



# New Heights

## THE DAY HE CALLED ME MOM



**“I was standing at the kitchen sink** when the younger one of my middles got my attention (we called them that because I have one son from my first marriage that we called the older, two children in the middle, and their baby brother we call the youngest ... all three adopted). He pulled on my shirt to get my attention saying ‘Mom, Mom,’” shared Emily Densmore. “What a moment that was for me. Even though

**“He pulled on my shirt to get my attention saying ‘Mom, Mom,’”**

he was my foster child he was still calling Brian and I by our first names. This day was different; we had just completed a meeting where his birth

mom came into our home to explain to her children that Brian and I would be their forever family. She assured them that she loved them and would always be their mom.”

“Some may think that hearing a foster child call you mom could be chalked up as a sweet personal victory. But the victory for me was really in the camp of that brave, generous, and yes – flawed birth mother.”

“When Brian and I decided to be foster parents we quickly decided that the best path to take was one of deep respect for the birth parents and the bond that they have with their children; and the willingness to surrender to the very real possibility of family reunification. So in my book, one of my middles calling me Mom was a real victory for everyone.” “I am not going to lie. The hardest part about foster parenting is the

uncertainty. Nothing is for sure. You don’t know up from down sometimes. This beautiful child you have in your life might go home tomorrow, or might stay forever. It is this uncertainty that has taught us such a valuable lesson of respect.”

The day that Emily Densmore came to St. Vincent Catholic Charities for this interview she had just responded to a call from STVCC for assistance with an emergency placement, an infant. Baby came along for the interview and even during the course of the interview Emily was speaking directly to the baby, all-in for this sweet innocent soul who may be gone tomorrow.

Brian and Emily are still hoping to adopt a little girl to complete their family, yet they are still remaining open to those calls for foster care assistance. It is their willingness, and their respectful treatment of birth families that put them at the top of our list for Foster Family of the Year for 2015.

**If there is room in your heart to foster children who desperately need a safe haven, for now or forever, please call us at (517) 323-4734 Ext. 1601.**



Head to [www.stvcc.org](http://www.stvcc.org) and help us save money by subscribing to the **FULL COLOR** online version of our newsletter!

(517) 323-4734  
2800 West Willow St.  
Lansing, MI 48917



“If ever there is a tomorrow when we’re not together ... there is something you must always remember. You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think. Even if we’re apart, I’ll always be with you.”

– A.A. Milne (Author and Creator of Winnie-the-Pooh)

Dear Friends,

It feels good to be welcoming Spring and looking forward to exciting new activities here at St. Vincent Catholic Charities. Yet, I don't want to forget the gift of thoughtfulness and introspection that this past season of Lent made possible. Our selected quote from A.A. Milne reflects on the lasting and immeasurable impact provided by our programs and services.



In this edition of our newsletter we draw your attention to the work of the foster care program. In the business of human services delivery there is a unique challenge in measuring outcomes for our services. Yes, we can quantify the numbers we serve and even the hours and hours of service we provide. Yet, we cannot put a number to the terrible, awful things that could have happened had we (our agency and the foster families) not been there for the clients we serve, especially the children.

I am extremely proud of the leadership, innovation and insight that our Child Welfare staff continue to demonstrate in their work. To that end, I have asked them to share their new and inclusive guiding principles. You will see it next to the infographic which demonstrates the power of the safety net that foster care provides, and many of the negative outcomes which foster care can prevent.

May is Foster Care Awareness month. Be sure to visit our website [stvcc.org](http://stvcc.org) for more information on local awareness activities, and information on how you can support this very important work. There, you will also find more information on our newest Child Welfare initiative – Therapeutic Foster Care.

Remember, we simply couldn't do this work without you.

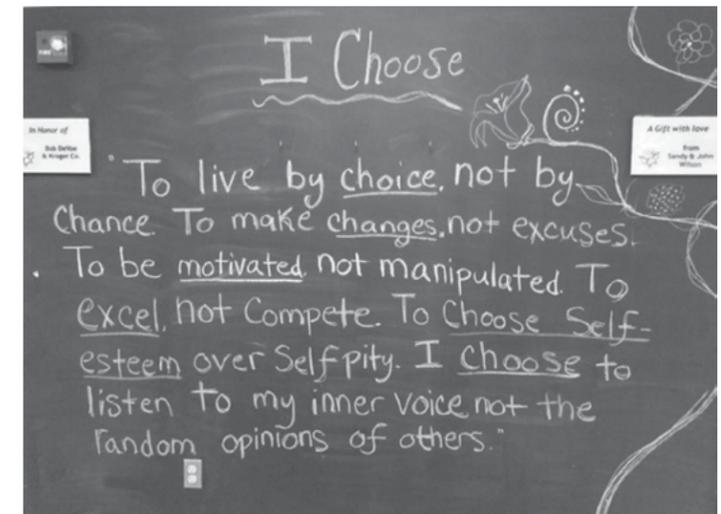
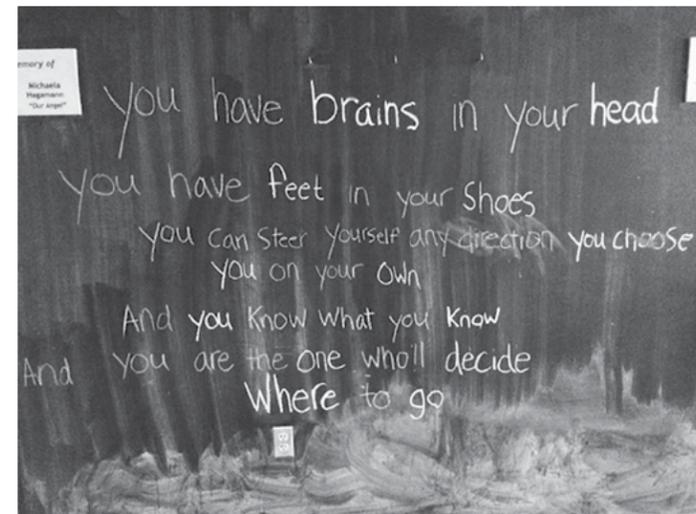
Faithfully yours,

*Andrea E. Seyka*  
 Andrea E. Seyka  
 Chief Executive Officer

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## POSITIVITY & STRENGTH

I feel very honored to be a part of the Children's Home treatment team. As the Program Manager in the Children's Home, I have the opportunity to see our kids and staff in action each day—the hard work that staff members put into our children and their treatment planning is remarkable. Even better is seeing the children put effort, positivity and strength into their own treatment at STVCC. The kids at STVCC participate in a multitude of clinical services and social programming. Treatment interventions in the Children's Home range from formalized therapy services to basic team building skills.

The children that live at STVCC are truly amazing kids. They bring talents and creativity to the Children's Home that can't be matched! The illustrations that were created on the chalkboards were done collaboratively between children and staff members.

STVCC attempts to try and provide 'normalizing' experiences for each child while placed in the Children's Home. Having staff members and children participate in activities together creates a more familial experience for the kids. The chalkboard artwork is only a snapshot of our kids' amazing talents.

As you read each of the chalkboard walls, you will see a theme of positivity and strength through each of the illustrations. While the children may be experiencing hurt and vulnerability at the Children's Home based on their past experiences, they are able to express themes of hope and strength through their artwork ... it is an amazing testament to the resiliency and optimism that our children can carry with them ... even during tough situations.

Alysia Christy, LMSW  
 Program Manager

## MISSION

The mission of St. Vincent Catholic Charities is the work of the Catholic Church, to share the love of Christ by performing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

## VISION

The vision of STVCC is with faith in God and love for all we aspire to create a healthier community.

## VALUES

STVCC's Core Values:

- Compassion
- Service
- Faith
- Stewardship
- Integrity

# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHILDREN DON'T HAVE A SAFETY NET?



1 in 5 or more will become homeless after age 18

7 of 10 women will be pregnant by their 21st birthday

Fewer than 3% will earn a college degree by 25

Just half will be employed at 24

1 in 4 will be incarcerated within two years of leaving foster care



DATA FROM THE JIM CASEY FOUNDATION, 2012

## Guiding Principles for STVCC Child Welfare Programs and Workers

To ensure the **safety and welfare** of **CHILDREN** through the establishment of *safe, positive, strength-based relationships* with **FAMILIES** (biological, extended, foster, adoptive) based on *mutual respect, dignity, collaboration and teamwork*, and the **sincere belief that people can and do change when given opportunity to thrive.**

## DID YOU KNOW?

STVCC gives out dozens and dozens of teddy bears per year through various child-centered programs, including the children being served in our refugee resettlement program.

At a time in their life where everything is uncertain - a **soft friend to hug is a precious gift.**

**BUILDING REFUGEE AWARENESS YEAR-ROUND**

You may be familiar with World Refugee Awareness Week, the time every June that the Lansing community and St. Vincent Catholic Charities' dedicates to advocate for refugees and to celebrate the diversity they bring. The subject of refugees has received much attention over the past six months, leading to an outpouring of support from the local media and surrounding communities.

This past January we had the honor of hosting several elected officials at STVCC. They learned about what we do as mid-Michigan's only refugee resettlement agency. Tamara Silva, one of our staff members who originally came to the U.S. as a refugee from Cuba, told her story. She planned to travel by boat from Cuba to the United States and like so many others, she experienced difficulty on her voyage. She was rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard after almost a week on the choppy seas. Tamara recalls seeing "many rafts

found alone or with kids on them without parents. I'll never forget all the sharks swimming around and around the small boats and rafts."

In response to the tremendous support we've received over the past six months and the continuing requests for more information on how to help, we've created suggestions for ways your faith community can get involved. We call it Refugee Ministries. Examples include providing English classes; helping to furnish a refugee home by adopting a room; and providing higher education counseling.

Go to [stvcc.org/refugee-ministry](http://stvcc.org/refugee-ministry) for a full list of suggested Refugee Ministries.

This year we will celebrate World Refugee Awareness Week from June 18 to 24. It begins with our third annual **Welcoming the Stranger 5K Family Fun Run** on Saturday, June 18th at



Hawk Island Park at 9 a.m. The next day is Refugee Sunday, a day celebrated around the world to recognize refugees. World Refugee Sunday is an opportunity to join churches around the world in praying for refugees. Additional events hosted by area organizations are being planned throughout the week.

For updates on confirmed activities over the following months, please visit: [stvcc.org/WorldRefugeeAwarenessWeek](http://stvcc.org/WorldRefugeeAwarenessWeek)

**WELCOMING THE STRANGER 5K FAMILY FUN RUN**

**WHEN:**

Saturday, June 18

**LOCATION:**

Hawk Island Park  
1601 E. Cavanaugh St., Lansing

**PACKET PICKUP/ ONSITE REGISTRATION:**

7:30 AM

**RACE START TIME:**

9:00 AM

[www.stvcc.org/Welcoming-The-Stranger-5k](http://www.stvcc.org/Welcoming-The-Stranger-5k)



**THE BLESSING IS PLANNED**

St. Vincent Catholic Charities (STVCC) has been the beneficiary of a number of bequests or planned gifts; sometimes they are gifts we know about, sometimes not. The arrival of these gifts are always a blessing. When it comes to planned giving, the blessings seem to flow for everyone involved. The giver remembers us fondly and validates the work that we do for the least of our brothers. These gifts are always helpful and often come at times when we really need them. The blessings then flow to the family as we communicate the benefits of the gift and memorialize the giver with our lasting gratitude.

**How Mark and Julie Ankney Planned**

"My wife and I were praying on the final distribution of our estate. We were not blessed with children of our own but felt St. Vincent's could help other people's children in ways we were not able to ourselves. Estate gifts to St. Vincent's seemed the best way to help those children who often fall through the cracks."

It is always a good idea to make and communicate your plans for your estate. This allows your wishes to be addressed

both by your family and, if you choose, the non-profits you wish to support. Gifts made through an individual's estate are critical to the work accomplished by non-profits. Here at STVCC we encourage these gifts because they help secure the future for the children and families we serve.

Here are some options for supporting STVCC through your estate plan:

- Through your will or living trust
- By designating STVCC as the beneficiary of retirement plan assets
- By naming STVCC as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy

Whatever you decide, we are here to help you with your plans for bestowing blessings. If you should have any questions, or would like information on how to get started, I would welcome your call. Please know that there is no obligation. We are happy you are thinking about us!

Cindy Herfindahl, Director of Development (517) 323-4734 Ext. 1201. To learn more, consult item #4 on our donate page, or to donate online go to [stvcc.org/donating](http://stvcc.org/donating)

**WE'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE YOU TO JOSH LOWN, THE NEW VOLUNTEER, OUTREACH AND TRAINING COORDINATOR AT THE CHILDREN'S HOME**



Josh has been working at the Children's Home for nearly four years, the past three and a half as a Youth Advocate. In his prior position, Josh first worked primarily with teenage boys, and then transitioned to the Comprehensive Clinical Assessment Program (CCAP).

Josh shared that since he started at the Children's Home, his "goals have always been to be the best person I can be for the children at the Children's Home, and to hopefully plant some seeds of confidence and self-esteem

so that they realize that they are more than whatever story they enter the Children's Home with. While I don't get to see and help the kids directly as

often, I have the wonderful opportunity to expand not only the community's impact on our children, but also our children's impact on the community as a whole. I aim to work hard at bursting any bubble that exists between us and the outside community, and to help dispel any misperceptions about children who face complex trauma. So far, we have had a lot of cool people in the community reach out and have given our kids some unique opportunities, and I plan to continue that momentum for as long as I can."

Josh is originally from Grand Haven, MI, and currently resides in Lansing. Josh graduated from Michigan State University with a B.S. in Psychology in 2012.

**SEWING UNITING THOSE FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE**



One of the unique programs and collaborations that exists at St. Vincent Catholic Charities is a partnership between STVCC Counseling Services and the Refugee Development Center (RDC), an organization located in Lansing that partners with our Refugee Services program. Together our Counseling program and the RDC offer the Sewing Circle, a therapeutic support group for refugees.

Activities like sewing have been proven to assist with trauma recovery, as the

support that the women offer one another helps them feel less isolated and more empowered to rebuild their lives. Transitioning to a new country is hard enough, but women who may be requested to stay home to care for children or elderly relatives often find it more difficult to learn a new culture and set of norms. The Sewing Circle provides that opportunity to get out of the house and share the difficulties that they may be experiencing.

The program has been in existence for over 15 years, serving hundreds of women from across the globe during that time-frame. In order to continue this amazing service, the Sewing Circle actively seeks the assistance from those in the community for donations of fabric, crochet hooks, simple yarn, and reading glasses. Gift certificates to Gall Sewing are also beneficial to assist with machine maintenance.

If you'd like to make a donation, please contact Counseling Office Coordinator Jessica Jones at [jjones2@stvcc.org](mailto:jjones2@stvcc.org) or at (517) 323-4734 Ext. 1713.



# A MESSAGE TO OUR FRIENDS

Online  
[www.STVCC.org](http://www.STVCC.org)  
Convenient  
Safe and Secure  
**SHARE**



When you **LIKE** our Fan Page and share our posts, you help us spread the good news about **STVCC**.

SAVE THE DATE!



LIFE IS A PICNIC  
WHEN YOU ARE SAFE, SECURE AND LOVED.

**WHEN**

WEDNESDAY, MAY 25TH

5:30 PM - 7:30 PM

**WHERE**

THE STVCC CAMPUS BEHIND  
THE CHILDREN'S HOME



THIS EVENT IS BY INVITATION ONLY

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HE CALLED ME WOW!



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