

GOOD NEWS

Fall 2017

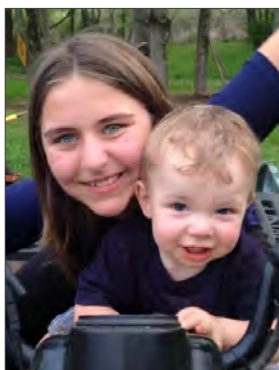


Adoptions provide a gift to all involved

Almost fifteen years ago, Jenn and Keith Brennan of Millstadt reached out to what was then Catholic Social Services to learn about adoption in order to grow their family. “We didn’t even consider another agency. As Catholics, it was the place to go,” said Jenn, with a smile. Because the agency promotes open adoptions where there is communication between the birthparents and adoptive parents, they were able to be present at the birth of their daughter, Keri, on Christmas Eve.

Even with the open adoption, Keri and her birthmother had never met but communicated through pictures, emails and letters over the years. When Keri was 12, she expressed a desire to meet her birthmother who now lives in another city. After everyone prepared for the reconciliation through counseling, they arranged to meet Keri’s birth mom as well as a brother who is 16 months older. Keri is now building a relationship with her birthmother and her biological brother. Jenn was nervous about them reconnecting, but her friends were protective. Still she says, “she has given us so much, that’s the least we could do.” Jenn stressed the importance of being open to learning and communicating with the birthmother.

Karcie Wyatt-Clark, Adoption Specialist at Caritas Family Solutions, explained that birthmothers can choose a family to adopt their child, but they don’t have to. In these cases, the child is placed with a family who has been waiting the longest. Jenn mused, “What do you say to a child who asks ‘why did my mom not want me?’”



Jenn started explaining adoption to Keri when she was about 2-3 years old, primarily through books suitable to her age. When Keri was 8, Jenn explained that “sometimes parents love their children so much, they want a better life for them. They may not be ready for parenting. They choose to give the gift of their child to someone who can’t have one.”

About this time, the Brennans returned to the agency now known as Caritas Family Solutions to once again begin the adoption process. Now they have a three-year-old son, John, and Keri has a little brother. Keith and Jenn were also present at John’s birth and see his birthmother semi-annually.

Like in all families, parenting has been different with each child. Jenn puts it all into perspective, advising others to reach out for support through human contact rather than books or the internet. “It is important to connect with real people not just other’s stories that you read.” The Brennans are friends with other adoptive parents, even those who’ve adopted internationally. They strongly believe that as in the rest of life, there are joys and challenges with adoption but with a support system you can work through them.

They offered this additional piece of wisdom: “When waiting for a placement, remember that things go a certain way for a reason. It is part of the journey.” Three times, Jenn and Kevin were preparing for a placement that didn’t work out. Eventually, their journey led to two children meant just for them.

Jenn said she is tied to the agency for life. “I have a vested interest in promoting adoption and am willing to share our stories.

“Adoption has brought us so much joy. We feel that God gave us a special blessing and journey to find our forever family. It is not unimaginable to think of our lives without children, but it is if we think of our lives without Keri and John. Caritas opened the door to meeting and matching us with the right birth parents,” Jenn concluded.

For more information about adoption, visit caritasfamilysolutions.org or call 800-997-9381.

Left: Keri and John Brennan

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Welcome NEW Board Members

Caritas recently welcomed three new members to the Board of Directors:



Lisa McQuade joined the Board of Directors in April 2017. She serves on the Planning and Program Committee. With both a BSN and MBA, she is currently President of Donco Electrical Construction, LLC in Edwardsville. A resident of Pocahontas, she is also a church organist and a former foster parent with two adult children.

Stan Brandmeyer also joined the Board in April 2017 and serves on the Development Committee. A former attorney in private practice, he is now a resident circuit court judge in Clinton County. Stan lives in New Baden with his wife Tracy; they have five adult children.



Kevin Riggs joined the Board in October 2017. With a masters degree in public administration and extensive experience in community development and government affairs, he is currently a lobbyist with Dentons Law Firm in St. Louis. Kevin resides in O'Fallon with his wife Rachel and their three young adult children.

Inaugural Caritas Day was a success!

When planning began for celebrating the 70th anniversary of our incorporation as a nonprofit agency, it was decided to create a day of giving on the actual anniversary date, July 31, 2017.

So in honor of our 70th anniversary, we held our first ever "Caritas Day," a day of giving in celebration of the numerous successes experienced by the thousands of individuals, children and families that we've served over the years, and in support of those who need our services today.

The day was full of volunteer and online giving opportunities and also included a ribbon cutting for the renovated rumpus room at St. John Bosco Children's Center and grand opening of our client resource center (see photos, page 6.) Mayoral proclamations from each city where we have a regional office confirmed and inspired support from the community.

We are grateful to all who participated in Caritas Day 2017 and look forward to making this an annual celebration!





‘Secret Santa Year Round’ puts new spin on holiday giving

For the past several years, Caritas Family Solutions has coordinated a very successful Secret Santa campaign that provided gifts to hundreds of children in foster care each Christmas. We are always so humbled by the generosity of those in the community who share their abundance at this time of year.

The Secret Santa campaign has been so successful that, even though the number of children in our care has risen in recent years, the outpouring of support has also increased. While this has been fantastic to witness, it has reached a point where the gifts lose their value simply because there are so many for each child. Also, since the giver is anonymous, even more value is placed on the gift rather than on the person giving it. In the true spirit of Christmas, we prefer that children learn to value people and relationships more than things.

While we certainly want every child in our care to have a good Christmas, we also want them to develop a healthy outlook in everyday life. Our mission is to “provide services to persons with social and emotional needs.” We are respectfully asking for “Secret Santas” to partner with us in this mission to focus on needs throughout the entire year instead of just one day.

As we approach the holiday season, we invite you to become a “Secret Santa Year Round,” and consider a monetary gift that will offer the flexibility to provide care and necessities for children in foster care at Christmas as well as every day. (This can even be done on a monthly basis from a checking account or by credit card, or, of course, as a one-time gift.) Your gift is an investment in the current and future well-being of a child. Cash gifts assure that funding is available for what is needed most on any given day all through the year, whether that is a haircut, a scout uniform, or a family counseling session. Sometimes it might just mean a special trip to get an ice cream cone that says “I love you and am here for you.”

For these reasons, cash donations are most appreciated and will make a significant difference when it is needed most. Your contribution can be made by calling 618-213-8700 or made online at caritasfamilysolutions.org/ssyearround.

Gifts for under the Christmas tree will still be collected from church groups, organizations and businesses with whom we partner to provide a list of desired and needed items. Please call Ashlee Lambert at 618-213-8714 or 877-722-2748 (toll free) or email Ashlee.Lambert@caritasfamily.org if you would like to coordinate a group gift collection this Christmas or at any time throughout the year.

We truly appreciate your past support and ask for your continued investment in our mission. Together, we can make a significant difference in the lives of so many, all year round.





STAFF SPOTLIGHT: Ramona McNamee

Ramona McNamee has worked as a Residential Treatment Specialist at St. John Bosco Children's Center in Belleville (SJBCC) for more than 23 years. When she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2013, the staff at the children's center supported her journey to survival. As a result, every October there is an annual Breast Cancer Awareness Pink Staff Appreciation celebration to honor Ramona. The staff found this as a way to rally behind Ramona as well as all breast cancer victims and survivors.

Ramona's first years at SJBCC were at the former location on Church Street in downtown Belleville. Back then, the center provided emergency, short-term care for children, even infants. Since Ramona worked the overnight shift, she was often in the nursery. "I spoiled them," she said. "They'd tell me to put the babies down but I didn't." Although SJBCC has experienced several changes over the years—a move into a now renovated building on Royal Heights Road, different management and approaches, even new children—Ramona admitted it's the children that have kept her here all these years. "They need a lot of love and they look to me for that, like a mother or now a grandmother," she chuckled. "I get the most respect in the building. The kids need love and nurturing and that is what I give."

Having endured surgery, radiation and chemo for her stage three cancer, she was declared cancer free in January 2017. "I feel great," says Ramona. "The sweetest thing is being around the kids. They make me feel good. Even the boys wear pink and tell me 'I'm so glad you survived. We love you, Mona!'"

Ramona also credits the supportive administrative team who worked with her when she was sick. "They didn't have to do that," she said, gratefully.

We're grateful for you, Ramona!



Left: Ramona McNamee. Above: Staff at St. John Bosco Children's Center. Right: A celebratory cake.



What does it mean to be ‘philanthropic’?

The Latin word “caritas” translates to the English word “charity.” As we prepare to celebrate National Philanthropy Day November 15, the words “caritas” and “philanthropy” both mean “love of humanity:” caring for, nourishing, developing, and enhancing what it is to be human. Charity relieves the pains of social problems – philanthropy attempts to solve those problems at their root causes.

As Caritas Family Solutions continues to celebrate 70 years of creating well-being in our communities, please help us recognize and thank those who have unselfishly left a legacy that provides for those who need help. You can begin, or add, to your legacy by giving back to your favorite charity on National Philanthropy Day 2017.

Jen & Ivan Beskorovany first became involved in the Caritas Family Solutions mission through the transformation of the Komlos Rumpus Room at St. John Bosco Children’s Center. Ivan is with Flooring Systems Inc. who donated the materials for the flooring in that room as well as several other rooms throughout our facilities. Jen and Ivan also went above and beyond for the youth at St. John Bosco Children’s Center by donating brand new sports equipment, outside games, frisbees and bubbles for the back to school picnic hosted by Scott 5/6 at Scott Air Force Base. They also donated Lego sets and MP3 players for the children to win on that day as well! Thank you Jen and Ivan for everything you have done for the youth and clients of Caritas Family Solutions! We appreciate you and could not do it without you.



Vogler Motor Company has supported the mission of Caritas Family Solutions for several years. Dennis Rathjen, president of the dealership in Carbondale, states that he became interested in assisting Caritas when one of his employees asked him to support a Caritas event through a sponsorship. Dennis generously responded and continues to be philanthropic toward Caritas. Thanks to Vogler Motor Company for making a positive impact in the lives of those who are trying to build a brighter future.

Judy Streif and her family have been supporting the mission of Caritas Family Solutions in many different ways throughout the years. Her philanthropy now extends through monthly giving. A specified amount is automatically deducted from her checking account each month through electronic funds transfer (EFT.) Judy says it’s the perfect way to give because “you don’t miss the money!” Caritas sincerely appreciates everything Judy has done for the agency and the many people served through her generosity. We salute Judy Streif during National Philanthropy Day!

If you would like to learn more about how you can give through EFT, contact Chief Development Officer Judy Woodruff at 618-213-8703.

Please consider a gift to Caritas Family Solutions on these upcoming giving days:



National Philanthropy Day®
November 16, 2017

Black Friday. Cyber Monday.
#GIVINGTUESDAY

November 28, 2017

CARITAS

Day of giving

July 31, 2017



Clockwise, from above: CEO Gary Huelsmann, accompanied by Belleville Mayor Mark Eckert, cuts the ribbon to open the Komlos Rumpus Room at St. John Bosco Children's Center. Volunteers from Scott 5/6 (noncommissioned officers group) took the lead on renovating the rumpus room. Belleville staff join the festivities. The new client resource center was stocked by many donations received throughout the day. There are many inspirational quotes painted into the flooring. A number of community members attended the ribbon cutting and grand opening.



If you can DREAM it
You can DO it!
~WALT DISNEY



HEART & SOUL

Annual Gala 2018



Planning is well underway for the 5th annual gala to benefit the programs and services provided by Caritas Family Solutions! Mark your calendars for **Saturday, February 10, 2018** and start making plans to be at the Four Points Sheraton in Fairview Heights at 6:00 p.m. You won't want to miss this opportunity to mingle with other Caritas supporters over cocktails, bid on awesome auction items, and take your chances at several amazing raffles! Then enjoy a scrumptious four-course meal complete with wine service while you listen to some light jazz and learn about Caritas in the community.

This year we honor and celebrate the life of Mike Burnworth, a longtime volunteer and friend of Caritas. Master of Ceremonies will once again be John Pertzborn from Fox2News in St. Louis, with Dave Schumacher as auctioneer. Invite a friend and make an evening of it, all for a great cause! Tickets are just \$99 each and can be reserved online at caritasfamilysolutions.org/gala or by calling 618-213-8714. Sponsorship opportunities are also available and we welcome donations for auction items as well. Hope to see YOU at the 2018 Heart & Soul Annual Gala!



Birth Mother Education Fund

With the philosophy that birth mothers deserve the opportunity for a successful future after adoption, the Bright Futures scholarship fund will support the educational goals of birth mothers in order to help them reach their career and life ambitions. The birth mother must be a current client of Caritas Family Solutions (or up to one-year post-placement) and shall have placed her child for adoption in or after the year 2016. If eligible, the scholarship provides \$500 for up to two semesters of classes, with payment made directly to the college or trade school.

Visit caritasfamilysolutions.org/scholarship for additional eligibility requirements and an application. For more information, call 618-213-8732 or 618-353-5294.

NOTE: Choosing adoption does not guarantee a scholarship will be available to the birth mother. The number of scholarships and the amount of each award might vary depending on the number of applicants applying.



ELLA'S BRIGHT FUTURES SCHOLARSHIP
BIRTH MOTHER EDUCATION FUND

REGIONAL OFFICES

Belleville

900 Royal Heights Rd.
Suite 2150
Belleville, IL 62226
800-997-9703

Carterville

10286 Fleming Road
Carterville, IL 62918
800-997-9381

East Alton

645 Berkshire Blvd.
East Alton, IL 62024
618-258-8750

Mt. Vernon

219 Withers Dr.
Mt. Vernon, IL 62864
877-277-3773





8601 West Main Street
Suite 201
Belleville, IL 62223



Newsletters are also available at caritasfamilysolutions.org. If you would like to receive this newsletter electronically, please send your name, mailing address and email address to outreach@caritasfamily.org. Thank you!



Above: New CSS Director Michael Dalton meets with staff at the East St. Louis office in 1972.



Above: CSS Executive Director Pete Cerneka (right) presents staff with certificates of appreciation, 1992.

Images
through
the years



Above: The Belleville staff celebrates the 65th anniversary of the agency in 2012, the first of only two as Christian Social Services of Illinois.

Right: St. John Bosco Children's Center opened in 1992 on North Church Street in downtown Belleville in the former convent of St. Luke Catholic Church. It was initially an emergency placement center for children removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect.

