child we met was in a horrible situation, which was no fault of their own. These children desire to reach their potential and make their dreams come true. More than anything else, they desire to be loved.



If you decide to open your home and heart to adoption, LSS can support you in that process. As a licensed adoption agency in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia, LSS provides home study and post-placement visits for domestic and international adoptions for families and individuals within a 50-mile radius of the DC Metro Area.



We continue to look to the future and expand our support to the community with new and inventive programming. With a grant from Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, we are taking the camp energy into our D.C. schools, teaching relationship skills to high school students through games and interactive activities. The program seeks to empower students to make healthy decisions about dating and romantic relationships, while providing tools and resources to avoid and prevent pregnancy, STI's and engaging in other risky behaviors. Thus far, the LSSNCA team has reached 137 high school students and is on track to reach 300 youth by the project's end, September 2020. We are excited to expand our work with D.C. youth, helping them be healthy, connected, and to succeed.

November 1 marked the launch of another new offering: The Community Interpretation Program (CIP). The creative thinking of job developer Yohannes Berhane set in motion the CIP. Although many refugees are Limited English Proficient (LEP) and need interpretation services, a growing number are fluent in English, in addition to their native languages. We intend to tap into the language skills of the latter group to serve its LEP clients and the community at large. Through CIP, we are recruiting and training bilingual refugees to become certified interpreters. In turn, they'll provide a small number of free interpretation services to LSSNCA and their new certified interpreter credentials will help them generate additional income for their families and serve local communities. Offering Swahili, Dari, Pashto, Tigrinya, Amharic, Spanish and Arabic.... this is a win-win for everyone.

GETTING INVOLVED



SAVE THE DATE:

Expressions of Abundance Breakfasts will be held April 21 and June 4. Locations in Maryland and Virginia to be announced. Stay tuned!



URM FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED:

There are dozens of youth waiting in refugee camps for a new home and a new opportunity. If you want to learn more about fostering unaccompanied refugee minors please contact Patricia Britt at 202-723-3000 ext. 254 or Brittp@lssnca.org.



VOLUNTEER NEEDS:

We need your help! Interested volunteers should contact Dana Lea at lead@lssnca.org. Opportunities include: refugee family mentors, D.C. office receptionist, event planning assistant, and community outreach.



DONATION NEEDS:

Household cleaning supplies and toiletries, kitchen items, grocery store gift cards, bikes for adults and kids. To coordinate drop off, contact Shelby Kruczek at kruczek@lssnca.org.



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READ OUR STORIES INSIDE

YOU GAVE REFUGEES
WARMTH THIS FALL



Coat Drive Success

A MOTHER INSPIRED
TO ADOPT



Lavontay's Family

SUMMER CAMP'S
20TH YEAR



A Camp Story

Serve Boldly.
We are rolling up our sleeves, finding new opportunities to strengthen and empower our neighbors. Please join us.
Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, Pinterest and Instagram.
Read our Blog at LSSNCA.org.



KEEP UP WITH LSSNCA

United Way 8746
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