

Construction Is Underway at the Families Together East Side Preschool

On October 26, community members, along with leaders from Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSS) and the Saint Paul Area Synod of the ELCA, gathered to celebrate the construction kick-off of LSS' newest therapeutic preschool, located at Grace Lutheran Church on the east side of Saint Paul.



Friends and supporters of LSS and the Saint Paul Area Synod enthusiastically celebrated during the Construction Kick-off event for LSS' newest preschool.

The new preschool will include three classrooms, a kitchen, gym, dedicated speech and occupational therapy rooms, and an outdoor playground. The space will also provide comfortable meeting rooms for teachers to connect with parents and caregivers. Renovations to Grace Lutheran's building were made possible by a \$1 million gift given through the Saint Paul Area Synod's Planting Hope campaign. An additional \$520,000 will be raised by LSS to complete the expansion.

"It is exciting to see this campaign initiative underway, as it seamlessly blends LSS' three strategic objectives of addressing social determinants of health, investing in prevention

and early intervention services, and advancing our commitment to social justice," said LSS Vice President of Development, Jesse Stremcha.

The Greater East Side neighborhood of Saint Paul was selected for LSS' second Families Together Preschool due to the neighborhood's high concentration of children under age five — of whom 90 percent are Black, indigenous or people of color — and a lack of high-quality early childhood educational programs.

Investing in the Greater East Side's youngest learners today will have long-term benefits for the community. "Students who are kindergarten-ready at age five experience higher academic achievement throughout the course of their education," shared Alexis Oberdorfer, vice president of community engagement and partnerships at LSS. "We are confident that by providing our young neighbors with a solid educational foundation today, the benefits will extend for generations to come."



Celebrating Your Generosity

Individual, corporate and congregational gifts in support of the new preschool may be eligible for recognition through named spaces. If you would like to learn more about supporting this project and/or naming opportunities, please contact Emily.Roscoe@lssmn.org.



PROGRESSING TOWARDS POSSIBILITY:
A Message from Jesse Stremcha
LSS VP of Development

One year ago, Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSS) officially launched our \$95 million, 5-year “Empower What’s Possible” campaign—the largest and most comprehensive campaign in LSS’ 158-year history.

The Empower What’s Possible campaign is thoughtfully aligned with LSS’ three strategic objectives. I am proud to share that in our first year, we have advanced each objective:

We have addressed social determinants of health by creating connection and community for individuals with identified needs through Camp Knutson’s new Fischer Cabin.

Our investments in prevention and early intervention services were front and center when we kicked off construction for the new Families Together East Side Preschool in October.

And plans for our next campaign project — the Center for Changing Lives Frogtown-Rondo in Saint Paul — are progressing quickly. You can read more about how this reimagined facility will advance our commitment to social justice on page 3.

It has been deeply meaningful to witness the excitement, the shared vision, and the generous commitments from our earliest campaign supporters. And if the inspiring results of our first year are indicative of what lies ahead, more neighbors than ever before will have the opportunity to live and work in community with full and abundant lives.

These efforts — and those on the horizon — are only possible because of the commitment of neighbors like you.

With gratitude,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jesse Stremcha'.

Jesse Stremcha
Vice President of Development



BUILDING



COMMUNITY

Building Upon Proven Success: Plans for New Center for Changing Lives Moving Forward

In 2008, LSS opened the doors of its first Center for Changing Lives (CFCL) in south Minneapolis. Operating as a central hub housing multiple LSS services along with programs from trusted community partners, neighbors could access a wide range of resources and integrated supports as they sought to change their own lives. LSS replicated its successful model in 2017 when it established the Center for Changing Lives Duluth.

The Empower What's Possible Campaign will support the launch of a third site, the Center for Changing Lives Frogtown-Rondo, which will be based at LSS' existing building on University Avenue in Saint Paul. Significant building enhancements funded through the campaign will transform the space into a modern, efficient, and easily accessible hub of resources located on the METRO Green Line.

"With a notable 18,000 square feet of space, LSS has been evaluating how best to utilize this building to serve our neighbors in the Frogtown-Rondo neighborhood," shared Maureen Warren, senior vice president of services at LSS. "By establishing a CFCL in the heart of this diverse and dynamic neighborhood, we have the opportunity to supplement and accelerate the positive momentum that is already underway in the area by bringing additional LSS services to the community."



LSS anticipates serving more than 1,100 neighbors annually through its newest CFCL, located in the Frogtown neighborhood of Saint Paul.

In a neighborhood where residents — of whom more than 73% are people of color — face challenges including a lack of affordable housing, low incomes and high rates of poverty, LSS anticipates serving more than 1,100 neighbors annually through its newest CFCL.

The CFCL Frogtown-Rondo will add an additional classroom to accommodate more students at LSS' existing Families Together Preschool, expand transitional housing offerings for youth and young families experiencing homelessness, and provide spaces for LSS' employment, financial counseling and education, housing, and mental health services.

"Individuals and families benefit from multi-layered supports," said Warren. "The CFCL model allows LSS to provide those supports more seamlessly by removing barriers to access while providing families with the opportunity to work with a trusted partner in creating individualized, holistic and comprehensive plans that advance their goals."





Erik Thorsell (right) currently serves on the board of Let Africa Live alongside Grace Ntbonera (center) and Kubisa Sosthene (left). Photo provided by Erik Thorsell.



YOU empower

what's possible

Erik Thorsell

Hometown:

Golden Valley, Minnesota

Education:

Studied Music Education at
Gustavus Adolphus College

Career:

Founder, SUCCESS
Computer Consulting

Volunteer Service:

Let Africa Live

Le Coeur du Partage d'Etienne
(Etienne's Heart of Sharing)

Home Congregation:

Plymouth Congregational
Church, Minneapolis

In 2016, Erik Thorsell was looking for an opportunity to align his values as a Christian with his actions. "I wanted to 'walk the talk,' to do something tangible, like drive someone to a medical appointment – something where I could get to know people whose backgrounds and experiences were different from my own," recalled Erik.

His desire to serve his neighbors ultimately led him to apply for a volunteer position with LSS Refugee Services. The experience turned out to be much more than he could have anticipated.

"While I figured that I would have that feel-good type of experience, I did not expect that volunteering with Refugee Services would change my whole life," Erik shared.

Through his volunteerism, Erik formed deeply meaningful relationships with members of the refugee community, some of whom have become like family to him. He is especially passionate about mentoring young adults in achieving their educational and career goals.

"Watching young people discover

their gifts, find their calling and then pursue their goals is amazing, especially when you consider the traumatic events many refugees have overcome," reflected Erik. "Being given the trust of the people I have worked with is an honor. It has brought more meaning to my life."

The trusted, person-centered connection at the heart of LSS' services is one of the reasons Erik chose to make an early, unrestricted financial commitment to the Empower What's Possible campaign. "I think about people I've met through LSS; people with huge potential who can now fully live into the life they were meant to have because of the love and support they received. I want to help LSS do more of that."

"I believe in the mission of LSS and I trust LSS," continued Erik. "It is motivating to think that by sharing my financial resources with LSS today, more positive change will happen both locally and globally in my lifetime while also creating a ripple effect of good that will be felt for years to come."



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