

CARITAS

Continued from Page 1

Caritas serves more than 5,000 individuals annually across Southern Illinois from offices located in Belleville, Carterville, Mount Vernon, Olney, Glen Carbon, and Effingham.

The need is stark, Huelsmann said.

“During the course of a year there’s around 25,000 children that come into care, in Illinois alone. By itself, Caritas manages the cases of some 2,600 – about 10 percent of the state’s foster care population,” said Huelsmann.

Caritas, which has just over 500 employees, is the second-largest private provider of foster care services in the state and has the cases of about 50 percent of all foster care cases in Southern Illinois — a larger percentage by far of any agency.

Caritas’ operating budget this year will be close to \$45 million, he said. About 69 percent of that is directed toward foster care.

“Before I started, we had about \$6.5 million in revenue and about 120 employees. We kept on growing,” he said.

One reason for Caritas’ growth is the nature of the state’s performance-based contracts. The better an agency does in placing children into a permanent, safe situation, the more cases an agency is given.

“We’ve been a very high-performing agency over the years and actually growing at a higher pace than the percentage of case increases in the state. We are growing faster because we have more kids, because we do better for the children,” Huelsmann said.

Illinois has recently seen an increase in the number of foster kids. During the peak of the pandemic, children were not being seen as much by mandated reporters, so there was actually a lull for a while



A child holds paper cutouts symbolic of Caritas Family Solutions’ focus.

in cases coming to agencies like Caritas.

Substance abuse, especially opioids, along with mental health issues, and poverty all contribute to the numbers.

Basically, when parents aren’t taking care of themselves or their kids, children often end up in foster care.

“Seventy percent of all cases that come into care are because of neglect,” Huelsmann said.

Caritas’ territory takes in about the southern third of the state, with offices in Alton and Effingham serving its northernmost territory.

The need for foster parents is a national crisis, he said, and Caritas Family Solutions provides training and licensing for people wanting to become foster parents and supports them throughout that process. The agency also recently implemented a foster parent mentor pro-

gram to offer people practical advice from other foster parents.

Resources such as family counseling as well as access to a Trust-Based Relational Intervention training program are also available to help foster parents understand how to respond to the needs of children dealing with trauma.

“It’s important for people to understand that right now, we are seeing children spend unnecessary time stuck in hospital psychiatric wards

or emergency shelters, simply because they don’t have a foster home to go to,” said Caritas Associate Director of Child Welfare Mark Becker. “Being a foster parent can seem intimidating, especially knowing that child may not be with you long. However, it’s an opportunity to build a positive difference or memory in that child’s life that they will carry with them forever and they’ll remember you.”

Becker said they are especially in need of people willing to open their homes to multiple foster children together, so that siblings don’t have to be separated. They also have a special need for foster parents willing to foster older children and serve as a mentor.

In addition to Be a Kid for a Night, there are other events on the calendar to celebrate the 75th anniversary.

Two golf tournaments are planned,

for which Caritas is the sole beneficiary. One is in August, the Federico Golf Classic, the other is Contegra Cares, an event sponsored by Contegra Construction Co. in the fall.

On Feb. 4, 2023, Caritas will hold what is traditionally its largest gathering, the annual gala, at the Hyatt Regency in O’Fallon, Ill.

Caritas’ mission is to provide homes where people and children are exposed to healthy settings and emotional support, from a maternity home for homeless, pregnant women; to adoptive homes; to foster homes; to a residential setting where children from abusive or behavioral situations can get back into a safe environment; to assistive living homes for seniors. There are also Community Integrated Living Arrangement homes (or CILA), which are small group homes of around four people where people with intellectual difficulties can become integrated back into the community.

Placing children from traumatized backgrounds remains one of the agency’s biggest challenges, he said.

“We have about 1,200 foster homes, and about one hundred of those are what we called specialized treatment homes, where they take children with special needs.”

The aim is to get foster children back into their homes unless or until parents have lost their custodial rights, then adoption becomes the alternative. Foster parents must be licensed, and they are paid based on the age or situation of the child, generally several hundred dollars a month.

For more information on Caritas’ many programs and the upcoming events, visit www.caritasfamilysolutions.org.

“We said ‘the thirtieth of *this* month,’ and then it was off to the races.”

Mike Kemper & Bob Snell
Pyramid Electrical Contractors

Tom Holloway
Carrollton Bank

CARROLLTON BANK
www.carrolltonbanking.com

© 2022, Carrollton Bank Member FDIC