

Historical Summary of LSS of South Dakota A Tradition of Compassion, Vision & Leadership

In the early fall of 1920, Dr. H. B. Kildahl, Executive Secretary of the Department of Charities, Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (NLCA headquartered in Minneapolis) wrote to N. N. Boe, President, South Dakota District, NLCA, recommending the establishment of a home for “unfortunate girls” and their children in Sioux Falls. Dr. Boe talked it over with the pastor of Grace Lutheran Church (currently First Lutheran), H. H. Glenn, and two leading church men, Judge Lewis Larson and attorney, James Berdahl. Their response was positive. Plans were made to invite all interested persons to an open meeting to discuss the request and possible ways to meet it.

On October, 1920, such a meeting took place, resulting in a decision to organize a Lutheran Children’s Home Finding Society of South Dakota. It was to be incorporated under the laws of South Dakota, and to be under the auspice of the NLCA. Those present elected the first Board of Directors. They authorized the Board to find and purchase property to serve as a maternity home. Articles of Incorporation of the Lutheran Children’s Home Finding society of South Dakota were filed and dated December 28, 1920.

A month later a site had been found. At its November meeting, the Board authorized the purchase of a house at the corner of 6th Street and Spring Avenue. The property was in serious disrepair, but the price was attractive. Since it had only recently been organized, the Home Finding Society had no money for the purchase. Personal loans from Board members (\$3,000), a bank loan (\$6,000), and a mortgage (\$3,000) made it possible to pay \$10,500 for the property. The remaining \$1,500 went to repairs and necessary furnishings.

On May 16, 1921, an open house and donation day marked the opening of the House of Mercy. More than a hundred women of Grace Lutheran Church had formed an auxiliary to help get the House of Mercy ready. They hosted the open house, serving coffee and sweets to the hundreds who came to see the home. Most of the visitors brought gifts—linens, china, cookware, books, food and money.

The morning after the House of Mercy opened, the first applicants for admission appeared—an elderly woman and a seven-year-old girl who needed a home. While they were not the expected clients, they were warmly welcomed and housed as long as needed. Three elderly ladies were also boarded that first year.

The pregnant girls for whom the home was intended soon began to arrive. By the end of its first year, the House of Mercy had cared for 23 unmarried and 3 married mothers, 12 children were placed in adoptive homes.

From this humble beginning, LSS has evolved to provide services throughout South Dakota. Following are highlights, expansions and changes of LSS through the years.

100 Years of Caring

- 1920 Lutheran Children’s Home Finding Society organizes in Sioux Falls
- 1921 House of Mercy maternity home opens in Sioux Falls
- 1939 First private agency to be licensed for child care in South Dakota
- 1939 Name changes to Lutheran Welfare Society of South Dakota
- 1947 Foster Care program begins
- 1948 Refugee Resettlement program begins following WWII
- 1961 Youth residential services begin when Summit Oaks Center is built
- 1962 Counseling office opens in Rapid City
- 1965 Name changes to Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota

- 1969 Counseling office opens in Aberdeen
- 1970 Counseling office opens in Sioux Falls
- 1973 Woodfield Center (formerly Bethesda Children's Home) becomes part of LSS
- 1977 Satellite counseling offices open in several communities
- 1983 Counseling office opens in Watertown
- 1984 Consumer Credit Counseling Service becomes part of LSS
- 1991 New Beginning Center, Aberdeen, becomes part of LSS
- 1993 Canyon Hills Center, Spearfish, becomes part of LSS
- 1998 Gateway Apartments opens in Sioux Falls to offer affordable housing to seniors
- 2000 Southern Hills After School program begins in Sioux Falls
- 2000 Affordable housing for seniors and families is established in rural communities
- 2001 School-Based Mentoring program begins in Sioux Falls
- 2004 Stepping Stones and Casey Foster Care, Rapid City become part of LSS
- 2005 New Canyon Hills Center facility in Spearfish is dedicated
- 2006 New Beginning Center facility expands in Aberdeen
- 2007 Sioux Falls Center for Children and Youth facility is dedicated
- 2007 Hilltop After School program opens in Sioux Falls
- 2007 Fatherhood & Families begins in Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Springfield and Yankton
- 2008 Rural Mentoring program begins in Lincoln and Minnehaha counties
- 2009 Woodfield Center ceases operation as a youth residential treatment center
- 2009 Prairie Lake affordable housing apartments open in North Sioux City
- 2009 Refugee & Immigration Services opens an office in Huron
- 2009 USucceed mentoring program begins
- 2010 Southern Hills expands to include infant-toddler enrichment care
- 2010 Community Resource Program begins statewide
- 2012 Childcare & Education Services completes a major expansion at the Southern Hills facility and expands to additional sites in Sioux Falls including First Reformed, East Side Lutheran and Our Savior's Lutheran
- 2013 Arise Youth Center Reception Center & Shelter Care opens in Rapid City
- 2013 Kinship Care becomes part of LSS
- 2014 LSS establishes new branding and logo design
- 2014 Refugee & Immigration Services changes their name to Center for New Americans
- 2014 Consumer Credit Counseling Service changes their name to the Center for Financial Resources
- 2014 Arise Youth Center Evening Report Center opens in Rapid City
- 2014 Counseling and Re-Entry Services provide services as part of the SD Criminal Justice Initiative, CJI
- 2015 LSS sells Gateway Apartment building, Sioux Falls
- 2015 Here4Youth Child Care becomes part of LSS
- 2015 Better Together programming begins in the Sioux Falls area
- 2015 New Alternatives, Intensive Independent Living Services, opens in Rapid City
- 2015 Counseling Services incorporates telehealth technology into service delivery
- 2015 Counseling Services starts providing counseling to students within the schools through the PATH program
- 2016 Arise Youth Center Reception Center, Shelter Care and Evening Report Center opens in Sioux Falls
- 2016 Functional Family Therapy begins through the state's Juvenile Justice Reinvestment Initiative
- 2016 Stepping Stones ceases operation
- 2017 Fatherhood & Families changes their name to Re-Entry Services
- 2017 LSS purchases property now known as the Campus on East Bank
- 2017 Center for New Americans relocates to the Campus on East Bank
- 2017 LSS sells Meadowlands affordable housing in Viborg
- 2017 LSS sells Broadway affordable housing in Centerville
- 2017 Center for New Americans office in Huron closes
- 2018 Re-Entry Services expands services to women through ICIP, Intermediate Correctional Intervention Program
- 2018 LSS celebrates 24 years of continuous accreditation through the Council of Accreditation, COA
- 2018 Better Together expands to Brookings
- 2019 Mentoring Services' Everyday Heroes program expands to Flandreau

- 2019 Counseling Services changes their name to Behavioral Health Services
- 2019 Here4Youth Childcare & Education Services relocates to the Campus on East Bank
- 2019 Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Sioux Empire transitions to LSS Mentoring Services
- 2019 Family Violence Program transitions from Compass Center to Re-Entry Services
- 2020 LSS celebrates 100 years of serving South Dakota

From our beginnings a century ago, LSS has been carrying out an active ministry of the Lutheran church—resurrecting hope where hope has been lost, meeting people where they are in life, and walking alongside of them as a ministry of presence. Throughout our 100 years, LSS services have evolved in response to the changing needs of individuals, families and communities.

Our legacy of 100 years of service was not built by being average and neither will our future. We go boldly into a second century of service with a vision for all people of South Dakota to be healthy, safe and accepted. Our faith compels us to serve and to value all people—using our hands and feet, our hearts and words, to serve our neighbors as God intended.

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