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 on 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.

3/5/2020