

Dear Friends,

I am writing to share exciting news about the future of St. John's Home, and the impact we will continue to have on kids in our community.

As you know, St. John's Home provides a home and treatment for kids between the ages of 6 and 17 as well as shelter care for all kids in Kent County up to age 18 when there is suspected abuse or neglect. Since opening the KidsFirst Program in 1998, we have partnered with other area agencies such as D.A. Blodgett for Children, Bethany Christian Services and Wedgwood Christian Services. In all of these partnerships, we have made sure that any joint effort was true to the mission of St. John's Home, which is to show love to all children who come through our doors.

Several months ago, we started having discussions with D. A. Blodgett for Children, another highly-respected, longstanding community organization that cares about children as much as we do. D.A. Blodgett for Children is the largest provider of foster care in West Michigan, including teen foster care. Initially, our conversations revolved around their interest in providing transitional housing and life skill instruction for youth exiting foster care. Our interest was in having more ready access to foster and adoptive homes for our kids coming out of residential care.

D.A. Blodgett for Children envisioned a group home setting for teens where they could learn essential independent living skills such as grocery shopping, anger management, and budgeting in a secure environment. They would be responsible for themselves and for their studies, but they would have the backup and support of a caring staff adult who could answer questions and encourage them...like having mom at the other end of the phone when you need her.

We envisioned an agency which could place our kids in loving families much sooner by including foster and adoptive home specialists into our treatment teams from day one.

These visions launched an exploratory journey that brought our two agencies to the table, discussing ways in which we could make these goals a reality. D.A. Blodgett for Children realized that St. John's Home was a strong partner who had an in-depth understanding of the group home concept, with an available living facility, and the same loving, caring approach to serving children. We realized that D.A. Blodgett's expertise in foster care, adoption and other support services (such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters) could only improve our outcomes with our kids. As our discussions continued, we realized that together, our two agencies could offer a vast, unduplicated array of services to all children in our community.

The idea blossomed into a major decision for our two agencies to merge into one. The two agencies are very similar in philosophy and culture, and we do not duplicate services in any way. The St. John's Home campus has the capacity for a number of additional programs, and we have youth in our residential programs who need the same safe, transitional experience that the youth

of D.A. Blodgett for Children need. In turn, St. John's Home has many children who come into D.A. Blodgett's programs who would benefit from foster care, eventual adoption or transitional living. Not only can we partner on the transitional housing project, but we have found a relationship that will enhance the experience of all children who come into our care.

Sharon Loughridge will be the executive director of the merged agency. Sharon brings a considerable wealth of experience and knowledge. She has a deep respect for St. John's Home and has always been a stronger partner. My role will be to assist Sharon in the integration of the two agencies and to develop new programming for this merged agency. Each campus will maintain its own name, but function as one. We have enclosed a brochure that explains how this merger will help us serve children and youth in our community. The bottom line is this: our merger is beneficial for the children we serve. We are stronger together, blending our full continuum of services, sharing best practice expertise, and unifying our excellent staff to work together regardless of the services a child and their family might need.

We ask you to join us in celebrating this merger. We welcome your input, questions and visits. Feel free to stop in or call to arrange a visit to either campus or both! We appreciate your support now more than ever as we embark on this new direction for both agencies!

With warm regards,



Mark Thomson
President
St. John's Home



Sharon L. Loughridge
Executive Director
D.A. Blodgett for Children