

Stories You
Helped Write



2025 Annual Report



Message from LCFS President & CEO



Every story has an author. And every story of hope at Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois (LCFS) this past year has your name on it.

As we look back on 2025, our hearts are full of gratitude. Gratitude for God's faithfulness. Gratitude for the strength and courage of the children and families we serve. And gratitude for you, our supporters, who show up time and again to stand beside them. This annual report is called Stories You Helped Write because none of these moments of hope, healing and growth would have happened without you.

Scripture reminds us, "Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18). You live this every day. Your love in action is shaping real outcomes and changing lives.

Last year, LCFS led the state in the percentage of foster children served who were safely returned home. More families were able to stay together, giving children the stability, connection and love that every child deserves. We see it every day, and research confirms it: when it is safe - being with family is the best outcome for a child.

You also helped us strengthen prevention efforts that support families before a crisis ever occurs. Through our Best Start for Families program, we partner with communities to give parents and youth the education,

training and tools they need to build strong, healthy family foundations.

Your support has also allowed us to meet young people where they are. Through 360 Youth Services, we launched new Mental Health Juvenile Justice Support Services. Working alongside local law enforcement, we now provide therapeutic programs that guide youth toward better choices, keep them out of the justice system and offer both support and accountability.

Each of these accomplishments is a chapter you helped write. Together, we are changing lives and helping people grow into the future God has planned for them.

Thank you for trusting LCFS with your generosity. Thank you for believing in families, in second chances and in God's call to love all and serve all. As we look ahead, we do so with hope, knowing the next chapters will be just as powerful as the ones already written—because of you.

With heartfelt thanks,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike Bertrand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "A" at the end.

Mike Bertrand, MSW, LCSW
President & CEO

Mission: To nurture and strengthen children and families in need.

Vision: A world where all of God's children have the opportunity for safe, healthy and meaningful lives.

Stories You Helped Write

Every child and family Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois (LCFS) serves carries a story with them. Some are filled with loss. Some are filled with hope. Many are still being written. This year, because of you, those stories did not stop at crisis. They continued toward safety, healing and connection.

Every life impacted in this section was made possible for one reason: your generosity. Through your support, children found beds instead of offices, families found help instead of roadblocks and moments of fear were replaced with moments of joy. These are not just stories of LCFS' programs at work - they are Stories You Helped Write.

6,680 children and individuals were welcomed to Camp Wartburg for camp, retreats or outdoor education



3,988 youth were provided life-changing services through 360 Youth Services



1,870 children were cared for in loving LCFS foster families



438 children and families were supported with counseling



435 youth in foster care found permanent homes with **188** able to return to their families



325 parents and youth strengthened their family interactions through Best Start for Families



302 families were strengthened through LCFS' family-focused preventative services



48 youth in care received emergency shelter at Southern Thirty Adolescent Center



38 children found their forever families through adoption



21 expectant parents were counseled by our adoption team in making parenting decisions



Chapter One: Always Ready Families

Across the country, there are not enough foster homes. Because of that shortage, some children have had to sleep in offices while waiting to be placed with a safe, loving foster family. LCFS could not accept that as an option.

Because of you, we did not have to.

Your generosity helped us create Always Ready Families, a group of LCFS foster parents who say YES in moments of crisis. Yes, to any child. Yes, to any age. Yes, day or night.



Nate* was 15 years old when he needed that yes.

By then, Nate had lived through more trauma than most people experience in a lifetime. That pain often came out as anger. He pushed limits. He had big outbursts. His first foster home tried, but they did not have the support he needed with other children in their care. Late one night, Nate needed a new home.

Finding a home for a traumatized teenager, especially in the middle of the night, is not easy. But because of donors like you, LCFS' Always Ready Families program existed.

When Nate arrived at Paula's* foster home, she was waiting at the door. She showed him to a room that was his own. Even though it was late, she offered to make him something to eat. No questions. No judgment. Just care.

Over the next few days, Paula's patience and kindness began to soften the walls Nate had built. Slowly, the anger eased. He started to believe that someone cared.

This moment of safety happened because you helped write Nate's story.

I was so lucky to attend the Harvest Fest last year and witness first-hand the outpouring of generosity and compassion! What an amazing sense of community it is to see others give with such selflessness for the good of children and families so that they might reach their full potential.

-Amanda, Foster Care Licensing Rep.

Chapter Two: Family Support/Emergency Fund

When families are in crisis, time matters. Healing cannot wait for paperwork.

LCFS' Family Support/Emergency Fund exists for moments like that, and it's made possible entirely by donors like you.

Lenna* was a young, scared foster child receiving services through LCFS' counseling program. Her therapist tried everything to help her feel safe and open up during sessions, but Lenna stayed quiet and closed off. Words were hard. Trust was harder.

The therapist believed play therapy could help. She found tools and supplies that she thought would make Lenna feel more comfortable, but there was no budget for them.

Thanks to donor support, help did not stop there.



A request was made to LCFS' Family Support/Emergency Fund. The therapist brought the new play therapy supplies into their sessions.

Slowly, something changed.

Over the next few weeks, Lenna began to relax. She smiled. She started to engage. Through play, she began to share parts of her world.

That small moment opened the door for healing to begin.

Because of you, help came right when it was needed. You helped write the beginning of Lenna's healing story.

Thank you for caring about the children and families we serve, and helping us guide them to a better place, knowing the community loves and supports them. Everything you do is so needed and much appreciated.

-Linda, Office Supervisor

Chapter Three: Camp Wartburg Families Retreat

Strong families do not just happen. They are built.

The Camp Wartburg Families Retreat, launched in 2025, brings families together for learning, rest and connection. Through partnership with local congregations, parents with their children signed up to attend a weekend retreat at Camp Wartburg. There they learned practical tools for healthy family relationships while enjoying faith-centered camp experiences. This program exists because of generous donor support.

Josh and Lauren attended the retreat with their young son and other families from their church.

“It was a really good experience,” Josh shared. “There was a great mix of learning and fun.”

Lauren appreciated the pace. “There was space to rest, connect and enjoy the weekend. We did not feel overwhelmed.”



Smiles, togetherness, and a little camp magic. Josh and Lauren enjoying Wartburg Families Retreat with their son.

One idea stood out to them: creating a shared family mission and vision.

“Having something we are all working toward gives direction for our family,” Josh said. “It is something we will keep building on.”

Lauren added, “Investing in your family is one of the most important things you can do, especially if your goal is to lead your family in faith.”

Because of you, families like Josh and Lauren’s are building stronger foundations. You helped write a story of growth, faith and connection.



Chapter Four: Christmas Drive

Ava* and Sophie* were 10 and 12 when they entered foster care along with their seven siblings.

The sisters were placed together with an LCFS foster family, while their siblings went to two other LCFS foster homes. The foster parents worked hard to keep the siblings connected and seeing each other often.

As Christmas approached, Ava and Sophie did not know what to expect. Growing up in a large family, they had rarely received gifts of their own.



But because of the generosity of supporters through LCFS' Christmas Drive, their foster parents were able to make something special happen.

On Christmas morning, Ava and Sophie came downstairs to find exactly what they had wished for. Brand-new shoes, silver for one and purple for the other, and a couple more toys each to call their own.

Their LCFS worker shared, "Their eyes said it all. They had never received so much that was just theirs."

The girls were in disbelief and just as happy for each other as for themselves.

It was a Christmas they will never forget.

Because of you, these sisters felt seen and deeply loved. You helped write a moment of joy into their story.

We are deeply grateful for your kindness and commitment to the children and families we serve. Your support directly enhances their well being and strengthens our ability to provide meaningful, consistent care.

-Crystal, Specialized Services Program Supervisor

Chapter Five: Back-to-School Drive

Starting school is a big moment, especially for children in foster care.

Jace* and Cam* are brothers, ages 5 and 6. They live with their grandma, who is their LCFS relative foster parent. As Kindergarten and first grade approached, the boys felt nervous.



Then La’Nya, their LCFS Child Welfare Specialist, showed up with something special. She walked in carrying brand-new backpacks, Paw Patrol for one and Spiderman for the other, stuffed with school supplies. All were made possible through gifts to the Back-to-School Drive.

They were exactly what the boys had hoped for.

Their faces lit up. The nerves disappeared.

“Sometimes it is the small things that can brighten a family’s whole day,” shared La’Nya.

Their grandma was grateful, not just for the joy on their faces, but for the help covering school supply costs.

Because of you, these brothers walked into school feeling confident and prepared. You helped write a hopeful first chapter to their school story.

*Names and images are representational only.

Because of You

These stories may begin with different moments such as a late-night placement, a counseling session or a first day of school, but they share the same author: you. And they are only a few examples of the many moments of care, healing and hope your generosity made possible this year.

Because of your gifts, children felt safe, families felt supported and help arrived right when it was needed most. Because you chose to give, the impact of your generosity will continue to unfold for years to come in more stories of resilience, belonging and second chances. Thank you for helping write stories that will shape lives for years to come.



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