

SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES ILLINOIS

every child deserves a HOME

Opening doors

IN THE AUBURN GRESHAM COMMUNITY

The new Community Center is the heart of SOS Chicago Village.

The corner of 76th and Parnell on Chicago's South Side has a fresh, new look with the recently completed Community Center and Administrative Building. The location serves as a gateway to SOS Chicago Village and a vital resource for the surrounding Auburn Gresham neighborhood.

Designed by Chicago's innovative Studio Gang Architects, the glass, steel, and concrete building creates spaces for learning and growth. The design team utilized the largest amount of available land to create a modern yet practical design that complements the Village and provides easy access for residents and visitors. The exterior is eye-catching, with windows punctuating the dynamic entry and bands of color highlighting the angular concrete walls.

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OUR MISSION

at SOS Children's Villages Illinois is to build families — to provide a stable home in a supportive community environment designed to help children in need grow into caring, productive, and self-reliant adults.

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Vanessa White, Child Welfare Specialist

Child Welfare Specialist Vanessa White is a navigator. She's a builder. She's a storyteller. And she loves her job.

As a caseworker for SOS Children's Villages Illinois, Vanessa spends countless hours navigating the Cook County Juvenile Court system to find the best care possible for SOS children and families. "It gives me great satisfaction when I help children and families build a better life," she said. "I truly desire to help families rewrite the story of their lives."

Her enormous dedication, spirit, and grace under pressure have brought her praise from SOS staff and parents, as well as numerous commendations from Juvenile Court judges. But she's quick to credit others with contributing to her success. "I have been involved in foster care for well over a decade. I have done thousands of home visits, and this is the best agency I have ever worked for," she added. "SOS foster parents represent what foster care should look like for the future." 🌟

SOMEONE YOU SHOULD KNOW

by SOS CEO
Tim McCormick



LEARNING For Life

"I had no one to read to me before I came here." These words were spoken by a young child who had moved into an SOS Children's Village. She was

eager to show me not only her new SOS home and its array of books, but also the people who would read to her.

From this brief encounter, I realized again that, before coming to the Village, foster children are missing some of the simple and common elements of living many of us take for granted. I am proud that we have parents and volunteers who are committed to read, engage, and support ongoing learning for children who too easily fall through the academic cracks of our communities and institutions.

Children coming to SOS Children's Villages often have been shortchanged both in formal academic learning and in the social and other basic life skills they'll need to become self-reliant adults. Our Villages help these children develop a new language of trust, hope, and the capacity to communicate with others on important life issues. SOS offers children new ways to deal with the anger, frustration, and pain that have filled so many of their innocent lives. Learning how to live with others in an intentional community that affirms our inherent dignity and supports our right to maximize our potential is a powerful lesson for us all. But the lesson is not easy.

Learning takes persistence; it takes the ability to break out of old habits and see yourself as a new person with unlimited potential. Often, we must move

children beyond their past experiences to see new horizons. Lifelong learning is attitudinal; it is a mindset to be open, both to what we know already and to what we can know. Mahatma Gandhi encouraged us to "Learn as if you were going to live forever." The quest for knowledge is truly a lifelong journey. One of the most vital lessons we can offer our children is the importance of striving to know and investing ourselves in learning.

For children at SOS Children's Villages, learning means moving beyond their fears of the unknown. It means discovering so many new and wonderful elements of the world around them through unearthing who they are. Most of all, learning takes the care and commitment of someone to light the way: the foster mom who encourages a child to read and discover a new vocabulary of love and concern for others, or the committed adult who guides a young life to intellectual and personal enrichment through the discovery of a love of service to others. These critical life lessons ultimately make us free to grow and become who we are.

Having no one to read to you is a horrible situation. Having a Village of committed individuals, parents, children, volunteers, and community leadership is a great asset. I hope as you read about some of the lifelong learning experiences in our wonderful organization, you, too, will feel the pride that together we are making a difference for every child, every day. 🌱

VILLAGE VOICES:

What I learned over the summer

"I learned that it is great to be able to sleep late during the summer."
- JIMMY, 13

"I learned it's fun visiting the Shedd Aquarium and seeing all the strange-looking fish."
- SABRINA, 11

"Summer is a good opportunity to look for a job and earn money."
- LASHAYE, AGE 16

"I learned about what it means to be an entrepreneur during the camp I attended at Wheaton College."
- DEAMBRESE, 17

"During my summer research apprenticeship program at the University of Illinois, I found out technology is a good profession to consider."
- JUAN, 17

"This summer I learned about responsibility and how to be more independent. I will be attending college this fall. I needed to plan my schedule and be responsible for getting my paperwork ready. I also have been learning how to cook so I can take care of myself when I'm on my own."
- TAISHA, 18



INTERNATIONAL UPDATE



In The Gambia, as in many other African countries, girls are often kept at home to help with daily chores or are taken out of school to be married. Even though the government is striving to promote and support education for girls, early marriage is still not forbidden by the law. The only way to bring about change is to increase awareness of this issue.

To highlight the right of Gambian girls to educational opportunities, 19-year-old Ndey from SOS Hermann Gmeiner School Bakoteh has written this poem.

*Can't I pound flour after school?
Can't I cook after school?
Can't I sell after school?*

*I can launder after school
I can sweep after school
I can fetch water after school*

*Say "yes," Mama; let me go to school!
Am I really no longer a child?
I am fourteen years old!
Marriage can wait for me, I'm sure.*

*Oh Mama, please don't take me out of school.
Don't take my brother
And leave me behind,
I want to read and write like him.*

*Oh Mama, please don't leave me behind,
I want to be a teacher!
I want to be a doctor!
I want to be an engineer and a pilot too!*

Mama, oh Mama! Please take me back to school!

For more information about how SOS Children's Villages International empowers women and children for a better future, visit www.sos-childrensvillages.org.



Inside and out, the new Community Center is concrete evidence that SOS Children's Villages Illinois cares about making a difference in the lives of children, families, and the larger community.

What I've Learned as a Parent

I have been a parent for 13 years at SOS Children's Village and, take it from me, parenting doesn't get easier. I never stop worrying no matter how old they are or how long they've been on their own. Being a parent doesn't end; it just changes and evolves as you go along. And we as parents need to change and evolve with our children, learn from our own mistakes so we can teach them to learn from their own mistakes. Say we're sorry when we're wrong so they learn to say "sorry" when they're wrong. Have strong work ethics and morals, so they learn to have strong work ethics and morals. Love them forever and always pray for help and guidance.

— SANDRA

SOS foster parents know — and learn anew each day — the joys, challenges, frustrations, and rewards of helping children grow into healthy, independent adults. These are some of the lessons they've learned.

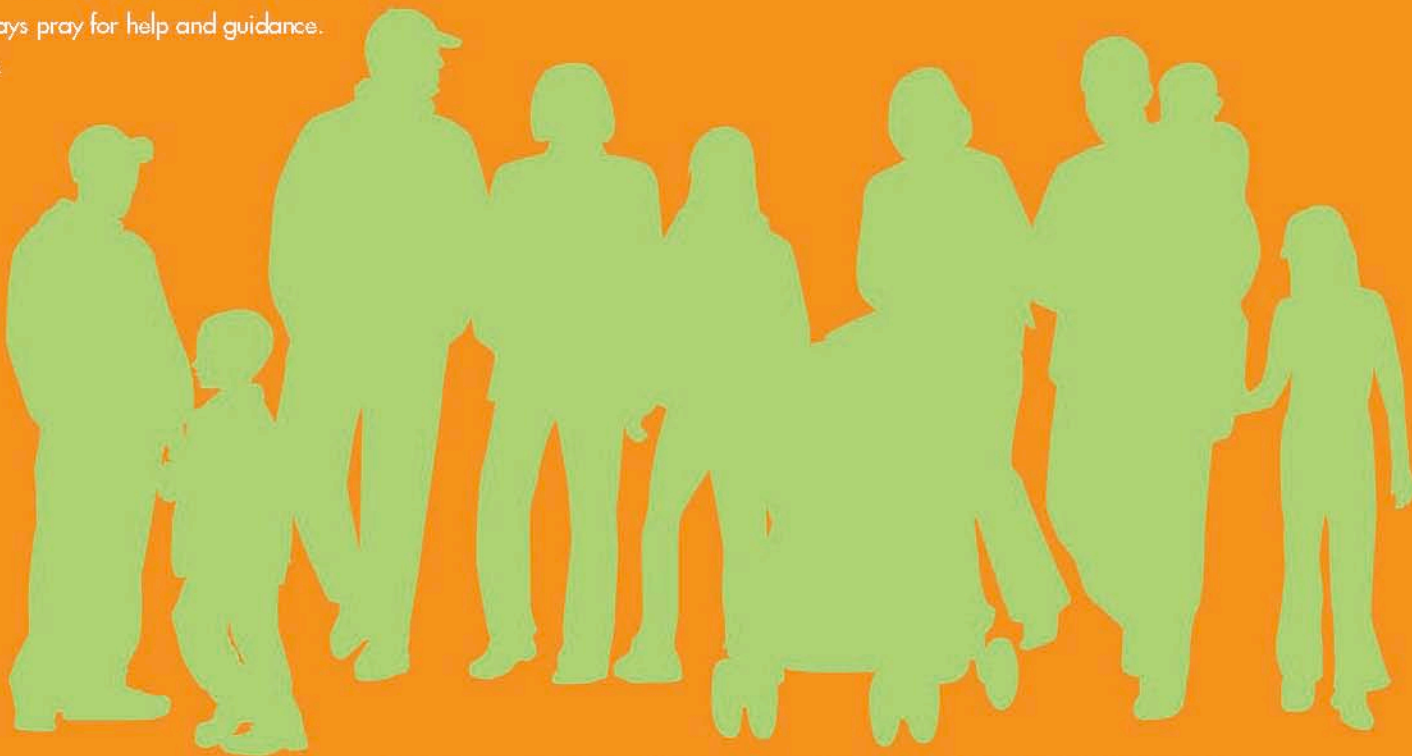
As a parent, the biggest thing I've learned is to be more patient. I have developed better listening skills. I can usually tell whether my children are telling the truth. During our time together, I've discovered more about my kids. I've come to know each child as an individual. I've seen their strengths and weaknesses. I've discovered that being a parent is an ongoing learning experience. It's like a good marriage — you need to work at it.

— DARLENE

A few things that I have learned as a parent:

- Teenagers are their own species.
- Children love to point out when you have made a mistake.
- Find time for yourself and enjoy it.
- Seek support from friends, family, other parents. When times get rough you need someone else to talk to besides children.
- Never underestimate your children; they will surprise you each and every time.

— TERICA



Foster parents are the backbone of SOS Children's Villages Illinois. We invite you to explore the exciting possibility of joining this lively, life-affirming group. To learn more about what it takes, contact Foster Parent Enrichment Coordinator Denise Hines at 312-388-0268.



new

Visit the SOS Web Site

Check out the newly redesigned www.sosillinois.org Web site for information on SOS Villages, programs, success stories, children's artwork, photos, foster parent information, and much, much, more.



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