



# BEING THERE

SPRING 2024

NEWS FROM LSS OF SOUTH DAKOTA

SOUTH DAKOTA  CARES

DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT DURING  
OUR ANNUAL WEEK OF GIVING  
**APRIL 21-27**

## A STORY OF UNEXPECTED CHANGE



Vicki's story started in a therapy session at LSS more than three decades ago. Today, you can join Vicki in making a donation to help others.

Throughout this newsletter you will see stories of impact highlighted during South Dakota CARES, our day of giving. Your donation now can be matched. Make a gift early to honor Vicki and her family's journey to a healthier, happier life.

Thirty-two years ago, Vicki Breeman received counseling services at LSS. Her life was spiraling. "It was crumbling all around me. I needed help," she said.

Back then, Vicki was a single mom with three children and battling mental health struggles, addiction, legal issues and financial strain. "I landed in the right place. LSS changed my life in ways that were unexpected."

During one of her counseling sessions, "My therapist said a couple wanted to meet me. They had sadly lost a little girl to a sudden illness and in her memory, they wanted to do something to help someone else." The couple donated \$600 to help Vicki get back on track.

She has never forgotten their kindness. "Everything was different after that."

Vicki sought help for alcohol addiction, worked through her legal issues, continued therapy and got back on track financially.

Today, Vicki and her husband enjoy time with their kids and grandkids. "I realize how blessed we are and incredibly grateful for everything. I just started thinking about what had happened to me back then. I need to do what I can to help someone else. Maybe it'll make a difference in their life."

Vicki shares her story and a donation with hopes to help someone who may be in a similar circumstance as she was all those years ago. "I hope to show that there's hope to heal, to be well, and to be successful."

Through her own actions, Vicki may have answered the question she had thirty-two years ago. "Why would they do that?" She may never know the details but now she has a better understanding as to why someone reached out to help her all those years ago.



## TOGETHER WE CAN.

A WORD FROM REBECCA

**Last spring, you showed us that together, we are powerful as a community.**

During our 2023 South Dakota CARES fundraising drive, more than 300 individuals came together to donate over \$323,000 in support of making our vision a reality—that all people in South Dakota will be healthy, safe and accepted.

As we ramp up for another successful year at LSS, I find myself reminiscing on our 104-year history and your role in helping make it all happen. I am so grateful for your continued support and belief in our mission. I know that together, we can truly create positive change for children and families in South Dakota.

As you flip through to read stories of how your donations helped someone in need, consider joining us once again for our day of giving, South Dakota CARES. Visit [SouthDakotaCARES.org](https://SouthDakotaCARES.org) to read more stories and learn about your impact. This is our biggest fundraising event of the year and thanks to generous donors, your gift will be matched!

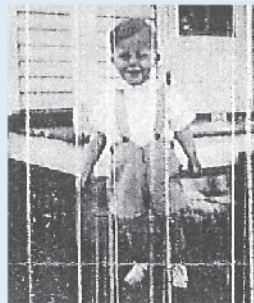
Thank you for your continued support. We couldn't do this without you.

YOUR DONATION  
**MATCHED**

# A FAMILY'S STORY 80 YEARS

Valentine's Day 1943—a young woman met and fell in love with an army serviceman, and she became pregnant. Before they could marry, he was shipped overseas to serve in World War II. She insisted she would parent her baby but her parents did not support her. According to the records, she decided "she would be doing him an injustice trying to raise him alone."

Unsure of her future, she walked through the doors of the LSS House of Mercy, a home for women experiencing unintended pregnancies and the first of many LSS services.



"I always knew I was adopted," said Craig Kittelson, now 80 years. "I remember my mother saying that you're special, you were a chosen child. In fact, I even had a book she'd read to me at bedtime, *The Chosen Baby*."

Craig had a typical childhood, attended college, and married after his college graduation in 1965.

"After several years of trying to have children with no success, we finally tested for infertility and found we would not be able to conceive." He remembers this news was hard to cope with, but he and his wife quickly, and almost automatically, turned to adoption.

## STARTING A FAMILY

It was an easy decision for Craig and his wife to choose LSS as the organization where they would apply to adopt a child. Anticipating a six to twelve month wait for a child, Craig remembers feeling like LSS really wanted to ensure that this was going to be the right placement, not just a placement. They were surprised when they got the call about a baby boy only two months later.

He remembers making a list of names, which was narrowed down to two, on their drive to Sioux Falls from northeast South Dakota. There was the natural joy and excitement at the thought of bringing a baby into their home, but Craig also remembers feeling "What are we getting ourselves into?"

When the couple saw their baby for the first time, they agreed his name would be Brian.

"If adoption had not been available and therefore we had never had children, my life would have been, in some ways, simpler, but in more important ways emptier," Craig reflects. "I've learned as much from my kids as they've learned from me. I learned to hug from my kids. You know, the spontaneous hugs or saying 'I love you' were not part of how I was raised."



# IN THE MAKING

## GRATITUDE

### RECONNECTING

Brian had an innate desire to know more about his birth family and where he came from. His interest peaked during graduate school. Brian found himself back at the place where his adoption story started. He learned that LSS would be able to do a search for his birth mother and communicate with her on his behalf. The LSS social worker encouraged Brian to write his birth mother a letter telling her about his life and explaining why he wanted to find her.

Brian's birth mother had also been longing to reconnect: "Throughout my life, I held my son in my heart, as a piece of me was missing. I prayed that someday we would reconnect. There was not a day that went by that I didn't think about him." She was overjoyed to learn about Brian's desire to contact her. She agreed and eagerly waited.

Brian was reunited with his birth mother. "It was definitely one of the best days of my life," he said. Since their reunion, Brian, his birth mom and their extended families have maintained close relationships.

"Finding my birth family and later working with LSS to find my original birth and adoption records has helped me find myself essentially. All these pieces helped me learn about who I am."

Brian continues, "The LSS social workers that helped me find my birth family in the 90s had a huge impact on my life, I'm indebted to them forever. Their work is so important. And the same with the social worker who I've been visiting with this past year. I can't even explain the impact that she's had on me."

**As Brian discovered, adoption services at LSS go far beyond the birth and placement of a child. LSS offers a range of services extending across a lifetime—from a pregnant woman discovering her options, to a child finding a loving family, and to an adult like Brian finding his birth family as well as the documents that filled in the gap that had remained in the early days of his life story.**

**Your donation makes stories like Craig and Brian's happen every day. Make a gift today and it will be matched thanks to a generous donor.**

"Their work is so important. I can't even explain the impact that they've had on me." — Brian

Starting when Brian was in college, Craig and Brian spend one week each year together, just the two of them, hiking, backpacking, and canoeing.



"When I look back on pictures, I don't always remember the places, but I remember how I felt—happy." — Craig



healthy  
safe  
accepted



Because of your support

## DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT

### Building Successful Families Match up to \$10,000

Double your impact with a gift to LSS Adoption & Pregnancy Counseling and support adoptive and birth parents in their journey to creating a family. Every dollar, up to \$10,000 is matched and will provide birth parent counseling, educational meetings and adoption workshops to equip parents with all of the information they need to make the best decision for themselves and their children.

### Enhancing Access to Mental Healthcare Match up to \$25,000

Every dollar, up to \$25,000, is matched! You can help reduce barriers to mental healthcare for children, families and individuals with a donation today. Your gift to support LSS Behavioral Health Services will ensure vital and affordable care is available to all who need it—in-school, at-home, in-office and virtually.

### Helping Children in Foster Care Challenge 25 donors = \$25,000

Your donation to LSS Foster Care Services creates safe and stable homes for children waiting for a family. 25 donors will unlock \$25,000 to recruit, train and license new foster families. Help expand our ability to offer families to children across the state today!

### Offering Cutting Edge Care Challenge 50 donors = \$25,000

Are you up for the challenge? 50 donors will unlock \$25,000 to enhance specialized, trauma-informed and evidence-based education and training for LSS staff. Your donation helps LSS stay on the cutting edge of new, proven treatment methods that help meet the needs of children, families and communities in South Dakota.



### YOUR SUPPORT BECOMES THEIR SUCCESS STORY—

Read more stories of change.  
See how you can increase the  
impact of your gift.

[SouthDakotaCARES.org](http://SouthDakotaCARES.org)

## YES, I WANT MY DONATION TO BE MATCHED!

### MY GIFT OF

- \$2,500       \$250  
 \$1,000       \$100  
 \$500       \_\_\_\_\_

Your gift of any amount would be greatly appreciated.

### DOUBLE THE IMPACT OF YOUR GIFT BY GIVING TO AN AREA WHERE YOUR DOLLAR IS MATCHED.

- Building Successful Families Match  
 Enhancing Access to Mental Healthcare Match  
 Helping Children in Foster Care Challenge  
 Offering Cutting Edge Care Challenge  
 Put my gift where it is needed most!

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After submitting your information for processing, we do not retain a paper copy of your credit card number.

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## Overcoming Childhood Trauma

# THIS MAY HAVE SAVED MY LIFE

"If I don't do this, I'll never be able to move on and live my life free." Lisa reminded herself as she arrived at LSS Behavioral Health in Rapid City. She took a deep breath. She was ready.

When Lisa stepped into her therapist's office, she had two goals—find a way to heal from the past and reduce anxiety to move forward.

At 56, Lisa knew she needed to deal with the abuse experienced when she was young. She spent decades trying to avoid the past but it had a way of bubbling to the surface when she least expected it. "I can no longer quiet the pain and stop the memories from coming back," were among the first words she said to her therapist, Rachel Shepherd, Director of LSS Behavioral Health Services.

After a few sessions, Rachel knew EMDR, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, would likely help Lisa heal. EMDR is a newer, evidence-based therapy that can help process traumatic memories to alleviate stress and anxiety.

"Lisa was nervous about facing her emotions surrounding her childhood, but she was eager to feel and to be better. Together we talked about what might happen in her brain and body," says Rachel. "I explained that the things she experienced in her childhood and the emotional pain she feels now are real and sometimes need different techniques to help ourselves let go of them."

EMDR works to recount traumatic memories and experiences in incremental doses while helping the person maintain focus on a particular stimulus such as handheld buzzers or lights that trigger bilateral stimulation and rapid eye movement. "The vibration of the buzzer or the lights, keep the individual grounded in their current environment—sitting in the room with me in that moment and assuring them that they are safe," explains Rachel.

LSS therapists are trained in EMDR as a response to increases in reported suicide rates in South Dakota. This technique is effective in helping reduce post-traumatic stress disorder and other trauma-based symptoms. "Reaching and processing trauma on a deeper level is important to the long-term success for people who carry the burden of difficult past experiences," Rachel explains.

After a few sessions using EMDR, Lisa was able to verbally process the abuse from her childhood which she struggled to do for many years.

"There were tears which is expected. As we moved through the exercise, Lisa's breaths grew slower and deeper. She was able to maintain control, relax and feel what she needed to feel," Rachel continues. "This process is really tough. I was amazed by Lisa's resilience. I don't think I had ever seen such determination in this stage of the therapeutic process prior to this moment."

**"It's a beautiful thing to witness somebody break free from the impact of their trauma and feel better," says Rachel. "This experience with Lisa was a big 'a-ha' moment about the effectiveness of EMDR and the importance of staying on the cutting edge of technology and techniques."**

At the final session, Lisa felt at peace with her past. "I will never justify the acts of what happened to me, but I no longer feel like they are in control or define who I am," she explained. "Thank you for everything you have done. I think this may have saved my life."

**The Cutting Edge Care fund helps make moments like this possible. Your gift will help provide training to LSS staff in new, effective, evidence-based techniques so they have the tools to best serve individuals and families as they work to heal. Plus, during South Dakota CARES your gift is matched, giving you a chance to double your impact.**

YOUR DONATION  
**MATCHED**

### **Ku's first days of life were difficult.**

He was born three months early and spent the next month in the NICU. His future was unknown—until he met his foster mother, Sara Hornick.

Sara and her husband experienced infertility, which ended with an unplanned hysterectomy. They were devastated, but found relief in knowing there were options.

# KU OUR MAGICAL KID

Sara will never forget the call she received about a tiny baby in the NICU who needed a family, love and a safe home. Sara spent the next month in the NICU snuggling and caring for Ku.

"He was so tiny. I spent every day with him. He had heart issues, he struggled to breathe and they thought he might have muscular dystrophy because he couldn't move his limbs," says Sara.

Four weeks later, when the Hornick family brought Ku home, they quickly realized he was an important part of their family and would be forever.

Not knowing how long he would be with them, they adjusted their lives to make sure he had all he needed while he was. Due to his complicated medical needs, Sara and her husband needed to be within minutes of the hospital at all times so Sara decided to care for Ku full time.

The two bonded immediately and Sara hoped and prayed they would be eligible to adopt him.

They were ready and committed to keeping Ku alive. "It became my purpose. We were determined to do everything in our power to save him and give him a good life," Sara remembers.

Soon, the family would find that Ku's battles had only just begun. At seven months old, at a routine check-up appointment, Ku was rushed to the hospital. As the family sat at his bedside, Ku began to crash.

Sara recalls having nothing but the clothes on her back when she and Ku were life-flighted to Sioux Falls.

"I'll never forget the kindness I received from the LSS team. They cared for me, while I was caring for my baby. They brought me clothes, blankets, food, anything I needed."

Sara continues, "That's the best thing about LSS. You aren't just a case number, you are human. You are family."

Sara never left Ku's side while in the hospital. They were soon sent home with an unknown outlook on Ku's future. The Hornick family celebrated his birthday every month just in case he didn't make it to his first birthday.

Today, Ku is three years old. He is a Hornick—happy, healthy and thriving.

"Every day he is surprising us with his words and actions," Sara continues. "We have a long road ahead and he will always be special needs but he's ours. For everything that he's been through, he's such a good kid, he's just magical."

**Ku is thriving because of the love of the Hornick family. Unfortunately, the current list of LSS foster families is limited to 25 percent of the families needed to serve kids like Ku. You can help recruit, train, and license more families by making a gift during South Dakota CARES. Give a gift early and your donation will be matched!**



Since 2016, Sara and her husband have been blessed to have cared for

## **26 foster children**

during their time as foster parents. Each one with their own traumatic backgrounds and some with medical needs—

You can help recruit, train, and license more families—like the Hornicks—by making a gift during South Dakota CARES.



APRIL 21-27

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## **YOUR DONATION MATCHED**



LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF SOUTH DAKOTA  
705 EAST 41ST STREET, SUITE 200  
SIOUX FALLS, SD 57105

1-800-568-2401 [LssSD.org](http://LssSD.org)

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## THEIR STORIES— OUR PURPOSE



### Support Through Vulnerable Moments

At LSS, we often share stories about the people whose lives have changed through our work and your support. As advocates for all people to be healthy, safe and accepted in South Dakota—their stories give us purpose.

The story of LSS is written by each person who walks through our doors. “When we think about the ‘why’ we exist at LSS—it’s to meet people where they are when they finally have the courage to pick up that phone or walk in asking for help,” says Sheri Ekdum, former Vice President of Community Services.

“We see it as our responsibility to make sure all feel welcome and safe from their very first contact with us all the way through their last. In fact, one of the first things we cover with new employees working the front desk or reception area, is explaining that you are going to hear and see people at their most vulnerable moment. They are not going to be their typical selves, they may yell at you.

They might be crying so hard that you can’t understand them. Just remember, that’s the ‘why’ in our lives.”

When Ekdum was a financial counselor at LSS years ago, she remembers “when people came for counseling, they looked like different people from the minute they walked in to the time they walked out the door. You could literally see a weight had been lifted.” She continued, “Someone can be so emotional that they don’t know what to do, and we are helping them understand that we can work together to reduce barriers and turn things around.”

One of the most rewarding experiences for someone who has dedicated their career to helping others, is seeing the shift in a person or family after getting the help they need. The strength and confidence in people as they leave our office—that is the story of LSS. It is why we exist.

**Jay Marchand, director of LSS Re-Entry Services, builds on Ekdum’s thoughts. “If we step back, and it’s difficult at times, but what an honor it is that we get to be there in the midst of the mess—when they are yelling. That’s when they feel safe enough to trust us. It’s an honor that we get to be there to walk through that time with them.”**

Regardless of how each story begins, LSS is a place where people can face their toughest battles, become healthy again, find safety, and be accepted.

**Their stories wouldn’t be possible without your support. Join us for our day of giving festivities April 21-27 with a donation to support the work that makes these stories a reality.**

**YOUR DONATION  
MATCHED**