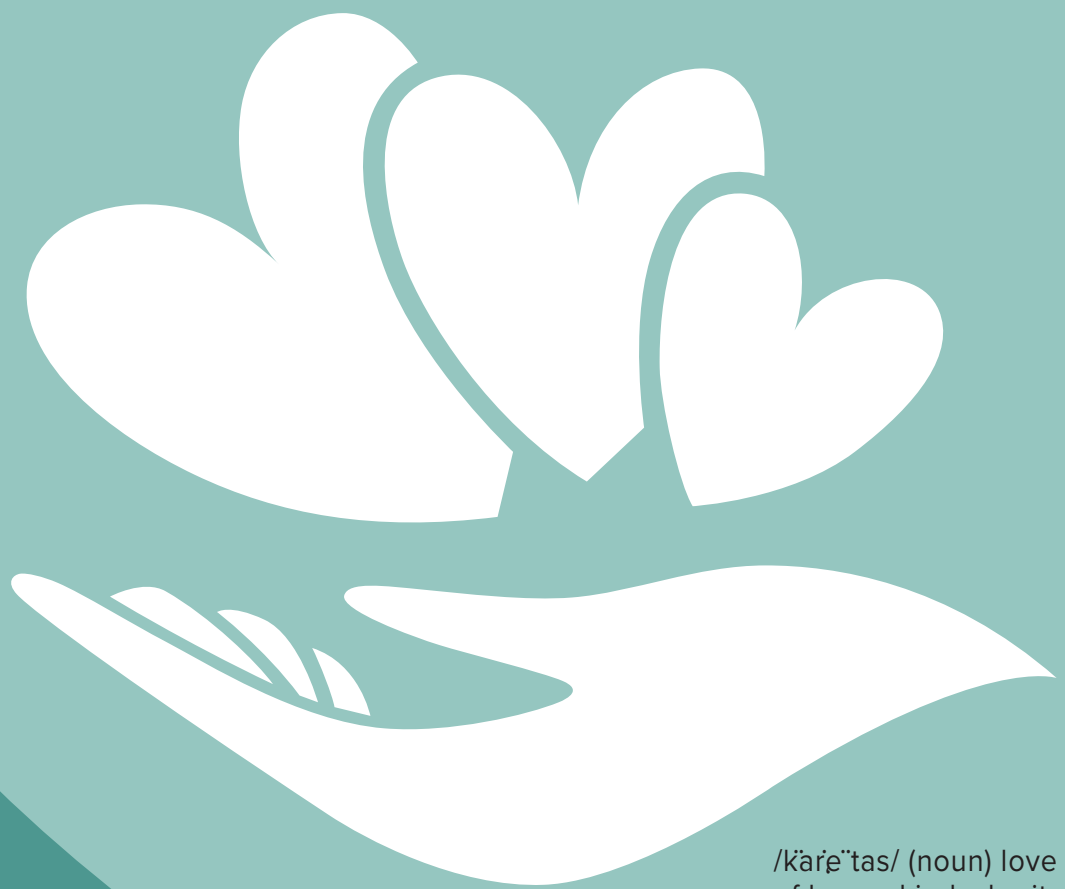


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/kəˈrɪːtas/ (noun) love of humankind, charity.

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Utah's Alliance House champions mental health with unique approach

Aimee L. Cook
Caritas Quarterly

Inside the welcoming walls of the Alliance House, adults struggling with “serious and persistent mental illness” (SPMI) find not just refuge but a community poised to help them rebuild their lives.

Established in Utah in 1987, originally as a part of Valley Behavior Health, Alliance House has carved out a unique niche in the realm of mental health support in Salt Lake City, embodying a mission fueled by compassion, respect and empowerment. Alliance House became

a stand-alone agency in 2017.

Unlike traditional mental health treatment centers, Alliance House operates as a “clubhouse,” a term that underscores its commitment to a supportive, collaborative environment. Here, those who come seeking help are referred to as members, a nomenclature that reflects their integral role in the community rather than defining them by their struggles.

“Alliance House follows an international model, called the ‘The

ed a group, ‘WANA’ which stands for ‘We Are Not Alone,’ and they would meet every day on the library steps in New York. A person caught wind of this and purchased them a building, and that was the first ‘Clubhouse.’ It is important that people recognize the consumer started the Clubhouse.”

The foundation of a Clubhouse is a science; it is a formula that must be followed for it to be effective. To be accredited, a Clubhouse must follow 37 standards. The first standard is that

A Commitment to Rebuilding Lives

The objective of Alliance House is straightforward yet profound: to offer adults with SPMI a platform to restore their self-respect, dignity and abilities. In the beginning, the Clubhouse was primarily a social gathering. Upon hiring a director, John Beard, who challenged the members to do more than socialize, they began the “work-ordered day.” This initiative gave way to every Clubhouse around the world today being understaffed so that the members come and volunteer their time to run the nonprofit.

“We tell people that come through our door to leave their diagnosis at the door,” Huff said. “They are not here to focus on their diagnosis; they are not here to be sick; they are here to utilize their talents, strengths and abilities to be part of our community. We do not have a hierarchy here. We have very professional boundaries [with the members], but they look very different from a traditional mental health facility.”

The establishment of a work-ordered day, wherein members voluntarily engage in the everyday tasks of



Rebuilding Confidence, Purpose and Community

Clubhouse Model.’ It was started in the 1940s in New York City, at which time institutionalization was a very common reaction or solution to people living with mental illness,” said Paige Huff, executive director of Alliance House. “As a society trying to get away from that, people being discharged made a commitment to each other upon discharge that they would support each other. They start-

membership is voluntary and without time limits. Members can come and go. Second, membership is open to any adult living with mental illness. No insurance is required. Currently, there are 317 members in the Alliance House. Staff at Alliance House consider the Clubhouse a launching pad, not a landing strip, and work diligently to assist members in meeting their independent goals.



Aimee L. Cook is an award-winning journalist with a passion for lifestyle, culture and entertainment. Her work has appeared in numerous publications across the Western region, offering insightful perspectives on diverse topics that aim to captivate and engage audiences.

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running the Clubhouse, includes tasks from answering the phone to working in the culinary unit to more complex roles such as serving on a training team. Members immerse themselves in various operational units, gaining practical skills and a renewed sense of purpose and self-worth.

The impact of Alliance House extends well beyond its Clubhouse walls. By actively participating in daily operations, members accrue real-world experience and the confidence needed to reintegrate into the broader society. The model has proven successful, with hundreds of former

members moving on to lead independent, fulfilling lives in Salt Lake City and communities beyond.

Central to the philosophy of Alliance House are its three foundational pillars: education, employment and housing. By prioritizing these core areas, Alliance House assists members in navigating their paths toward long-term recovery and social reintegration. Education programs offer opportunities for members to complete high school equivalency exams, pursue higher education and engage in various learning initiatives designed to widen their knowledge and skills. The employment pillar focuses on providing members with the tools necessary for workforce re-entry, including transitional, supported and independent skills.

Housing, the third pillar, addresses one of the most critical needs by helping members secure stable and affordable housing. The Alliance House transitional housing program provides "subsidized independent housing to



Alliance House Clubhouse member "Rudy" works at one of the organization's transitional employment sites, Goodwill Industries. Members are able to access employment opportunities in the community.



Members and staff work side-by-side in the Alliance House Culinary Unit.

qualified members, particularly those who are homeless," recognizing the fundamental role of a safe living environment in mental health recovery. Alliance House owns two properties within walking distance of Alliance House that are reserved specifically for the members. One building has 10 units; members can live there for up to six months rent-free. After six months, if they have an income, they pay 30 percent of that income up to \$200. The other building has nine units, members live there for 30 percent of their income up to \$500. There is a waitlist, but people are not removed on a first-come, first-serve basis but rather based on their situation.

Alliance House's unique approach has not only reshaped lives locally but has also set a precedent on the global stage. As one of only 12 Clubhouses worldwide certified by Clubhouse International to provide comprehensive training for similar programs, Alliance House stands as an example for organizations eager to adopt or enhance their own Clubhouse-model initiatives.

Empowering Through Mutual Respect

Alliance House's foundational ethos of mutual respect and caring is at the heart of its success. In this collaborative setting, the distinction between staff and members blurs, fostering an environment where everyone works side-by-side toward a common goal. This harmonious dynamic is pivotal to the Clubhouse's mission, emphasizing that recovery and empowerment are achieved not

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in isolation but through shared effort and community support.

“What I love about Clubhouse is it focuses on me being independent and that I can do whatever I choose to do,” said Margaret McCoullum, a member of Alliance House. “I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety; I had my first breakdown at 21 years old. I was told many times that I could not work, go to school or do anything. I originally joined Clubhouse in New York City. It gives you a purpose to

keep up every morning. Since I have been a member, I do public speaking; I am on the training team to train other Clubhouses.”

Recognizing the barriers that uninsured individuals face in accessing necessary mental health services, Alliance House ensures that all donations received during fundraisers directly benefit its Clubhouse program. This commitment underscores Alliance House’s dedication to serving all members of the community, regardless of their financial situation.

“We are really dedicated to working as a community and overcoming any challenges together,” Huff said. “Medicaid is difficult for people living with mental illness. A lot are living in homelessness. They don’t have an address to receive the notifications

that they need a review, so therefore they lose their Medicaid. There are a lot of us trying to assist our members in accessing Medicaid if they are eligible for it, but we heavily rely on donations from our larger community.”

Alliance House offers more than support for Salt Lake City residents facing the challenges of SPMI; it provides a pathway to recovery, empowerment and a chance to reclaim one’s place in the world.

“Come [to Alliance House] and visit us first; come and see what we can do,” McCoullum said when asked what advice she would give to others thinking about becoming members. “It gives you a choice for different doors that could be opened, like getting a job or reaching your goals.”



Members Jan, Katy, and Tori working side-by-side in the Alliance House business training unit.



Members and staff attend an Alliance House education and employment dinner. Alliance House hosts the monthly event in support of its members.



Member "Damon" speaks to other members and staff of Alliance House at the organization's annual Milestone Fundraiser, hosted by Squatters Downtown. Donations help Alliance House serve any adult living with mental illness, regardless of insurance eligibility.



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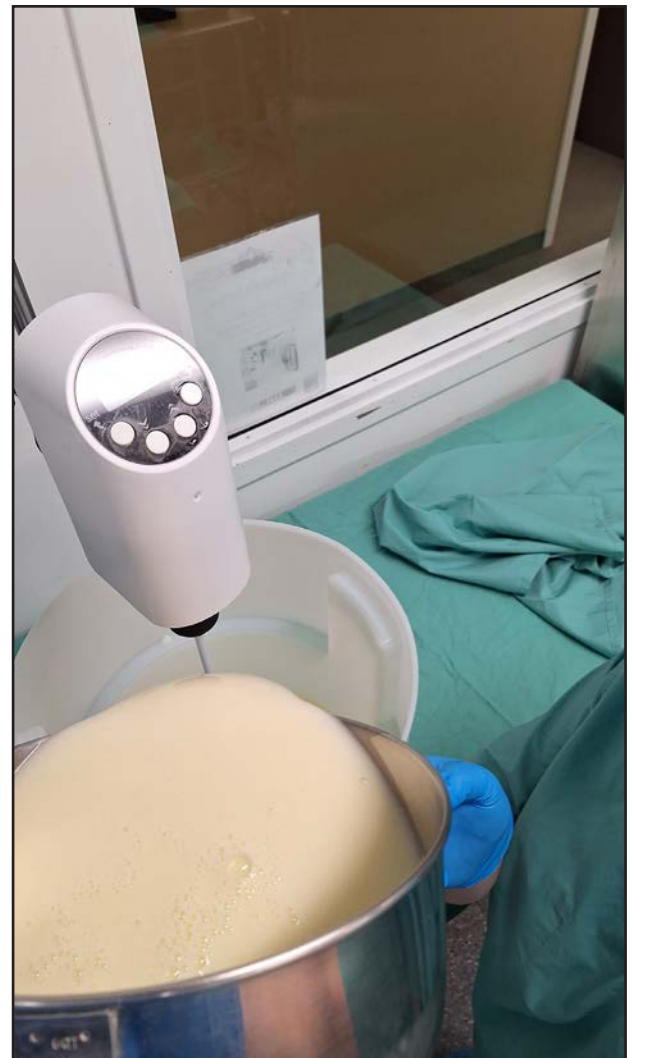
Giving tiny tummies a better start



At the Mountain West Mothers' Milk Bank in South Salt Lake, donor human milk is thawed and prepped for bottling.



Janis Angeles prepares donor milk for pasteurization.



Donor milk is poured into a mixer to homogenize it.

Dedicated to the health and welfare of Utah infants

Aimee L. Cook
Caritas Quarterly

Mountain West Mothers' Milk Bank (MWMMB) has become a source of hope and support for countless families, neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) and healthcare professionals. This nonprofit organization was founded in 2014 by a dedicated group of Utah clinicians who shared the vision and were dedicated to advocating for the health and welfare of infants. Those efforts have made significant strides in promoting the importance of donor human milk as a life-saving resource.

Due to the lengthy process of getting certifications and approvals for a milk bank, the MWMMB was officially opened in December 2019 and its first batch of pasteurized milk was completed in January 2020. Mountain West Mothers' Milk Bank proudly stands as a member of the Human Milk Banking Association of North America, adhering to rigorous standards in the promotion and distribution of donor milk.

In 2021, local communities made a monumental contribution by donating over 263,000 ounces of milk to the Mountain West Mothers' Milk Bank. This remarkable act of generosity enabled it to distribute more than 200,000 ounces of donor human milk to hospitals, nurseries and infants

needing this essential nourishment in their homes. The impact of these donations cannot be overstated, as every ounce of milk plays a critical role in supporting the health and survival of vulnerable infants across the region.

Through rigorous screening, processing and distribution protocols, the organization ensures that donated milk is safe and accessible to those in need. It also analyzes calories for specific infant needs. They provide a standard 20-calorie offering and a 22- and 24-calorie offering.

The process begins with generous donations from lactating mothers who have passed through a comprehensive screening process to ensure their milk is healthy and safe. Once donated, the milk undergoes pasteurization and rigorous testing at MWMMB's state-of-the-art laboratory facilities to eliminate potential pathogens while preserving vital nutrients and antibodies. The MWMMB has over 200 screened donors in their system.

"In Utah we are really lucky that we have a population that falls into our donor requirements," said Amanda Ottley, the organization's executive director. "We don't have a risky lifestyle, and we have a base of volunteerism of moms who send us milk. Our goal is to pasteurize 17,000 ounces a month."

One of the cornerstones of MWMMB's success is its collaboration with hospitals and NICUs across the region. By supplying donor human

milk, the nonprofit plays a pivotal role in supporting premature and sick infants whose mothers may be unable to provide enough milk due to various factors. This partnership has been instrumental in reducing instances of necrotizing enterocolitis, a dangerous gastrointestinal disease primarily affecting preterm infants. The University of Utah and Intermountain Health are MWMMB's founding sponsors. Hospitals purchase a bottle of milk from MWMMB for \$5 an per ounce on average. Private insurance is billed for the supply.

"It can take a long time from the time a mother says she is interested in donation all the way through to the actual delivery of milk to the hospital to give to the babies," said Erin Zinkhan, neonatologist and medical director for MWMMB. "The milk is frozen before and after it is pasteurized. Research studies have looked at the benefits of donor milk instead of formula, especially in the smallest babies — premature infants born under 28 weeks' gestation. Those infants are at the highest risk for having complications. The donor milk reduces death, is more easily tolerated and they just do much better with their gut."

The impact of MWMMB's efforts extends beyond the immediate health benefits of donor milk. It also serves as an educational resource, raising awareness about the importance of breast milk and lactation support for new mothers. MWMMB fosters a supportive community centered around infant nutrition and maternal health through workshops, outreach programs and collaboration with healthcare professionals.

Challenges remain despite the clear benefits and growing demand for donor human milk. One significant obstacle is the limited public awareness about milk donation and its life-saving potential. Many mothers are unaware that such programs exist or that their excess breast milk could help save lives. To combat this, MWMMB actively engages in community outreach and education, utilizing social media, local events and partnerships with healthcare providers to spread the word.

Funding is another challenge for MWMMB. The nonprofit relies on donations, grants and fundraising events to cover operational costs, including milk processing, storage and distribution. The cost of processing a single ounce of donated milk is substantial, making financial support vital for the organization's continued operation and growth.

"We are little different than other nonprofits in that we have a product we can be reimbursed for so we can have an income stream," said Ottley. "We have about \$1 million in revenue and fundraising a year."

MWMMB is committed to expanding its



Trudy Smith strains the homogenized donor human milk in the final steps before bottling.



Janis Angeles pours the prepared milk into bottles.

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Janis Angeles heat-seals protective foils on bottles of donor human milk at the Mountain West Mothers' Milk Bank in South Salt Lake.

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reach and capacity. Plans include increasing the number of milk drop-off locations, enhancing laboratory processing capabilities and strengthening partnerships with healthcare institutions. Additionally, the nonprofit aims to broaden its donor base and volunteer network, ensuring a steady supply of donor milk to meet the rising demand.

“This is an inspiring group to work with, both on the operations side and on the board side. These are committed people who are very busy, but they know how important this is to the tiny, fragile members of our community,” said Susan

Isbell, MWMMB board chair. “As we grow, we serve more infants each year, and each of those infants is helped by having pasteurized, donor-given milk. In order to serve more families, we will need to grow; we are always looking to the future; we plan five to 10 years out.”

The stories of families who have benefited from MWMMB’s services underscore the profound impact of its work. Parents of premature or ill infants often speak of the relief and gratitude they feel knowing their child is receiving the best possible nutrition, thanks to donor milk. These testimonials are powerful reminders of the value of community support and the difference each donation can make.

“With my first child I decided to donate milk because my freezer was filled top to bottom with milk and I needed to make some room. When I got pregnant with my second, I knew I would probably have to do

the same thing again. Then I went into preterm labor. I was taken by ambulance to a hospital two hours away from home, where I gave birth five weeks and a day early to my little five-pound, one-ounce preemie girl. The whole experience is a blur, but I very clearly remember signing a paper giving permission for my baby to have donor milk and thinking about all the milk I had donated. The next day I watched the nurses wheel a baby born at 25 weeks into the room next door to begin their long NICU journey and found out the baby on the other side of us had been there for over 70 days. It was then I decided to set my goal to donate 1,000 ounces of milk, which I reached in 14 weeks.” — Alex Carleton, quoted on the Mountain West Mothers’ Milk Bank website.

Organizations like Mountain West Mothers’ Milk Bank play an essential role in a world where the health and well-being of society’s youngest members are paramount. By bridging the gap between the abundance of breast milk and the needs of vulnerable infants, MWMMB embodies the spirit of giving and the power of community.

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Children's Service Society of Utah

Kinship Care • Adoption • Caregiver Support

A legacy of compassion and support

Aimee L. Cook
Caritas Quarterly

In Salt Lake City, a movement blossomed from the concern and kindness of 34 visionary women on Oct. 13, 1884. These pioneers laid the foundation for one of Utah's oldest and most dedicated nonprofits — the Children's Service Society of Utah (CSS).

Born out of a necessity to provide a safe haven for children of the working poor, the society quickly evolved to address a more profound need when a baby was left on its doorstep. This poignant moment expanded its mission to include adoption services, marking the beginning of a long-standing commitment to child welfare.

Through generations, CSS has remained dedicated to its mission, adapting to the changing needs of children and families within the community. Today, it continues to light the way for countless families, providing essential services through its varied programs. These services aim to empower families and caregivers, ensuring the safety and well-being of children, which is at the core of all CSS endeavors.

"I moved here from Spain in 1996. I started working in the child care center before they hired me at CSS, helping with Spanish-speaking families, translating and interpreting," said Encarni Gallardo, executive director of the Children's

Service Society of Utah. "In my heart, I always had the dream that someone needed to advocate for children. Children don't have a

voice. They accept whatever comes their way, even when it is the worst scenario. I could tell you so many success stories."



A young client of Children's Service Society of Utah celebrates her birthday with a beautiful birthday cake donated for the occasion by Cake4Kids.

Pioneering Programs for Family Empowerment

CSS's current initiatives are anchored in its rich history. It is extending its legacy into the 21st century with programs designed to meet today's challenges.

"Our services are based on what the community is telling us, not on what we think they need," said Gallardo. "I had a senator from another state ask me why Grandfamilies was so successful, and I said, 'Because we never thought to say, 'This is what you should be doing.' We held a lot of meetings with the grandparents to understand better where we could fit our services and where they need to go in order to be meaningful to them.' That made it a very successful program."

Adoption

CSS stands as Utah's oldest non-denominational child welfare organization, boasting a remarkable legacy that spans over 135 years. This enduring institution has facilitated the adoption process for thousands of birth parents, adoptive families and children, fostering countless connections and nurturing families. In recognition of its commitment to ethical practices and excellence in nonprofit leadership, CSS was honored with the Utah Ethical Leadership award in

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Officers, staffers and supporters of the Children's Service Society of Utah participate in a recent fundraising Zumba activity.



Before his death in 2022, Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah meets with the officers of the Children's Service Society of Utah. Left to right are board members Saundra Stroope, Gail Holladay, Connie White and Paula McFarland; Sen. Hatch; board member Bria Mertens; Mark Gurney, board president; board member Jennie Garner; and Encarni Gallardo, the organization's executive director.



A Children's Service Society staffer conducts a visit at the home of a client, one of the services offered by the organization.

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2018. This accolade underscores the organization's status as a premier provider of supportive community services, specifically highlighting its ethical approach to adoption services.

Grandfamilies and Kinship Care

In Utah, an estimated 24,000 children are raised by grandparents or other relatives, often due to parents' drug use, poverty, death, incarceration or mental illness. These children, having faced neglect or abuse, bring complex needs to their new homes. Caregivers encounter numerous challenges, including securing financial support, obtaining medical insurance, school enrollment, affordable child care and finding emotional support.

To assist these families, CSS offers tailored programs focusing on education for caregivers about safety, emotional support, managing neglected or abused children, boundary-setting with parents and substance abuse awareness. Simultaneously, it emphasizes providing the children with a stable, supportive environment, alongside mental health services and skills for proper parenting and substance abuse prevention. This comprehensive approach aims to address the multifaceted needs of both children and their caregivers, ensuring a smoother transition into their new familial roles.

Care About Child Care

The Care About Child Care initiative at CSS embodies a comprehensive approach to child welfare and education. This program underscores the belief that child care transcends basic supervision; it's a multifaceted issue that touches upon family dynamics, economic development, workforce participation, educational outcomes and community well-being. In collaboration with the Utah Office of Child Care, Care About Child Care utilizes an innovative online platform designed to support quality child care practices while assisting parents in finding licensed and reputable caregivers within their communities. This initiative is pivotal in advocating for environments that foster the

holistic development of children. The Department of Workforce Services' Office of Child Care provides funding through the Child Care and Development Block Grant. For more details on how to access resources or support, please visit the Care About Child Care website.

Home Visitation Program

The Home Visitation Program at the Children's Service Society of Utah stands as a vital service within Salt Lake County, aiming directly at aiding low-income and high-risk families. From pregnancy through to the moment their child begins kindergarten, this initiative is dedicated to enhancing school readiness and promoting the health, safety and development of mothers, infants and young children. This program specifically addresses the myriad challenges these families face, including poverty, unemployment, the scarcity of affordable housing, the pressures on adolescent parents, parental stress, domestic violence, a transient lifestyle, infant mortality, low birth weights, preterm births, inadequate basic healthcare for children, insufficient parenting skills, mental health issues, substance abuse and involvement in the child welfare system. The holistic support provided by the Home Visitation Program is essential in securing a healthier, safer and more stable environment for the community's most vulnerable members.

Building Blocks Child Care Center

In November 2021, the Building Blocks Child Care Center embarked on a new chapter under the auspices of the Children's Service Society of Utah, marking a significant step forward in addressing the early education and care needs of underserved families. This acquisition by CSS marked not just a change in ownership but a profound transformation in the center's mission and environment.

Following extensive remodeling and updates, the center now prides itself on offering a secure, nurturing and exceptional educational setting. Designed to support up to 41 children, ranging from 6 months to 5 years old, Building Blocks is dedicated to fostering the developmental, growth and early learning needs of children. The center's overarching aim is to pro-

CONTINUES next page

FROM previous page

vide quality child care that supports the dynamic needs of biological, adoptive and kinship families, while also engendering positive relationships within these family structures. Key to the success of this program is the ability to offer reduced tuition rates, made possible through strategic funding sources and community partnerships. By alleviating financial pressures and providing robust family support, Building Blocks endeavors to narrow the early education achievement gap, ensuring a brighter future for the community it serves.

Importance of Community

The contributions from the community play a pivotal role in enhancing the impact of CSS. Donations are fundamental in sustaining life-changing programs like Building Blocks Child Care Center. Each contribution, whether monetary or in-kind, directly supports the center’s capacity to offer reduced tuition rates, which are crucial for low-income families. In addition, donations enable CSS to maintain a high quality of care and education, invest in

professional development for staff, and ensure the facility continues to meet the evolving needs of children and families. It is through the generosity of donors that CSS can expand its reach, innovate its services and strengthen its mission to serve more families efficiently. This support not only facilitates the immediate needs of the community but also invests in the long-term well-being and success of its youngest members.

Community members who generously donate their time and expertise are invaluable in navigating the complex legal challenges often faced by families served. Additionally, the heartwarming gesture of bakers in our community, such as Cakes4Kids, who donate cakes to children in the CSS programs, infuses a sense of joy and normalcy for those who may not otherwise experience the simple pleasure of a birthday celebration. These acts of kindness not only strengthen the programs but deeply enrich the lives of the families and children, reminding us all of the profound effect community support can have in creating lasting positive outcomes.

“I am a birth mother. I placed my son for adoption when I was 18 years old through CSS,” said Jess Couser, an attorney and owner of Jess Couser Family Law. “After that, I would go talk on various panels, etc., about my adoption experience. Fast-forward to 15 or so years later, I joined the board of directors and served five years. CSS, both in my experience as a birth mom in 1995 as well as when I was

on the board, has consistently had a very informed, ethical and big-picture view of their adoption program — it is very birth-parent conscience. Working in family law, I often work with grandparents, and I think the Grandfamilies program is really cool and is utilized by clients in my field.”

The Children’s Service Society of Utah’s long and storied history is a testament to the power of community and compassion. Looking ahead, CSS remains committed to evolving its programs to meet the changing dynamics of families and the challenges they face. By continuing to advocate for children’s safety and well-being, CSS not only honors its founding mission but also illuminates a path to a brighter future for all Utah families.

“Listening to the community is something I do not want to lose,” Gallardo said. “I think when we become and grow more administrative, we tend to be disconnected from the reality of what happens. Some needs have changed after COVID-19; we need to be able to change when times change. If I had a dream, it would be that we are able to fund services that focus more on prevention and not so much on intervention.”

CSS hopes to inspire continued support and engagement from the community, ensuring that the agency can extend its impact even further. For those looking to contribute, volunteer or learn more about the Children’s Service Society of Utah’s life-changing programs, visit cssutah.org.



Staff members of the Children's Service Society of Utah dress as superheroines for a fundraising fun run sponsored by the organization.



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