

# Abundant *life*

SPRING 2020

## 2020 ANNUAL EVENT SUPPORTS ABUNDANT LIFE® VISION

Despite the coronavirus (COVID-19) uncertainty that impacted the in-person portion of the Lutheran SeniorLife Foundation's annual event, 2020 – *Celebrating Our Vision*, numerous supporters still exhibited immense generosity, raising approximately \$150,000 for the programs and services of Lutheran SeniorLife on April 24, 2020.

President of the Lutheran SeniorLife Foundation, Jane Bittcher, released the annual event's cancellation statement in late March after much deliberation.

"Prior to the event, we closely monitored the news about coronavirus as it progressed," Bittcher said.

"As the date of the event approached, we determined it was our responsibility to cancel the event to prevent the spread of the virus."

Guests who already secured tickets

and sponsorship opportunities were eligible to receive a full refund.

Although, it is with our greatest appreciation that a majority upheld their pledge as a donation to the Lutheran SeniorLife Mission Fund.

Others sustained philanthropic efforts during the virtual silent auction portion of the event from April 6 until April 24.

Featured items included a catered dinner party for eight donated by Cura, two Steelers ticket bundles contributed by Grant Street Asset Management and golf packages for Connoquenessing Golf Club and Lenape Golf Resort among many others.

In addition to having the opportunity to bid on the many auction prizes, guests were also given the option to make a donation through the online auction site.



LEFT: Center at the Mall staff pose around the flowers they received from the Lutheran SeniorLife Foundation.

All in all, this virtual segment of the event alone raised approximately \$7,500.

"While we are disappointed that we could not hold the



annual event, we are honored that our friends, sponsors and supporters helped us celebrate our vision through their gifts and silent auction bids," Bittcher said.

"Their generosity will enable us to enhance the programs and services of Lutheran SeniorLife through the Mission Fund."

Two hundred and fifty daisies, previously ordered as table decorations for the event, also went to meaningful use as a way to support small businesses and uplift those we serve amid the pandemic.

PrimeTime Senior Center in Bellevue and Center at the Mall in Monaca are just a few of the programs that distributed the flowers to participants as a token of encouragement.

Each pot displayed the message, "We hope these flowers bring you happiness and a little bit of cheer during the blessed spring season and all throughout the year."

Contributed by a generous donor, these flowers symbolized our hope

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# AbundantLife

is published by Lutheran SeniorLife.

To report a change of address or to be removed from our mailing list, please contact the Lutheran SeniorLife Foundation at 724-453-6014 or [FoundationStaff@lutheranseniorlife.org](mailto:FoundationStaff@lutheranseniorlife.org)

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Our mission is to continually transform and elevate health, wellness, and social services while fostering an *Abundant Life*® for those we serve and who serve.

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We thank The  
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## HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR CRAFTS MASKS FOR ESSENTIAL STAFF

These past few months have been busy, to say the least, for crafters as many stepped up to sew essential masks for Lutheran SeniorLife due to the personal protective equipment (PPE) shortage.

Of these many sewers, Grace Lopicollo, a student at Seneca Valley Senior High School, set aside her senior project of making a dress for prom to fulfill this need within our organization.

“Every student has to pick a senior project and it has to be related to fundraising or something within the arts,” said Grace, who is also the daughter of VNA, Western Pennsylvania’s Billing Supervisor, Bonnie Lopicollo.

“I’ve always liked sewing, so I originally decided that I would sew my own prom dress.”

But when it was announced that Grace’s senior prom would no longer take place in May due to the coronavirus, she became hesitant.



“I didn’t want to put all of that time and effort into creating something if I wasn’t going to be able to enjoy the final product, so I stopped working on it for a little bit,” Grace said.

“Then, my mom called and asked if I wanted to help sew facemasks for her coworkers.”

Grace’s focus quickly shifted from making her prom gown to sewing fundamental masks for Lutheran SeniorLife.



“I emailed my teacher and asked if I could change my project to sewing masks and he was really supportive of it,” she said.

In total, Grace has made about 50 masks, and she continues to sew more as the need for PPE remains.

Grace’s masks have even taken on popularity within her community with friends and neighbors displaying her designs.

“Everyone has just been really grateful to get a mask because they are so limited,” Grace said. “I’m happy that I was able to do something to help.” ❖

## 2020 ANNUAL EVENT SUPPORTS ABUNDANT LIFE® VISION Continued from front cover

of better days beyond the pandemic and our commitment to fostering *Abundant Life*® regardless of unprecedented circumstances.

If you are interested in donating a charitable gift, please contact the Lutheran SeniorLife Foundation at 724-453-6014 or email [jane.bittcher@lutheranseniorlife.org](mailto:jane.bittcher@lutheranseniorlife.org). Thank you in advance for your support. ❖

RIGHT: Fifty of PrimeTime Senior Center’s flowers are prepped for participant distribution with a poem that reads, “Roses are red, violets are blue, I know it’s hard but you’ll make it through.”



LEFT: PrimeTime Senior Center staff prepare to deliver flowers to our program participants in Allegheny County.



# CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

This year marks Lutheran Service Society's (LSS) 100th anniversary of providing children and family services throughout southwestern Pennsylvania.

LSS first developed its children and family initiatives in response to community needs that emerged after World War I. Though soldiers had returned home from the war, injuries and trauma had left them shattered.

Religious discrimination and the start of Prohibition only made matters worse as rebellion and corruption raged. Trapped in the middle of this chaos were parents struggling to raise their children in neighborhoods plagued by crime.

The initiatives LSS developed focused primarily on serving low-income families, single mothers and neglected children.

By 1941, LSS had formally instituted its child services department. Shortly thereafter, LSS began placing children in foster care or with adoptive parents. This aspect of the department continues today, making it LSS's longest-standing program.

World War II created another surge in the number of single mothers who needed assistance in the 1940s and 1950s. By 1964, with the help of the Economic Opportunities Act, LSS opened two new family services offices to continue helping single mothers, as well as to assist with child behavior disorders.

As the region moved into the 1970s, LSS helped more children with special needs through the adoption program, as well as through a new program, Foster Grandparents.

By the 1980s, LSS's adoption services had grown to include finding

placements for Russian children, as well as for children from China and other countries. The department's focus turned toward more international adoptions throughout the 1990s.

In 2010, the program returned its attention to domestic adoptions, foster care and post-permanency services, which is much of the department's emphasis today.

Just last year, LSS delivered adoption and foster care services to approximately 200 children and families throughout western Pennsylvania.

Thank you for trusting us with the wellbeing of children and families for 100 years. Please call our adoption office at (412) 734-9330 if you are interested in learning more about these important services.



- 1920s LSS starts family welfare services including a Big Brother program – the precursor to its foster care services.
- 1940s LSS formally institutes its child services department and begins placing children for adoption as well as in foster homes.
- 1960s LSS becomes an associate member of the prestigious Child Welfare League of America, Inc.
- 1970s LSS recruits and trains hundreds of older adults through its Foster Grandparents program to offer love and support to children with special needs.
- 1990s Placing children from Russia, China and other countries becomes the principal focus of the adoption program.
- 2010s The program's primary attention returns to domestic adoptions, foster care and post-permanency care.
- 2020 LSS is looking forward to another century of caring for children and families.

## Hadiyah's Story: Turning Pain into Success

Genna Kicinski, a permanency caseworker at our LSS office in Bellevue, Pa., has personally seen the impact these services can have on children and families.

Specifically, the program introduced Genna to an extraordinary young lady named Hadiyah.

"I've been working with Hadiyah for about two and a half years and it's been phenomenal," Genna said.

Usually, Genna would receive roughly 10 visits with Hadiyah, but her appointments have remained extended as the two's interaction quickly grew into a strong bond.

*RIGHT: Hadiyah and Genna FaceTime together regularly as their friendship has grown over the past two and a half years.*

*BELOW: Genna makes sure to connect with Hadiyah each holiday so that she never feels alone. Easter is just one of the many celebrations she prioritizes.*

"We text almost every day," Genna said. "I'm the one she called when she got her first job and her driver's license, among many other accomplishments. It just shows the difference it can make when you have a consistent person in your life who cares."

Hadiyah was exposed to hurt at an early age in the form of abuse and not feeling loved or valued.

Now, at 20 years old, she has overcome many barriers to work a full-time job, enroll herself in college,



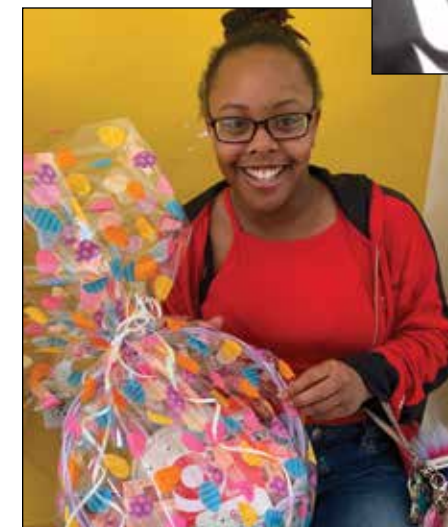
own a vehicle and secure an apartment – achievements that would most likely not have taken place, Hadiyah explained, if she didn't receive help from various programs.

"At first, I didn't like the fact that I was in the system but, right before my 18th birthday, I realized I wasn't going to have anything if I signed

myself out. So, I decided to stay," Hadiyah said. "It was one of the best decisions I've made."

Hadiyah admits it was a long battle, though, because she didn't always feel that the foster care system was on her side.

"I was just hurt," Hadiyah said. "When you've been abused your whole life, it starts to become all you know."



Nonetheless, Hadiyah knew that if she wanted the cycle to end, she had to be the one to break it.

"It made me think, if it doesn't stop with me, then it will move onto my future child," Hadiyah said. "I didn't want to pass on that pain, so I had to change myself for the better."

Genna's words of support and inspiration helped Hadiyah throughout much of this process.

"She would just tell me, 'You're going to be great. You're going to be successful,'" Hadiyah said. "Once I realized that, there was no stopping me."

Today, Hadiyah is grateful for the adversities she has faced, because otherwise, she would not be where she is now.

"I wonder that all the time: *How would my life be if I was never in the system?*", Hadiyah said.

"See, in life, you may go through hardships, but as long as you set your mind to what you want and put in the effort, anything can happen".

"Don't let your past decide you. Even if it was something traumatic, don't let it become you," Hadiyah said. "You are not what you think you are; you are what you are about to go through."

With her head held high, Hadiyah truly stands by these words of empowerment, and she will not let anything stand in the way of her success. ❖



# RESILIENCE AMID THE PANDEMIC



St. John Specialty Care Center employees received numerous acts of appreciation from family and members of the greater community once visitation restrictions were announced due to COVID-19.



Passavant Community's dining team made our residents smile through the pandemic with food cards. Messages like "We can 'beet' this together" and "we're egg-static to be keeping you healthy" offered reassurance and support.



Several businesses answered our call for personal protective equipment (PPE) during COVID-19. Pictured above is Lutheran SeniorLife's donation from Ambridge Lumber Company and Volep Manufacturing Company.

Valley Care Adult Day Center comforted participants during the pandemic with homemade care packages. Food staples and reading materials were just some of the many items personally delivered to each client's house.



VNA, Western Pennsylvania started a handmade facemask campaign in response to the personal protective equipment (PPE) shortage. Thanks to the overwhelming support of others, their team collected more than 4,000 hand-made masks for internal distribution.



Passavant Community held a parade to lift our staff and resident's spirits during COVID-19. An emphasis was placed on appreciating our frontline heroes who provide quality care.

Many Lutheran SeniorLife staff embraced creative visitations as a way for our residents to safely connect with friends and family during the pandemic.



Programs, such as SilverSmart Technology™, are leading virtual visitations to connect residents with loved ones as visitation restrictions continue at our campuses. St. John Specialty Care Center and Passavant Community acquired several iPad donations from a fundraiser called, ConnectYinz, which aided toward the campaign.



LIFE Lawrence County held a delicious drive-thru lunch for colleagues as a way to demonstrate appreciation and gratitude. Our LIFE teams have done a tremendous job ensuring that our participants receive the appropriate care and resources they need throughout this health crisis.



# RESILIENCE AMID THE PANDEMIC *Continued*



Our Freedom Rd. office participated in Victory Family Church's food distribution project, "Help Your Neighbor." The church distributed the non-perishable donations to those who needed them most within our community.



Our LIFE programs remained fully operational amid the pandemic to provide vital health services, such as daily meals, to our participants.



Passavant Community teams distributed treat baskets to our staff as tokens of appreciation during the pandemic.



LIFE Beaver County staff began "sacking" lunch to one another as a way to boost employee morale amid COVID-19.



Passavant Community resident, Emilia Carcaise, celebrated her 90th birthday with cake, gifts and a window party to connect with family during visitation restrictions.



RoseCrest Assisted Living residents presented staff with bird feeder ornaments as a way to say "thank you" for taking care of them during this time.



VNA, Western Pennsylvania ensured positivity was spread to our staff with smiley cookies and messages of self-care.



Enterprise Fleet Management graciously delivered Eat'n Park lunches to our VNA, Western Pennsylvania staff during COVID-19.



Passavant Community's Fitness Center staff brightened the days of our residents and employees with colorful messages of hope outside of our Abundant Life Center.





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With headquarters in Adams Township, Pa., Lutheran SeniorLife has locations in Zelienople, Mars, Butler, McCandless, Bellevue, Kittanning, New Castle, Aliquippa, Ambridge, Greensburg, and Monaca. To learn more about any of our programs or services, please visit our website at [www.lutheranseniorlife.org](http://www.lutheranseniorlife.org).

## ST. JOHN HELPS JOE RETURN HOME

When Joseph K. first came to St. John Specialty Care Center, he was unable to walk and needed extensive assistance with everyday tasks.

With a complex medical history of spinal surgeries and post-operative difficulties, Joe's latest operation had left him frustrated and discouraged.

"It took three months and two weeks before I walked," Joe said.

Such a memorable experience that he even recalls the distance.



"I couldn't walk, I couldn't stand. The only thing I could do was sit up and lay down," Joe said.

It was a slow road with many setbacks, but after continuous encouragement, Joe began to believe in the St. John staff and focus on his victories.

"Nine feet," he said, comparing the achievement to a newborn baby learning to pick up their feet and set them down for the first time.

"I couldn't do anything before, and now I can do everything – that makes me feel good," Joe said.

Nevertheless, if Joe had to do it all again, he would choose St. John.

"I've been to other rehabs, and this is one of the best," Joe said. "Everybody is so great and caring. I was well taken care of here." ❖