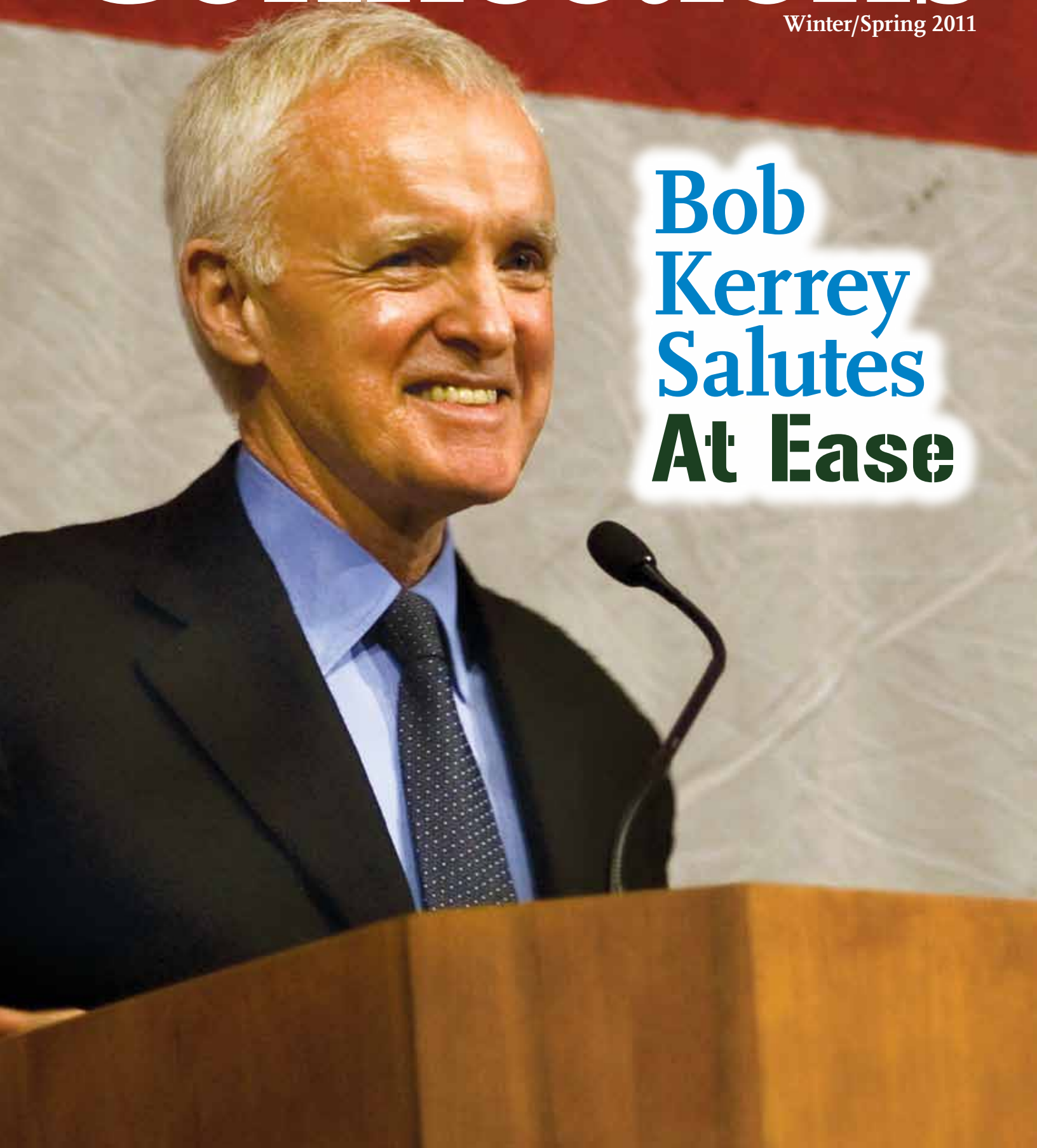


 Lutheran Family Services  
of Nebraska, Inc.

# Connections

Winter/Spring 2011

A photograph of Bob Kerrey, an older man with white hair, wearing a dark suit, light blue shirt, and patterned tie. He is smiling and speaking into a microphone at a wooden podium. The background is a light-colored, textured wall.

## Bob Kerrey Salutes At Ease



## Message from the CEO

**S**trategic decisions implemented today can have lasting impact for generations!

The Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties has placed its confidence in Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska (LFS), naming LFS to lead the new Learning Community **Family Liaison Program**. Trained and experienced LFS staff will soon begin working within Omaha and Bellevue schools to provide case management to students and their families to identify and reduce barriers to academic achievement, with a special focus on reducing truancy.

On March 28 LFS will celebrate the grand opening of its fourth **Center for Healthy Families** ... this one in North Omaha. Based upon stellar programs in Council Bluffs and Fremont, LFS will now work with young at-risk parents in North Omaha – many of whom are middle school and high school teenagers.

In collaboration with community organizations and philanthropists including *Building Bright Futures*, LFS is working to help young mothers and fathers complete their high school education and learn healthy parenting. We believe our early childhood prevention & intervention and incentive-based programming will help lower the risks of child abuse and neglect.

This strategic outreach into North Omaha and into the public schools underscores the LFS mission: To express God's love for **all** people by providing quality human care services that build and strengthen individual, family and community life.

Be assured these program decisions are being made strategically and collaboratively. We value you and all our partners as we work together to keep children and communities healthy and strong.

Together in service,

Ruth A. Henrichs  
President & CEO



*(Top) St. John's Lutheran Church Foundation in Council Bluffs presents a large donation to Susan Pawloski from the LFS Pottawattamie County Center for Healthy Families. (Center) Immanuel Medical Center staff generously gave dozens of gifts for Children Services families. (Bottom) Quilters from Augustana Lutheran Church in Omaha donated beautiful quilts they created to the North Omaha Center for Healthy Families.*

# The real reason James is struggling...

*New grant establishes LFS Learning Community Family Liaison Program*

**J**ames K. had trouble reading. All his teachers agreed that the fourth-grader was bright. When pressed, James couldn't explain why he was having trouble. The problem, the educators decided, was that he wasn't applying himself. He was placed in a remedial class to make up his deficiencies.

## What the teachers didn't know was:

- James was being bullied by another boy in his class. The bullying made James reluctant to come to school, and he would often fake illnesses in an attempt to skip school.
- James's father had lost his job. An intermittent drinker, he had started to get drunk in the evenings again, making James uneasy for his mother's safety and unable to concentrate on things such as homework. The resulting

friction between his mother and father also left James feeling uncertain about the stability of his family.

The Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties has contracted with Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska (LFS) to implement its new Family Liaison Program. This program is designed to help enhance the academic success of elementary students, particularly those who face challenges in the educational environment due to factors such as attendance, poverty, limited English skills and mobility.

Lutheran Family Services has a 119-year history of helping high-risk families in crisis. LFS' proven strength is helping families eliminate or cope with stressors through programs as basic as making parents aware of their child's developmental markers, or as complex as trauma therapies to



help children overcome the impact of domestic violence or sexual abuse.

The Learning Community defines this program's target audience as:

- Children with excessive absenteeism/truancy;
- Children in poverty;
- English language learners;
- Highly mobile students; or
- Children with low proficiency scores in reading, writing and math.

"At Lutheran Family Services, we are very focused on prevention and intervention," says Ruth Henrichs, President and CEO. "We are excited by what the Family Liaison program will mean for the future of our community—and the families we serve."

## Helping to heal those with PTSD

*By Matthew Hansen. First appeared in the Omaha World-Herald on December 13, 2010. Reprinted with permission, edited for space.*

**T**he former Air Force sergeant can't make eye contact. He leans back in his chair, swivels toward the wall, stares at the ceiling. He looks down at his hands, folding and unfolding them as if an answer might appear on his palms.

"The low point?" says the Offutt Air Force Base veteran. "There have been so many." Maybe it was the time he put on his uniform, grabbed his rifle and readied for battle. He stood at attention in front of his house, fully prepared to defend the garage from aliens.

Maybe it was those invasions he planned with his friend Perry, a fellow

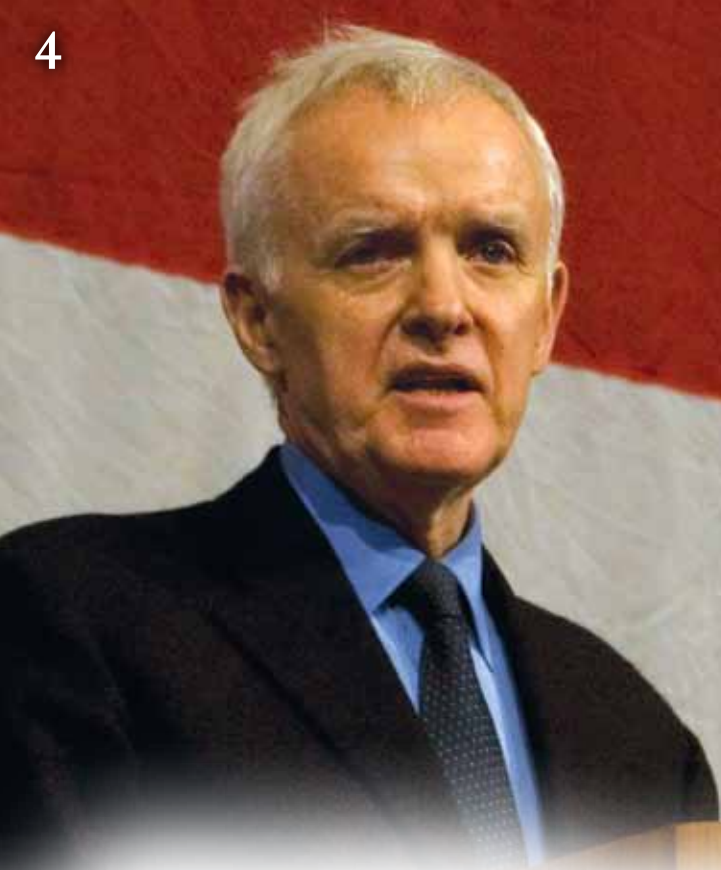
vet wrestling with his own demons. Heads on a swivel, eyes darting, they would attack enemy territory. Perry would cover the sergeant as he bought tube socks. He would cover Perry as he picked up toilet paper. They would return to the parking lot, the shaken survivors of another trip to Target.

And maybe the low point came this summer. He couldn't hold a job, and the bank was closing in on his house. It took all the energy he had to get out of bed and brush his teeth. He took out a life insurance policy on himself so his wife would have something when he was gone. The



ex-sergeant's eyes fill with tears when he thinks about the life insurance. Yes, he agrees. That was the low point. "It

*(Continued on page 10)*



# Bob Kerrey makes **At Ease** personal

*“Love is a force, which can be...  
applied to the damaged hearts and  
souls of our returning veterans.”*

**A** sold-out crowd filled Ballroom A at the Qwest Center on a snowy day in January. Among them—military and business leaders, active duty military and veterans, family members and loved ones.

All came to support **At Ease**, the growing program that provides PTSD therapies and therapeutic support to those struggling with the impact of repeated deployments to the battlefield of what is now the longest war in American history. KETV anchor Adrian Whitsett, himself an Iraqi veteran, served as Master of Ceremonies. After watching a moving video on the need to support veterans as they return from war, the audience heard from Ruth Henrichs, President & CEO of Lutheran Family Services. Then, keynote speaker Bob Kerrey delivered a powerful message on the need for programs such as **At Ease**. Here are excerpts from that speech:

• • •

**T**hank you Ken [Stinson, Honorary Chair of the **At Ease** Benefit Luncheon] for that kind introduction. And thank you for everything you and Ann [Stinson] have done and are doing for our community.... And thanks to

Lutheran Family Services and Scott Anderson for organizing this event and the effort you are making to help those suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Although some stigma is still attached to it, PTSD has moved from the suspicious shadows and fringe world of psychological theory to being recognized as a serious, debilitating and treatable condition.

This is not easy work. It is not for the faint of heart. It is not for those who expect and need clear-cut victories or cures. It is not for those who cannot endure the sadness caused by the inevitable human tragedies or failures. It is not for those who must live in a world of black and white certainty. Helping men and women with PTSD means working in a world of gray ambiguity.

Most of all it is the work of people who believe that we can and must do something. It is the work of people like Scott and Lutheran Family Services who believe that love is a force, which can be organized and applied to the damaged hearts and souls of our returning veterans.

It just happens to be one of the oldest and most important things that we humans do to separate ourselves from other living species. We care about the suffering of others and want – in spite of occasional evidence that it might not be worth the effort – to try to do what we can to reduce it.

We ask our youth to train to do things we have told them all their lives are morally wrong. We ask them to submit to the constant fear that it could be their body that is ripped and torn asunder by a high velocity projectile or a high order explosive. We ask them to do all this and then expect them to come home and behave as if nothing has happened.

Among the things that has happened since is that people like Scott and Lutheran Family Services are trying to understand what happens to our youth when they leave us. The great challenge is that we can never really know the answer. Never really know. They will not or cannot tell us.



And sometimes a memory haunts them. A memory of something they saw or did. Human suffering they witnessed or caused. A memory, which does not leave them when they sleep, that reappears when they least expect it. A memory, which cannot be shared or explained.

We do not know what to do. We've heard about post-traumatic stress disorder and think that is what we are witnessing. But we don't know where to go for help, or more accurately we don't know how to get the man or woman we love to ask for help.

Scott, that is why what you and Lutheran Family Services are doing is so important. You are the people we can turn to for help. You are the people who are trying to do the most wonderful and heroic thing. By enabling a PTSD sufferer to see that their life is worth living you have saved a life. And the healing wake of human existence, which spreads forward from these lives, cannot be measured and should not be ignored.

There are two military orders, which have a different connotation in civilian life. "As you were" is the first. A senior officer who has entered a room causing all subordinate personnel to come to attention most often gives this command. "At ease" is the second and like "as you were" its intent is to produce relaxation.

Scott, you have chosen a good name for your program. May those who come to you find a way to become more "as they were" and may they find ease from the memories which have disabled them.

Thank you.

*Download Kerrey's entire speech at [www.LFSneb.org/kerreyspeech.pdf](http://www.LFSneb.org/kerreyspeech.pdf)*

*Clockwise from top left: Mr. Kerrey speaking at the **At Ease** luncheon; Deryl & Ramona Hamann with the Senator; Mr. Kerrey with Dick Holland; The Senator speaking with Ken & Ann Stinson; **At Ease USA** founder Scott Anderson speaking at the luncheon; Senator Kerrey, Ruth Henrichs & Eugene Glock; Mr. Kerrey with KETV anchor & luncheon emcee Adrian Whitsett.*



*"Scott [Anderson]...what you and Lutheran Family Services are doing is so important. You are the people we can turn to for help. You are the people who are trying to do the most wonderful and heroic thing." —Sen. Bob Kerrey*



# What is a Center for Healthy Families?

*It all started in Council Bluffs...*

To qualify as a “Center for Healthy Families,” a Lutheran Family Services (LFS) location must operate at least two of the organization’s three core competencies—either Children Services, Behavioral Health or Community Services.

LFS now operates four Centers for Healthy Families: Council Bluffs, Fremont, North Platte and North Omaha.

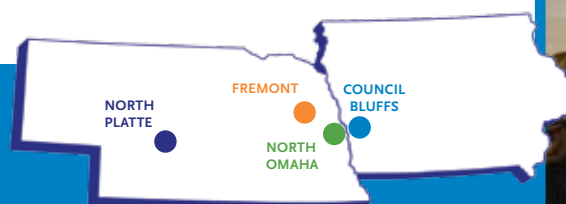
The vision for the first Center began in 1999. The citizens of Pottawattamie County believed that when given the essential skills and support, highly-stressed parents and caregivers with limited resources would create healthier environments for their children.

Their vision became the heart of the *Building Families Boutique* in Council Bluffs, an incentive-based program where participating parents and caregivers earn points by engaging in healthy activities including immunizations, well-baby check-ups, parenting classes and completing educational goals. Points earned are redeemed (with pride)

for new infant and toddler items at the Boutique “store.”

As Lutheran Family Services programming evolved to meet the growing and changing needs of the clients and communities, specialized therapies were added. Among them: assessments to identify possible mental health developmental problems, and programs which guide parents in proper interaction with their child and therapies for children who have witnessed or experienced trauma. LFS has drawn on its long history in behavioral health to integrate programming for children where it may be needed most.

The ultimate goal? Stronger, healthier families—and a reduction in the risk of child abuse and neglect. As a result of the program’s success in Council Bluffs, Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska has now replicated the program and added services to meet specific needs in each of the other communities.



*Centers for Healthy Families locations*

## Fremont’s next chapter

### *Rupert Dunklau Center for Healthy Families*

It was a big day in Fremont. On Thursday, December 2, it was standing room only as Lutheran Family Services (LFS) dedicated the new Rupert Dunklau Center for Healthy Families. Guests from all over the city filled rooms throughout the building—taking self-guided tours, enjoying holiday cookies and checking out all that is new.

The entire garden level now houses LFS’ Fremont Behavioral Health offices once contained in leased space elsewhere in Fremont. On the upper level, donors and supporters viewed the new specialized therapy rooms for children, as well as “Becky’s Place”—the children’s resource room dedicated to the memory of Rebecca McClain. Later, both

Rupert, Dunklau and Terry McClain spoke passionately of their commitment to LFS and then used the huge Chamber scissors to cut the red ribbon and symbolically bring together both the upper and garden levels.

Through lead grants from Rupert Dunklau, The Rupert Dunklau Foundation and Region 6 Behavioral Healthcare, LFS was able to purchase and complete renovations on the building at 1420 East Military in Fremont. The consolidation of two Fremont office locations further strengthens LFS’ commitment to human care for children and families in Dodge County. This co-location of services creates a permanent cost-efficient, consumer-friendly, community-based

facility focused on prevention and behavioral health in Fremont and Dodge County.

It was on this actual site that Reverend Peter Graef founded the Lutheran Children’s Home in 1892. The Home was one of two orphanages that have since grown into what is now one of the largest human care organizations in the state.

The broad spectrum of services in Fremont now includes:

#### **BEHAVIORAL HEALTH (GARDEN LEVEL)**

- Mental Health & Substance Abuse Treatment
- Chemical Dependency Evaluations



*Lori Cheshier, Rupert Dunklau Center for Healthy Families*



Wicker & Wine Honorary Event Chairs  
Doug & Deb Goodman



Brenda Hausmann, Omaha City  
Councilwoman Jean Stothert and Dari Dornan



Malorie Maddox (center) with auctioneers  
George G. DeWitt and Byron Menke

# Pottawattamie County—the flagship program

## Wicker & Wine Basket Auction – November 4, 2010

As the lights went down, the noisy room went quiet as Kristi began telling her story. She was sure, she said, that if she had not taken the parenting classes offered by LFS, she would have been “fighting the state” for the custody of her two boys. The “points” she earned in the incentive program prevented her from having to choose between buying gas for the car or diapers for the children. The Center, she said, has

been a “Godsend.”

Kristi and her family are clients at the Pottawattamie County Center for Healthy Families (formerly the Building Families Boutique). Via videotape, Kristi and other clients explained how LFS’ commitment to this community resource has been life-changing, both for themselves as parents, and for their children. The five-minute video segment was a key part of this year’s Wicker & Wine Basket Auction, which raised a record \$85,000.

The annual fundraiser was held on November 3, 2010, at the Mid-America Center in Council Bluffs. In addition to the client stories, over 200 attendees heard from community leader

John P. Nelson, Chairman and CEO of SilverStone Group. Mr. Nelson urged donors to give generously to the program because it is helping strengthen the next generation of Council Bluffs’ leaders.

Malorie Maddox and Tracy Madden of WOWT continued their commitment to the program by serving as co-emcees again this year. Doug and Deb Goodman served as honorary chairs.

In 2009 in Pottawattamie County we served:

- 417 families (61% with income below \$20,000/year)
- 502 children age 5 and under
- 76 pregnant mothers and their unborn babies.



...pert Dunklau, Terry McClain, Ruth Henrichs  
...nty Commissioner Bob Missel

## North Omaha Center for Healthy Families

The newest Center for Healthy Families is located inside the Urban League building at 30th and Lake in North Omaha.

The needs in this area are great. There are many at-risk children under the age of five – a majority of whom are being parented by a teenager. The programming in North Omaha is designed to meet their unique needs. In partnership with *Building Bright Futures*, teenage parents will get support in obtaining their high school diploma and getting their infants and toddlers off to a healthy start. What better way to offer a “hand-up” and help vulnerable children be healthy than through education and support?

This powerful new parenting resource, the North Omaha Center for Healthy Families, held an Open House for our generous donors on March 28. Story and photos in the next issue of *Connections*.

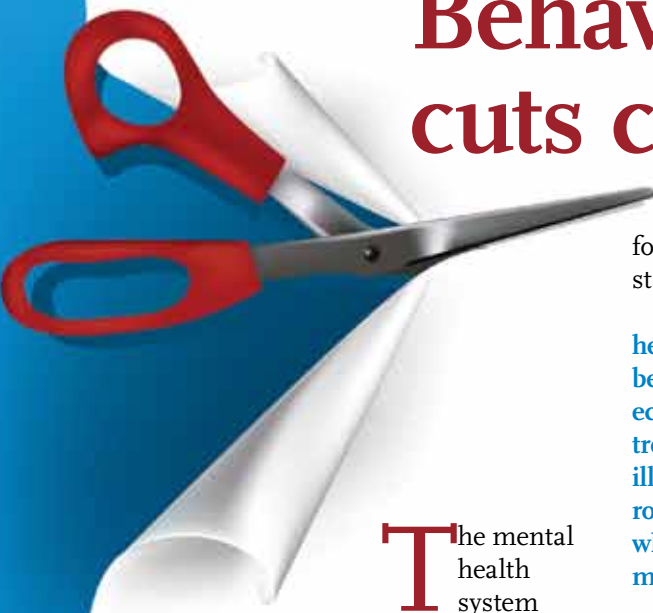


- 24/7 Mobile Crisis Response (at law enforcement request)
- Mental Health Community Support
- Group Therapy, Education & Support

### CHILDREN SERVICES (STREET LEVEL)

- **New!** Early Childhood & Parenting Specialized Therapies
- Incentive/Prevention/Intervention Programs (Sara’s Boutique)
- Parenting Classes & Support Groups
- Pregnancy Counseling & Adoption

# Behavioral Health budget cuts cause for concern



**T**he mental health system has faced a great deal of scrutiny since the story of Jared Loughner, the alleged gunman in the Arizona shootings, unfolded on news outlets throughout the world. Critics say that the troubled young man could have been helped by mental health programs in his community, but that two years ago those programs were eliminated when the state cut \$65 million from mental health services to shore up its budget deficit.

During the recession, budgets for mental health services in some 30 states were slashed an average of almost \$19 million in 2009 and more than \$24 million in 2010. Between 2009 and 2012, state mental health system budgets nationwide are expected to be reduced by a whopping \$2.2 billion.

In other states, the budget cuts have closed the doors to hundreds of treatment centers, forced the layoffs of therapists and mental health staff and reduced subsidies for outpatient counseling, medications and family support services. And while access to critical treatment and support services is being reduced, demand for these services is increasing, resulting in growing waiting lists

for mental health services in many states.

**Cuts in funding for mental healthcare are only going to be more costly in human and economic terms. Without adequate treatment, people with mental illness will end up in emergency rooms, homeless or in jail, all of which will cost taxpayers much more in the long run.**

“People who need mental health services do not magically disappear when funding is cut,” says Linda Rosenberg, president and CEO of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, the association for 1,800 behavioral healthcare organizations nationwide.

**“Withdrawing community-based supports for some of the most vulnerable people in American society typically results in tragic and costly outcomes.”** *(LFS is a member of the NCCBH)*

While no one is suggesting that budget cuts had any connection with the recent shooting rampage in Arizona, the tragedy should serve as a wake-up call for states to reconsider these drastic measures. States that believe they are saving money now will only have to pay more later.

## What you can do

**C**ontact your Nebraska State Senator to oppose the Governor’s recommended 5% cut to Medicaid and a 5% cut to HHS Behavioral Health Division. Contact decision makers today. Let your voice be heard.

## IN NEBRASKA

- **A 5% PROVIDER RATE CUT WILL CONTINUE THE CLOSING OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE FACILITIES ACROSS NEBRASKA.** Since late 2008, 22 facilities and programs across the state have closed because public payment for services do not cover costs. Reducing access to services forces Nebraskans in crisis to wait for services, making the likelihood of other resources—Emergency Protective Custody, emergency rooms and incarceration—the only real alternatives.
- **CHILDREN’S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES WILL BE DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED** because approximately 90% of the behavioral health services in Nebraska are paid out of public funds. The Safe Haven crisis occurred two years ago, yet the Nebraska Child Welfare System remains in crisis. Now is not the time to reduce access.
- **PROPOSED STATE AID CUTS TO COUNTIES AND CITIES WILL FURTHER THREATEN REDUCTIONS IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES,** particularly in Douglas and Lancaster counties. Additional behavioral health capacity is paid out of funds at the local level.

# Meet Vanja: A passion for refugees' needs

**M** eet Vanja Ilic. Vanja came to America as a refugee on April 15, 1999. She is now Lutheran Refugee Services Resettlement Office Site Coordinator for Lutheran Refugee Services in Lincoln.



Vanja Ilic

## Vanja, how did you land at LFS?

I have a passion for the needs of refugees, so I started volunteering a few months after arrival. I started working part-time and was hired full-time January 3, 2001—ten years ago.

## What is one of your biggest achievements professionally?

I've grown as a person, but more than anything—serving new refugee populations and making them self-sufficient. When clients we serve are happy and secure with their “new” life, there is nothing else that makes me happier than knowing they have shelter and food on table.

## Tell us a little about your family.

We are a family of three plus a few animal members which makes us eight all together. We came in Lincoln, NE, April 1999, from Europe (Germany). We came through Lutheran Family Service/Lutheran Refugee Services Resettlement 11 years ago. I was born in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and moved to Germany in 1992 when war began in my country. I married in Germany and gave a birth to beautiful girl, who is now 16 years old.

## What do you see as one of the biggest turning points in your life?

Escaping war, and having a second chance. Realizing we take so many things for granted in our lives, unfortunately. Having a second chance, in 1992 I promised to myself, I would be thankful for every day in my life, and I will live thinking it may be last one.

## What are you the most proud of?

The way we were able to rebuild and establish our life in the USA, starting all over with a new culture, country, language, etc. That was the biggest challenge we ever faced and accomplished.

## If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

Wish I can change the past and be born in USA. My life would have been much easier.



## LFS to celebrate 120th anniversary

Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska is in midst of planning for our 120th anniversary celebration next year. We're enjoying the research into our history and want to share with you. In the last issue of **Connections**, we talked about the founding of the Fremont orphanage. The other early orphanage was in Omaha at 36th and Meredith, near the current location of Immanuel Medical Center (one block north of Ames). It was then called the **Immanuel Deaconess Institute** and was founded by Reverend Dr. E.A. Fogelstrom in 1887 – almost by accident. This excerpt comes from Dr. Fogelstrom's writings:

*“We had not thought about establishing a children's home. In January 1887, a man was killed by a train accident in south Omaha. He left a widow with four small children; the oldest of the children was six years. In June, the mother became very ill. I promised the mother to care for the children. In spite of good care, the mother died in August. I contacted an uncle in Marshalltown Iowa and asked if relatives could care for the children. The answer was that he was the only relative and was too poor to take the children. He would gladly leave them with us. I dared not withdraw. One of our teachers, Miss Fredina Peterson, who had expressed her wish to give herself into the Lord's service became the first housemother for the children in the church basement, our first children's home....”*

“Miss Fredina” later became a deaconess. There was a children's home on the Immanuel campus for many years. As the care of children changed to foster homes, Immanuel's home was closed and the records turned over to Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska.

If you adopted or were adopted through LFS, we would love to hear from you as part of our planning for the 2012 celebrations. Please contact Kelli at (402) 591-5063 or at [development@LFSneb.org](mailto:development@LFSneb.org).

# PTSD (continued from page 5)

was getting really ugly for me,” he says. “If it wasn’t for them ...”

The ex-sergeant is sitting in the antiseptic conference room of a Bellevue-based program, **At Ease**. The tiny nonprofit treatment center is finding outsize success in treating military-related post-traumatic stress disorder, which increasingly is being recognized in troops and in family members who never stepped into a war zone.

**At Ease**, the brainchild of an Omaha advertising executive [Scott Anderson], treats stereotypical cases of combat-related PTSD, helping men and women who shot an enemy soldier or survived an IED attack and now sleep fitfully with guns tucked under their pillows. But the program also reaches out to new kinds of patients who won’t or can’t seek treatment from traditional government programs such as a veterans hospital.

The **At Ease** therapists see veterans like the ex-Air Force sergeant every day. He never entered Iraq or Afghanistan. But while serving in Qatar, he received a noncombat diagnosis that’s likely PTSD-related.

The therapists work with some veterans whose PTSD has roots deep in their past, long before they joined the military. And they treat the parents and spouses of deployed troops, people the therapists often classify as suffering from what’s called indirect or secondary PTSD.

Including veterans with noncombat-related PTSD — often the result of childhood abuse — and

family members with indirect PTSD illustrates the scope of a sprawling mental health problem that will challenge the military, government agencies and the mental health community for decades. An entire

The engineer, severely abused as a child in West Virginia, says his psychological problems grew more noticeable when he went through basic training and then felt constantly belittled by his commanding officer.

*“It was getting really ugly for me. If it wasn't for (At Ease)...”*

*—Air Force sergeant receiving treatment from At Ease therapists*

subsection of the U.S. military — by some estimates up to 300,000 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan alone — shows symptoms of the disorder.

As PTSD becomes better understood and less stigmatized, vets from as far back as Vietnam are seeking and receiving government help for the first time.

**A**t **Ease** founder Scott Anderson believes that every soldier or veteran with the disorder affects the mental health of at least two or three relatives, some of whom develop indirect PTSD.

Nationwide, “You are talking a million people,” he said. “This is a tsunami ... but we’re showing we can do something to stop it.”

**At Ease**, funded by local donors and run by Lutheran Family Services, is fighting PTSD by doing what veterans hospitals cannot: quickly accepting almost everyone who calls. That includes veterans such as an ex-Army engineer who was never deployed before being “other than honorably” discharged from the military, which disqualifies him from getting treatment from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

After repeatedly trying and failing to be transferred to another unit, he went AWOL. He got out a map, pointed at a city he’d never heard of — Norfolk, Neb. — and drove there. He eventually turned himself in to the Army, which led to his discharge and sent him even further into a cycle of anger, depression and drug abuse.

The 40-year-old says he hasn’t slept more than 90 minutes at a time since his teens. He has suffered from a social-anxiety disorder that nearly paralyzed him in groups of strangers, and he has bipolar disorder. To cope, he turned to alcohol and meth. He fought frequently and built a rap sheet that includes assault, domestic violence and weapons charges.

He described his brain as “racing 500 miles an hour, with seven different thoughts. I try to pick one out and hold onto it, and if I can’t ...”

He makes the sound of an explosion.

“I can’t even tell you how many times I’ve put a gun into my mouth and just thought,” he said.

Although he never set foot in a combat zone, his string of problems is typical for veterans with PTSD, **At Ease** therapists say. Severe cases are as disabling as schizophrenia and lead to a roughly 20 percent chance of attempted suicide, according to government studies.



**At Ease**

Trauma treatment and therapeutic support for active military, veterans and their loved ones

## FURTHERMORE

Kudos are well deserved for founder Scott Anderson and the donors who are funding At Ease, which has provided invaluable help to veterans whose lives are burdened by the stresses of post-traumatic stress disorder. Lutheran Family Services, one of this area's most respected nonprofits, operates the Bellevue-based program. It was heartening to read the World-Herald coverage of the wonderful work being done by this admirable initiative.

The **At Ease** therapists developed an individualized recovery plan for him, emphasizing his desire to repair his relationship with his ex-wife and deal with memories of abuse that repeatedly surfaced in flashbacks after he quit using drugs in 2004.

He now visits the Bellevue office weekly, sometimes twice a week, for appointments with Deb Jones, the director and senior therapist. He says Jones “gives it to me straight.”

The unemployed engineer gets all this for free: **At Ease** doesn't turn away anyone because of an inability to pay.

He says he hasn't felt this emotionally stable in years.

“If veterans take advantage of this, it will help them,” he says. “I don't doubt that in the slightest bit.”

And there's another, more intractable problem: More and more American veterans are returning home with traumatic brain injuries caused, for example, when a makeshift bomb explodes underneath a Humvee. In earlier wars, such troops usually died on the battlefield, Greenwell says. Now, superior technology and medical care keep them alive. They return home with a brain injury and PTSD, a potent combination that's tough to successfully treat, Jones says.

That combination might be what's ailing the ex-Air Force sergeant, who reports that many of his psychological problems began after he suffered a head injury in a workplace accident on an Air Force base in 2008. He was eligible for help at the VA but didn't go because he worried that admitting he felt unstable would stop his climb up the military ladder.

That's a typical reaction, studies show. In 2008, only half the troops suffering from the disorder received treatment, according to the Rand Corp. And 63 percent of Iraq and Afghan war veterans responding to a New England Journal of Medicine study said “my unit leadership might treat me differently” when asked why they didn't seek help.

**At Ease** therapists hope the stigma associated with PTSD treatment will fade as military leaders continue a public campaign to raise awareness about the disorder — a campaign also designed to make service members feel more comfortable about asking for help.

“The message has to be ‘It's OK to go to a place like this, or the VA,’” Greenwell says. “The message has to be ‘What you are experiencing is normal.’ Until we get to that place, a lot of people are going to go untreated.”

The **At Ease** therapists also find themselves treating another, barely understood group: veterans' parents and spouses who suffer from indirect PTSD. While indirect PTSD doesn't meet the psychiatric definition of PTSD, family members suffering from it report many of the same symptoms and need many of the same treatments as recovering veterans.

Bruce Cannon, an **At Ease** board member, is the father of a soldier who spent two tours of duty as a sharpshooter in Iraq. When Cannon's son came home, he had a markedly different, almost unrecognizable personality. The once-social teenager refused to go into restaurants and was withdrawn and short-tempered. The son now lives in Tennessee, trying to pick up the pieces of his life by himself. He has refused repeated pleas to enter treatment.

He wasn't the only one affected. Cannon found himself obsessed with TV and Internet coverage of the war when his son was overseas. He panicked every day when driving home from work, terrified that a military official would be in his driveway, bearing

bad news. And he says he experienced some of his own personality changes and dangerous behaviors.

“This is brutal,” Cannon says. “It's real, and it's a problem, and it's not going away.”

The ex-Air Force sergeant agrees on the brutality of PTSD — he says one of his best friends at an Air Force base in Florida committed suicide after struggling with PTSD-like symptoms. But for the first time in months, the sergeant is seeing glimmers of hope in his own situation. Baxter has helped him fill out paperwork to get VA and social services. He scored a part-time job and has figured out how to make his house payments. He says he feels more stable — a different man from the one who guarded his garage from aliens.

“Without them, I'd be in foreclosure now, maybe worse,” the ex-Air Force sergeant says of **At Ease**. He looks up at the ceiling. “They saved me. They saved my life.”



The Bellevue office where the **At Ease** program resides

Fandango Honorary Chair Amy Scott with LFS Development Officer Cheryl Murray



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## Fandango “Hits a Home Run for Kids!”

The 12th annual Fandango event raised over \$100,000 for foster care adoption!

Emcee John Oakey of KETV NewsWatch 7 told his story of being a foster parent, and Honorary Chair Amy Scott, along with her sons, told how adoption had changed her life.

Huge thanks to the *Forever Families Guild*, its president Teri Krohn and event chairs Cindy Hartmann and Julie Geschwender! Look for a bigger story, more photos, and interviews with some of Nebraska’s foster children in the next edition of *Connections*.

## Calendar

**March 28, 2011**

*Grand Opening and Open House, the North Omaha Center for Healthy Families, 30th & Lake, Omaha*

**April**—Child Abuse Awareness Month

**May**—Foster Care Awareness Month

**June 18, 2011**

*World Refugee Day, Benson High School, Omaha*

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