



# LSA CELEBRATES FOSTER CARE MONTH

## Lutheran Social Services of Michigan

### OASIS HOUSE

On most afternoons, in the open grass behind OASIS house in Charlotte, Michigan, you can find any number of the 10 boys who live there, kicking around a soccer ball and managing it fairly deftly. The boys are refugee youth from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador mostly, with one boy hailing from Africa. This group home creates a new type of family environment for them as they acclimate to the ways of American teenagers, while learning English and adjusting to being so far away from home.

OASIS House is a program of Lutheran Social Services of Michigan's Refugee Resettlement program under the Children and Families service line. It's managed by Richard and Brenda Hand, a couple whose youngest biological child (of three) is a junior in college. Both veterans of youth ministry, the pair were at a turning point in their careers and becoming empty-nesters led them to fill the spot of house parents at OASIS.

"They're amazing, resilient kids that are interested in becoming a part of the community and acculturating into the culture," says Richard. They are getting involved in school and making friends. Before school started, all the kids played soccer, so that was a real good introduction into the school and for the school to see the kids."

Most of the boys attend Charlotte High School, whose JV and varsity soccer coaches have been very eager to work with the kids. Soccer became the bridge that connected these boys to their new classmates, the common language between them all.

"The coaches really have encouraged our boys," says Richard. "We have five on JV and two on varsity. One of the coaches is a math teacher and has done extra tutoring with them. The principal has been really good about helping the kids to come to school and have the support they need. Right now they have some extra Spanish-speaking help in school in a study hall class and a couple connections in their regular classes with Spanish-speaking support to help them. The principals have been really good about making sure they feel part of the school and have the support they need."

Kids come to OASIS House for 6-18 months; by the end of that time, they should have legal status and be able to transition into independent living situations, Richard notes. Mostly, the boys arrive when they are 16 or 17, giving very little time in the system to help them get on their feet.

The Hands make sure OASIS home is exactly that – a home. "We are just like a normal family home," says Richard. "They have freedoms. Some stay after school to work with a teacher, workout in the weight room, or hang out with friends."

### Lutheran Social Services of Michigan

Lutheran Social Services of Michigan has been providing services for children and families since 1934. LSSM is Michigan's largest private foster care organization, helping more than 800 children daily. Their experienced staff are passionate about their desire to help foster families create a better life for the children in their care.

For more information about LSS of Michigan, visit [www.lssm.org](http://www.lssm.org).

**LSS of Michigan is a member of the LSA Network, an LSA 20-500 Fund supporter and it's part of the Annie E. Casey-Provider Exchange LSA cohort.**

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We pick up some of the kids, and some ride the bus home. They have busy schedules with meetings and therapy and all the things they have to do.”

Every morning, everybody gets a copy of the schedule with their name highlighted so they know what they have that day, he shares. “They do their own laundry, sometimes make their own meals. As you can imagine, there’s a little bit of drama sometimes with teenage boys and sharing space, but they’ve been pretty amazing,” he says.

Later this year, LSSM hopes to open a second OASIS Home to accommodate more refugee youth in need of assistance.

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