

empower

REALIZING THE POWER OF LIVES TRANSFORMED

September 2024



LSS Design Lab team members Laura Blue, Tika Khachatryan and Kyle Sommer.

"LSS is committed to creating programs that meet the evolving needs of our neighbors. The Design Lab will play a critical role in helping us do that more effectively and efficiently."

*-Tika Khachatryan,
Design Lab manager*

Designing for the Future

Throughout our nearly 160-year history, Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSS) has been a leader in finding new and effective ways to address evolving community needs. LSS' commitment to delivering quality, person-centered services with an entrepreneurial spirit has fueled its growth and longevity.

The newly launched LSS Design Lab, a key initiative of the Empower What's Possible campaign, represents an exciting advancement in LSS' ongoing pursuit of strategic growth and innovation. As part of LSS' business development team, the Design Lab will create a structured process to collect, evaluate and act on insights from our most important mission partners: the neighbors we serve.

"A core function of the Design Lab is deep community listening and engagement," shared Tika Khachatryan, Design Lab manager. "We want to hear from the people we serve so we can evolve our services to better meet their needs, understand their priorities and support them in achieving their goals."

The Design Lab launched its first official project earlier this year in conjunction with another Empower What's Possible campaign initiative: the Center for Changing Lives (CFCL) Frogtown-Rondo in Saint Paul. The team conducted in-depth interviews with several youth and families currently supported by LSS. Those insights are informing the design of the transitional housing services and apartments that will occupy the second floor of LSS' newest CFCL.

"The people we serve are our best experts, providing us with a deeper understanding of what they are looking for from us in terms of the new physical space as well as the overall experience they desire," shared Tika. "Those types of insights are invaluable and can't always be seen through data alone."

Formalized community engagement will be a foundational element of all projects led by the LSS Design Lab. Feedback shared by individuals utilizing LSS services will become the springboard for further ideation among stakeholders, including LSS employees, community partners and funders. Those ideas will drive enhancements and new service offerings that can be scaled statewide and lead to better outcomes.



PROGRESSING TOWARDS POSSIBILITY:
A Message from Joe Khawaja
LSS Sr. VP of Finance and Operations

As someone who values curiosity and learning, I am excited to share a new initiative at Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota that embodies this spirit of learning and growth: the LSS Design Lab. Housed within our business development department, this newly formed team aims to accelerate our efforts to learn, innovate, and lead within the social service sector.

At LSS, we often refer to ourselves as a learning organization. We take pride in our commitment embrace new and improved ways of supporting our neighbors in living full and abundant lives. The Design Lab formalizes and resources LSS' role as an industry leader in driving improved efficiency, community relevance, and outcomes within Minnesota's social service system.

While the long-term vision of the Design Lab may seem lofty, its foundation is more than familiar to those of us at LSS. It begins with asking questions and deeply listening to the neighbors we support, our frontline employees, and mission partners like you. Our shared commitment to learning and innovation will undoubtedly lead to another 160 years of incredible services that inspire hope, change lives, and build community.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. I am confident that together we can continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Khawaja'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large 'J' and 'K'.

Joe Khawaja
LSS Sr. VP of Finance and Operations



BUILDING



COMMUNITY

LSS Early Learning Center - East Side Celebrates Grand Opening

For students and grown-ups alike, the final weeks of summer will forever be synonymous with going "back to school." On August 14, the LSS Early Learning Center - East Side was thrilled to join in the excitement of the new school year for the first time.

Together with the Saint Paul Area Synod of the ELCA, Grace Lutheran Church and more than 100 friends and supporters, LSS officially opened its newest early childhood education site.

"Over the last two years, we've been anticipating this journey, and the result has been nothing short of inspiring," shared Alexis Oberdorffer, LSS senior vice president of services. "We wanted to create a thoughtful space that is supportive of kids, welcoming to families and a celebration of the community. Together, we have done that."



Bishop Patricia Lull, Alexis Oberdorffer and Rev. Karen Williams.

The LSS Early Learning Center - East Side team warmly welcomed its first class of students just two weeks later on September 3. "It has been wonderful to welcome students to the Early Learning Center - East Side," shared Program Director Angie Goettl. "This beautiful new space is ready to support kids and families on their journeys, and so is our team."



More than 100 guests joined in the Early Learn Center's grand opening.



**Join Us in
Empowering
What's Possible**

If you would like to learn more about any of the Empower What's Possible campaign initiatives, please contact Emily.Roscoe@lssmn.org.



YOU

empower

what's possible

Jan & Russ Michaletz

Hometown:

Jan: Cambridge, MN
Russ: Glencoe, MN

Education:

Jan: Gustavus Adolphus College – B.A.

Russ: Gustavus Adolphus College – B.A.;
University of Minnesota Law School – J.D.

Career:

Jan: High school English and Speech teacher before staying home full-time to raise their kids.

Russ: CPA with Arthur Andersen and Deloitte; currently an independent consultant in family business.

Volunteer Service:

Both served on the Board of Trustees at Gustavus Adolphus College and have held leadership and volunteer positions at Diamond Lake Lutheran Church

Jan: Multiple volunteer positions at Edina High School.

Russ: Multiple leadership positions in Rotary District 5950.

Home Congregation:

Diamond Lake Lutheran, Minneapolis.

Family:

Four children and five grandchildren.

Russ and Jan Michaletz have been investing in Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSS) for nearly 30 years. "We like to think of ourselves as investors rather than donors," shared Jan. "It feels like it highlights the courage of those LSS serves and the work they put in to changing their lives." "It also frames the way we think about giving," added Russ. "We want our contributions to do the most good possible."

The Michaletzes' initial connection to LSS came through Jan. After years of serving as the chair of the Alumni Board of Directors at Gustavus Adolphus College, Jan accepted a role on the LSS Foundation Board of Trustees. Reflecting on the decision, Jan said, "I was attracted to LSS because of its legacy of getting things done. It's not been an organization that spins its wheels. LSS has a rich heritage of figuring out ways to meet needs in communities."

"There is a tremendous momentum in the LSS movement," added Russ. "After Jan's time on the Foundation Board, I was approached, and I said yes because of LSS' commitment to strategic innovation. That's the sort of thing that gets me excited."

After nine years of service, Russ concluded his term on the LSS Foundation Board of Trustees in 2023, prepared to step into a new role with LSS as Chair of the Empower What's Possible campaign steering committee. He has played an important role in setting the vision for LSS' ambitious \$95 million comprehensive campaign, part of which will focus on strategically elevating LSS' commitment to new service design and innovation through the LSS Design Lab.

The Michaletzes see a bright future for the social service sector in Minnesota. LSS' long-standing reputation as a trusted leader as well as its ongoing commitment to innovation through strategic initiatives like the Design Lab will contribute to ongoing successes. "LSS has proved, again and again, that it is a trustworthy organization," reflected Russ. "The LSS Design Lab will be the point of the arrow for fresh innovation and continued leadership."

Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota
2485 Como Avenue • Saint Paul, MN 55108

Phone: 651.642.5990
lssmn.org

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