



FALL NEWSLETTER



Our Mission

To strengthen the social and emotional well-being of individuals and families in order to create healthy relationships, loving homes, and strong communities.

Our Vision

To be the premier human services organization committed to promoting a just and caring society reflective of God's love.

Our Values

Respect • Innovation
Equity • Faith
Integrity • Accountability
Collaboration

Fiscal Year 2020 Reflections from Caritas CEO Gary Huelsmann

Ordinarily, I would have loved to begin our fall newsletter with thoughts of how stores and homes across the area are filled with the sights and smells of delightful fall treats, like warm apple cider or pumpkin bars, to remind us of the changing season. However, the current fall season is unlike any other we have faced in our time. Fall football parties and homecoming celebrations are being replaced by zoom calls, remote learning, and online meal delivery. If you're like me, I'm longing for the days where we can sit in cozy spots with family and friends and enjoy warm moments of laughter and closeness.

As life outside the agency has adapted to the challenges brought about by COVID-19, life within our agency has adjusted as well. Words like virtual visits, PPE, and social distancing have been adopted as common language in the halls of our facilities. Our staff and stakeholders are doing their best to mitigate the effects of the virus while ensuring our clients feel cared for and safe. I couldn't be more proud of our staff, as they consistently demonstrate the capacity to embrace hope and optimism during this crisis.

Our larger community of stakeholders has also embraced faith in the goodness of others and has shown us hope during this challenging time, as we serve others. Many groups have made masks for our employees and clients. Several organizations, agencies and government entities have provided grant opportunities to help those impacted by the pandemic. Our foster parents continue to go above and beyond for the children in their care, assisting with remote learning and keeping the children safe. We are so very grateful to everyone who has stepped up during these extraordinary times, as we work to create healthy relationships, loving homes and strong communities.

One final note as we begin the fall season, the legendary Notre Dame football coach Lou Holtz once said, "Show me someone who has done something worthwhile, and I'll show you someone who has overcome adversity." While it is certain that we are facing adversity at this point in time, it is now more important than ever for us to care for the social and emotional needs of one another. I wish you and yours a safe and joyful fall season.



Gary Huelsmann, MSW

Caritas Belleville Regional Director CO-Chairing Racial Equity Practice Committee

Elke Hansen, our Belleville Regional Director, has been doing outstanding work as Co-Chair of the Child Welfare Advisory Committee (CWAC) for Racial Equity Practice with DCFS. Elke has been key in our effort to continuously work toward a more equitable future for the children and families we serve. Through the CWAC Racial Equity Practice Committee, she is able to work toward equity and justice on an even larger scale.

With CWAC, Elke and her co-chair have been spearheading a 10-week educational campaign to educate, promote and encourage greater awareness and understanding of racial inequities and impact of existing racial inequalities in the Illinois Child Welfare System. This educational series is one of the elements that will support the racial equity practice model being developed for the Illinois Child Welfare System.

Most recently, Elke was a presenter at the Hephzibah Children's Associations Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors where Elke and her co-chair Robert Blackwell, shared their insights and experiences to help attendees to better serve and partner with vulnerable communities. Elke knows how impactful events like these are and is integral to making these changes at Caritas.

"We as the second largest child welfare agency in Illinois, we have a responsibility to change the current child welfare system, if we, or I, can contribute to that, it is our responsibility to do so, especially as a white person in a leadership role," said Elke.

Different trainings and being a member of the CWAC team has led to valuable learning and discussions that Elke brings back to Caritas. Most recently, she and our CEO, Gary Huelsmann, attended the United Way of Greater St. Louis Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) training series which they are using at Caritas. Other trainings like these have made Elke key in integrating a racial equity lens and language into our teams and structures as well as helping us push toward equity on a much grander scale.

"Families of color are not proportionally represented in the child welfare system; race disproportionality occurs at different decision points and leads to negatively impacted outcomes for families of color, such as length of stay, compared to white families – applying a racial equity lens will improve the system overall, and positively impact the outcomes for families of color."



"Families of color are not proportionally represented in the child welfare system; race disproportionality occurs at different decision points and leads to negatively impacted outcomes for families of color, such as length of stay, compared to white families – applying a racial equity lens will improve the system overall, and positively impact the outcomes for families of color," said Elke.

The CWAC Racial Equity Practice Committee ensures that Illinois supports a race-informed Child Welfare System by embedding racial equity principles and values into ongoing trainings, practices and policies. Elke has been part of this committee since its inception in July 2016 and has served as a co-chair since 2018.



Caritas CILA Staff Saves Two People's Lives

Portia Heidelberg always knew she wanted to do a job where she made a difference.

When she decided to take a job with Caritas Family Solutions' Community Integrated Living Arrangements (also known as CILA) program as direct support personnel, she knew that she would be helping to fulfill Caritas' mission of providing people with developmental disabilities the opportunity to live in a loving, caring home environment, where they can experience independence and community. Over her two years with CILA, not only has she helped dozens of people by providing daily support, she's also saved two people's lives.

A few months ago, a CILA resident was eating when he suddenly started having trouble swallowing. The resident wasn't able to tell Portia what was wrong and she was afraid he was choking. She managed to gently get him down on the ground and checked his airway. Once she realized it was clear, she started doing CPR. When the paramedics arrived, she learned that the resident's pacemaker had stopped working and that the CPR she provided had saved his life.

Last year, Portia experienced a similar emergency and acted quickly to administer CPR, saving that resident's life as well. "On both occasions, I was just happy that I was there to help them," said Portia. "It makes me feel proud of myself and reminds me that this job is about more than the money, it's about taking care of people. I love working at CILA."

Portia, as well as the rest of the CILA staff, receives CPR training and refresher courses once a year. Caritas East Alton Regional Director Susie Harris said Portia's calm and quick reaction in an emergency has been an inspiration to the rest of their staff.

"Portia has been a dedicated support to the people we serve," said Harris. "On two occasions she was literally a life saver, performing CPR to save a life of a CILA resident. It is staff like Portia that demonstrate that service to others is the heart of what we do at Caritas."



"Portia has been a dedicated support to the people we serve," said Harris. "On two occasions she was literally a life saver, performing CPR to save a life of a CILA resident. It is staff like Portia that demonstrate that service to others is the heart of what we do at Caritas."

Caritas CILA program allows people who are not fully able to care for themselves the opportunity to live as independently as possible, in a home environment, rather than an institution, where a Caritas staff member is available to assist and care for them at all times. Caritas has six CILA homes in four communities; Caseyville, Fairview Heights, Swansea and Belleville, which can accommodate up to 22 residents.

Learn more about how our CILA program benefits the community by going to our website at caritasfamilysolutions.org/community-integrated-living-arrangements.



Pitching for a Purpose

For Collinsville native Tanner Houck, his childhood dreams of becoming a Major League Baseball pitcher were realized when he made his MLB debut with the Red Sox on September 15. At the same time, he took action on another dream; raising awareness about adoption. Tanner launched a Pitch for Adoption campaign, in which he donates \$100 to Caritas Family Solutions for every strikeout he records.

For Houck, supporting Caritas is more than a good cause – it’s personal. Both Houck’s father and stepfather were adopted, and when he was in high school, his mother took in a 4-year-old foster child, Reanna from Caritas. A few years later, she was officially part of the Houck family via adoption.

“I remember meeting Reanna for the first time when my mom brought her to my high school baseball game,” Houck said. “I knew even then she was going to change our lives for the better, and we would help change hers. My family and I have been strong supporters of adoption for as long as I can remember, as it’s what made our family complete. I hope that our story and my campaign will inspire others to learn more about the life-changing benefits of adoption,” Houck’s website reads.

Houck’s involvement with Caritas goes far beyond the fundraising. In particular, Tanner has formed a

close bond to the children at St. John Bosco Children’s Center (SJBCC) and is working to raise awareness about the need to support children who have experienced extreme trauma. SJBCC serves as a loving, caring and structured home for up to 36 boys and girls, ages 6-18, who need to heal from trauma too severe for them to be successful in foster care.

On one of his visits to SJBCC, before leaving for spring training, he hosted a pizza party at the center and told the kids about his strike-out campaign. When he can’t visit in person, he sends residents birthday cards and shares videos documenting his baseball adventures.

Just as he supports the children at Bosco, in honor of his second start against the Yankees on September 20, they wanted to support their favorite pitcher by creating posters to cheer him on while they watch his games from home.

So far, Tanner’s Pitch for Adoption campaign has raised \$5,013 for Caritas Family Solutions and his story continues to inspire many Red Sox and sports fans across the nation to join him as his story continues to garner attention with every game. Learn more about Houck at pledgeit.org/tanner-houck



Stay tuned for more information soon about our annual **Secret Santa** campaign.

Go to caritasfamilysolutions.org/secretsanta to learn how you can help children in foster care have a joyful Christmas!