



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
ILLINOIS

SOS ILLINOIS NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2020

TAKING THE NEXT **STEP**

**COPING WITH COVID-19:
INSIDE OUR VILLAGES OF HOPE**

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**EXTENDED FAMILY:
STEPPING UP AND
STAYING CONNECTED
EVEN AT A
DISTANCE**

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We'll make sure you're on the list!

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LOOKING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE
FOR AN ORGANIZATION CREATING
A BETTER TOMORROW FOR
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES?
VISIT US AT SOSILLINOIS.ORG
TO MAKE A GIFT.

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CEO Message

Many spoke these words to us as small children just beginning to walk, “go ahead . . . take the next step . . . you can do it.” Later in life, either the same people or others told us once again to take the next step, move forward in a personal relationship, explore a professional career opportunity, or investigate other aspects of our lives, even when we felt unsure.

Today, we are in extraordinarily challenging times of uncertainty, fear, and insecurity. A worldwide virus challenges us to care for others by maintaining distance and wearing protective face coverings. SOS Illinois has witnessed many of the communities in which we serve suffer from this pandemic in disproportionate numbers.

“Today, we can take the next step for the children in our care everywhere.”

As we continue to provide much needed services, we see the impact of COVID-19 leaving thousands upon thousands sick and millions unemployed; and most recently we have sadly seen once again the visible signs of hatred, division, and racism that permeates our society.

So, amid all this, what must we do? The options are simple. We can stand paralyzed in fear and remain in the shadows of uncertainty; Or we can collectively stand and find the courage to take that next step.

As you read this newsletter, I invite you to see how we as an organization have worked to instill hope during an unprecedented time, build confidence in our services as we anticipate our next turn, and remind our children



SOS Illinois Foster Parent, Liz Hope, smiles with one of her children in a still from the broadcast.

Amid the global pandemic, SOS Children’s Villages Illinois has been recognized for our prevailing hope.

ABC News Producer, Tonya Simpson, first contacted SOS Illinois in March, as she was creating a digital write-up for ABC News’ website on the impact of COVID-19 on foster care custody hearings and reunification goals. We then connected her with Foster Parent Elizabeth Hope (“Ms. Hope”) to hear a first-hand account of supporting children during this time.

“I couldn’t believe how positive and optimistic [Liz] sounded in the midst of a pandemic and I was impressed and inspired by her story,” Tonya shared.

In May, ABC News’s Kyra Phillips interviewed Ms. Hope about the creative

and families that we are still one united Village.

I thank each of you for all you give us and how you inspire SOS Illinois to keep moving forward.

Today, we can take the next step for the children in our care and for all children in foster care everywhere...so later, they can teach others to trust again, rise together, and take the next step.

ways she is keeping the children in her home safe, educated, and positive during COVID-19.

As seen in the broadcast, Ms. Hope found accessible, meaningful ways to help explain the pandemic to the children in her home, such as watching and discussing the film *Outbreak*, reminders on handwashing and mask-wearing, and discussing the parts of social distancing that feel most difficult. By talking about the health crisis in age-appropriate ways, Ms. Hope is able to create an environment where children feel supported in their concerns and encouraged to discuss fears.

SOS Illinois Children Embody the Stars They Are

The impacts of coverage like the broadcast by ABC News not only helps create positive media attention around foster care, but shines a light on the children affected.

For the children in Ms. Hope’s home, the story created more than attention: it created feelings of pride.

“The children loved the story; and liked that their story was being told,” Ms. Hope shared with our team. “Even though their faces were blurred, they think they are newfound celebrities.”

FAMILY MATTERS: SAFETY, EDUCATION, AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



As the State of Illinois transitions to the next phase of reopening the state, SOS Illinois continues to assess our changing course of action. Despite the many unknown factors still facing us as a nonprofit serving communities hit hardest by current events, there is much assurance in the belief that we must first and foremost act upon the goodness that is ours.

We will continue to heal, teach, and strengthen children, as well as guide them to move beyond fears and uncertainty. By leading each child to take these much-needed steps, we show them they can trust in the power of the human spirit and in authentic, unconditional, and powerful love.

Out of such love for others, we will be implementing new protocols on our journey to provide more services in each of our Villages. During the next few months, we will have a strategic focus on **safety, education, and behavioral health** at our Villages and sites. In doing so, we believe we can move forward with comfort and optimism for what is to come.

Safety

As we reopen administrative sites, we are taking precautionary measures by putting into place additional protocols. These actions will help us ensure good sanitation practices, social distancing, protective face coverings, and self-monitoring are in place. We are adding these steps in order to maximize the health and well-being of our children and families, Foster Parents and staff, as well as birth parents and visitors.

Education

As Foster Parents took on the additional roles related to our children's virtual education, certain factors, such as the age of the children and whether they could be self-directed, access to a quality computer, as well as having good internet became critical issues to monitor. We were extremely fortunate to have had Win Biernacki, a longtime SOS Illinois supporter, an educator, and wife of SOS Illinois Board Member and Former Board President, Don Biernacki,

graciously offer video segments for Foster Parents to answer questions regarding online education. We are looking to build upon this series of resources by hiring a consultant whose focus will be writing and implementing an educational plan that will support every age and level of learning at our Villages should e-learning continue.

Behavioral Health

The level of uncertainty experienced by all of us was challenging and in many ways trauma, which is all too often part of what occurs for children entering the foster care system. Yet, uncertainty, fear, and brokenness can be a source of hope. On weekly calls between senior leadership and Foster Parents at each site, our discussions quickly moved beyond fear to our collective notion of hope in each other. Already, staff at SOS Illinois have established outlets for different age groups in order to address some of these behavioral health needs. Group sessions via Zoom are taking place, and resources are being provided to help Foster Parents begin conversations that deal with larger, complex issues related to events taking place in our city and around our country.

SOS Illinois' Next Steps

Chief Operating Officer, Delphine Rankin, shared this reflection in a recent team meeting that summarizes the efforts of the Village. "I am proud and grateful we have been able to react to so many challenges and faced incredible change without hesitation as a result of the health crisis. No one blamed anyone, and no one faltered. Our Villages pulled together, and with a team effort rallied through this unprecedented time." Using that same approach, we will now face the next challenges, knowing that at the core of all things, the safety and well-being of the children in our care is the very foundation of our model of care.

UPDATE ON THE ROOSEVELT SQUARE COMMUNITY CENTER

When March 2020 began, we quickly realized we had been faced with an unprecedented situation like never before in our organization's history. Fortunate for SOS Illinois, just as our work was deemed an essential service, so too was construction work. This meant that as residents of Illinois were asked to "stay at home," our incredible construction crew kept at it and, as a result, has been able to make immense progress on the Roosevelt Community Center.

Designed by architect Juan Moreno and JGMA with construction led by Lendlease, this Center is located at 13th Street and Blue Island Avenue in the Roosevelt Square neighborhood of Chicago. Once opened, the Center will serve over 5,000 individuals and families from the Roosevelt Square Village and surrounding communities through services for children and adults alike, including a full teaching Culinary Kitchen.



Sustainable cross laminated timber and Glulam columns being unwrapped.

Over the first two quarters, final stages of cutting and capping existing water lines occurred, Glulam columns and beams were installed, roofing panels made from cross-laminated timber were set in place, and HVAC duct work and fire suppression systems were installed.

Additionally, exterior framing and metal panels, as well as windows for the entire building have been framed and installed; thus, the structure is now fully enclosed. The immense work that has been completed has set the Roosevelt Community Center right on target for the center's completion and opening in late September 2020. A special thanks to the leadership of Lendlease for keeping use on track.

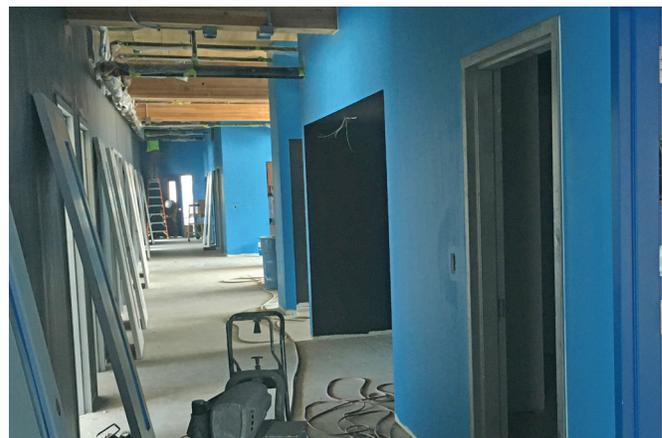


External construction as of June 2020.

Sustainability Measures

The architectural planning of the Center, inspired by generous donations, includes the use of eco-friendly materials, like cross-laminated timber and Glulam columns and beams, as well as sustainable and renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, energy efficient appliances, and light fixtures. The inclusion of an urban garden, both further promote the organization's commitment to responsible development.

These environmentally conscious features reflect both our focus on building sustainable futures for our children and families, as well as our desire to help create a sustainable future for our city at-large. Additionally, this center will set a new standard for sustainable architecture and construction in the City of Chicago as the first public building fully constructed from mass timber - a renewable resource and engineered wood. For more details like these and to get the most recent construction updates, visit the SOS Illinois website to see the videos and monthly blog regarding the Center's progress.



Internal construction as of June 2020.

EXTENDED FAMILY: STEPPING UP & STAYING CONNECTED EVEN AT A DISTANCE



A child at SOS Illinois stops for a loving pose with groceries delivered by Swissôtel Chicago

Over the course of three short months, SOS Children's Villages Illinois has faced myriad new and unexpected challenges as an organization caring for at-risk youth and children in foster care. As the "stay at home" order was put in place due to COVID-19, we were grateful our services were deemed essential; and therefore, continued without interruption. However, the very idea of going full speed ahead, when most of the population of Illinois was asked to shelter in place, easily could have seemed an overwhelming task.

As an organization with a 30-year history of having faced both challenges and successes, we were thankful we did not have to confront this uncertainty alone. SOS Illinois rose to the occasion; and we did this with the help of our amazing friends. At every hurdle, we were able to step up to our tests. Your affirmative and resounding support reminded us that although we were social distancing and could not touch hands, you showed you could still touch hearts. For your outpouring of encouragement, we are so thankful that you stayed connected to us during these unprecedented times. We are pleased to be able to share a few highlights:

Feeding our Families with #FeedItForward

The Lavin Family Foundation, known for its innovative philanthropy, committed over 2 million dollars to support impacted local charities and restaurants with the #FeedItForward Initiative.

This initiative aimed to provide meals to those in need, while financially helping local restaurants stay in business. The response to the delivered meals from families at all three of our Villages has been overwhelming. Children and Foster Parents alike are grateful to for the nights when family meals are delivered through the #FeedItForward initiative, and the only work required is setting the table. So many thanks to the Lavin Family Foundation. With their generous support, our families will enjoy delivered meals through the end of August.

Virtual Story Hour and Grocery Delivery

Longtime friend and supporter, Swissôtel Chicago, recently partnered with Big City Readers to provide an educational and entertaining opportunity for families right from the safety of their own homes. Through a Virtual Story Hour, nearly a hundred participants from around the country gathered for the free, Zoom-based event. As a give-back initiative, participants were asked to consider making a donation in support of the children in foster care served at SOS Illinois, which would be matched up to \$5,000 by Swissôtel Chicago. We are grateful for this special treat for our families, as well as this creative approach towards supporting our programs. Swissôtel Chicago also supported our Villages during this time with the wonderful gesture of delivering groceries for each of our homes. This has been most helpful during a time when a simple trip to the grocery store could not be completed.

E-Learning Made Easy with the Gift of Chrome

Almost one year ago in May, the #Voices4FosterCare Campaign, was kicked off by Academy Award winning actor Christian Bale, who invited Dining & Conversation participants to join us in raising a collective voice for foster care. Christian and other celebrity guests helped us share our mission with over a half million people through social media, news coverage, and more. The support and care from Christian and Sibi Bale continues year after year. In early April, as children and parents across the state, nation, and world scrambled to readjust to a new classroom online, our organization quickly understood more computers were needed to help our children. The Bales supported our homes and provided a new Chromebook in each household to ensure our children could meet the demands of e-learning. We are extremely appreciative of this gift as we see that virtual learning will continue to be a part of our children's lives.

We are incredibly grateful to all our donors, and would like to specifically thank: Christian and Sibi Bale; Swissôtel Chicago; Bohne Foundation; T-Mobile; Chicago Blackhawks; Lochner;

ConAgra Foods; CC's Wish List/ Enchanted Backpack; Lavin Family Foundation; BorgWarner; Atlas Wealth Management; Headwaters Relief Organization; Win Biernacki and Rama Dandamudi M.D.

Offering Gratitude to our Donors and Supporters

Under normal conditions, caring for six children in foster care at one time takes a bounty of resources and supplies, including food and formula, diapers and wipes, medications, cleaning and home goods, and more. During this crucial time, those needs were and continue to be even greater. Thank you to the many who supported with a gift that helped ensure that our Foster Parents had and will continue to have the resources and supplies they need to keep their Village homes safe and healthy. There were so many stories of individuals and organizations working with us to ensure our children were safe. **Thank you, once again, as you, our extended family, helped us meet the most unprecedented challenges, and step up to ensure the safety of our entire organization.**



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SOS CHILDREN'S
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Black Lives Matter.

"The brutality of systemic racism that has plagued this nation has once again been revealed. Those in power cannot take the lives of others without righteous indignation and protest. To remain silent and allow such acts of hatred and division will only make us less as a people and a nation. Our voices must be strong and united. Now more than ever, we as a Village must reflect on how we will speak and act at this time."

SOS Children's Villages Illinois stands in support of Black children, families, and communities.

read the full message from our CEO at sosillinois.org/connect

