



where
hope
shines

THE LATEST NEWS
PUBLISHED FOR OUR
FRIENDS & FAMILIES

Fall 2021



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear friends,

It feels as though our world has been in a constant state of upheaval over the last 18 months. At times, daily life has been very hard, and reality has felt discouraging. Some people have suffered the loss of loved ones, illness, violence in their communities, damage from catastrophic storms, and other experiences that were downright terrifying. As I reflect on all that has happened since March 2020, I believe we have been in a collective trauma cycle. As the word "trauma" comes to mind, I think immediately of the children and teens we serve at Gemma. Many of them come to Gemma for help after living through significant trauma and loss that might include abuse, neglect, incarceration or the violent death of loved ones, parental substance abuse or mental illness, and numerous other indescribably challenging circumstances.

So how do we sustain throughout ongoing trying times? In our work with traumatized children, we have learned that hope is key to healing and that hopelessness fuels despair. In our behavioral health programs, Gemma uses evidence-based practices proven to help youth heal from the aftermath of their traumatic experiences. In our special education school, Martin Luther School, teachers employ best practices to guide students through their education while supporting them emotionally. This support enables them to make progress academically, something many students were unable to do before coming to us. As these youth, and the families we work with as well, begin to see a better path for themselves, hope starts to grow and, in turn, the future seems a bit brighter. On the pages that follow, you will read recent examples of our mission in action and about the tireless work of our dedicated teams to serve children and families in great need.

This is hard work in the best of times and even more so during the ongoing pandemic. You help to make our work possible, and we are buoyed by your friendship. With your support, we remain steadfast in our hope that an easier time for all — our kids, our families, our organization, and our communities — is truly on the horizon.

In gratitude,



Kristen E.M. Gay, Ph.D.
President and CEO



Our Vision: We envision a world in which children, youth, and families feel valued and have the tools to realize their highest potential.

Our Mission: Gemma Services changes lives by transforming hope into action for children, youth, and families facing emotional and behavioral challenges.



Visit us online at www.gemmaservices.org.

QUESTIONS? Contact us at info@gemmaservices.org or 610.825.4440 x3206.

Thank You for Giving Kids a Great Start!

More than 300 children were able to start the school year off on the right foot thanks to generous donations of backpacks and school supplies! "The book bags definitely saved me time and money," expressed one appreciative father. "Thanks, Gemma Services!" shared another grateful caregiver. We could not have provided these much-needed school supplies to families without the partnership of many caring friends. We are especially grateful for:

- Abington Presbyterian Church
- Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church
- Central Presbyterian Church Downingtown
- Chambers Memorial Presbyterian Church
- Gwynedd Square Presbyterian Church
- Messiah Lutheran Church in Downingtown
- NewChurch Live
- Newtown Square Presbyterian Church
- Ridley Park Presbyterian Church
- St. John's Presbyterian Church
- St. Luke Lutheran Church in Devon
- The Mansion at Rosemont
- Wayne Presbyterian Church



If you are interested in partnering with Gemma to serve vulnerable youth and families, check out our wish list on our website at <https://bit.ly/GemmaWishList> or email us at info@gemmaservices.org. Thank you!

Welcome to Robyn Radomicki!



Gemma Services is pleased to welcome Robyn Radomicki, LCSW, as the new Clinical Director of the Residential Treatment Program! Robyn comes to Gemma with more than 20 years of deep experience providing clinical services for both children and adults.

Robyn most recently worked at the Horsham Clinic as Director of Counseling and Social Services for Adults. Prior to that role, she worked at Devereaux Advanced Behavioral Health Services as the Clinical Director of their Children's Behavioral Health Center, a stand-alone psychiatric hospital for youth. Robyn started her career as a residential counselor. After completing her Master of Social Service at Bryn

Mawr Graduate School of Social Work & Social Research, she held several different clinical roles. She is well familiar with the services we provide through our Residential Treatment Program at Gemma. "When I think about residential, it's in my heart," Robyn said. "My belief is that residential services can make a significant difference in the lives of children and adolescents." Robyn also points to Gemma's use of data to help drive treatment. "The way that Gemma is looking at data as part of the treatment planning process is exciting. Plus, I am thrilled to be working with such a great team here!"

Sarah Kline, Vice President of Residential Services, states, "We are thrilled to have Robyn join our devoted team in the Residential Treatment Program at Gemma. She brings expertise and extensive clinical experience that will enhance the services we provide for children and teens." Welcome, Robyn!

A RETURN TO IN-PERSON

After a virtual school year and lots of changes to everyday life since March 2020 when the pandemic began, a summer filled with fun was much needed for "our" kids! We were thrilled to be able to plan many fun-filled activities for the youth served by the Residential Treatment Program and Martin Luther School on our Plymouth Meeting campus.

Martin Luther School's six-week, Extended School Year Program (ESY) welcomed students back in-person four days a week after a fully virtual school year.

The program continued with one virtual school day each week. More than 150 students participated in programming, continuing to build their academic skills and enjoying a host of activities centered around this year's ESY theme, "Breaking World Records," inspired by the Guinness Book of Records. Students competed to see who could stack the most marshmallows and how far their paper airplanes could fly, cooled off on a giant inflatable water slide, and more. "I don't know if we actually broke any records," one student shared. "But we had a lot of fun!"



Summer Fun!

"Children need to feel the sun on their face, the breeze in their hair, and all the joys of being outdoors," shared Malaika Henry, Residential Program Manager, as she described the program's commitment this past summer to finding many ways for the youth we serve to experience childhood joy, even during a pandemic.

Some examples of joyful opportunities included visits to local zoos, an outing to a nearby farm to pick sunflowers, and nature walks on campus supplemented with a trip to the Insectarium. They also had a blast

when the Doodlery Art Bus came to campus for a day of actually painting the bus! Water play in sprinklers and lots of arts and crafts rounded out the many activities that undoubtedly helped the kids to create many good memories.

"It was important to us to give them some semblance of normalcy," said Henry. "We wanted a summer where they could run, laugh, and build positive memories."



Outpatient Program: Serving Youth Through the Pandemic

"There is something magical about being in the room with a child," says Beth Richey, Director of the Outpatient Program. "There is a tangible energy when they are sharing their trauma in a safe space with a parent and a therapist."

After more than a year of providing therapy through Telehealth, Gemma's Outpatient Program recently began a phased return to in-person therapy at the Preheim Center in Southwest Philadelphia. Additionally, psychiatrists have started to meet with children and families in our Mt. Airy office and we continue planning for additional in-person appointments in the future as well. Priority is to offer appointments to the youngest children for whom Telehealth is quite challenging.

Providing therapy via Telehealth has also been challenging for the staff who have had to call upon a great deal of creativity to engage clients in virtual sessions. "If a 6-year-old is excited to show me their superhero toys [over the screen], then I connect that to what we are working on in therapy," explains Richard Lawrence, therapist. "I might ask, 'Oh, you like superheroes? Sounds like being strong and brave is important to you?'"

For some families, Telehealth has had unexpected benefits, including added convenience of not having to commute to an appointment. "We have seen notably higher attendance for sessions due to increased

accessibility, flexibility, and a reduction in barriers many of our families face," states Richey. Richey explains that the older teens whom therapists work with have responded positively to virtual sessions. "Many teenage clients have been more willing to enter therapy when they can participate from their own homes," says therapist, Suzannah McNamara. "Kids and adolescents are so used to doing things virtually that it becomes an extension of their lives...it actually has been something the kids seem to like."

Many families have expressed heartfelt appreciation for their therapist's dedication. "Families have come to us and said, 'thank you for doing this for our family,'" shares Richey. Positive feedback like this and seeing their clients make progress has helped to buoy therapists during this ongoing trying time. "After a good session, one where I feel like we've made progress in addressing emotional wounds and helping a child heal from them," says Lawrence, "those victories keep our spirits up." Whether delivered via Telehealth or in one of Gemma's offices in-person, the Outpatient Program is dedicated to continuing to provide vital support to help make hope shine for vulnerable children and families in our communities.

Interested in supporting the work of the Outpatient Behavioral Health Program? Please use the enclosed envelope or visit www.gemmaservices.org and click on "Donate" to do so. Thank you!



**We Are
HIRING!**

Gemma Services has openings across the agency! We are hiring for a variety of positions in our behavioral health programs and in Martin Luther School.

To learn more, please visit the Careers page of our website:
www.gemmaservices.org.

A Forever Family



Despite the challenges of the past year and a half, Gemma's Adoption and Permanency Program continues to forge ahead in their work to find forever families for at-risk children and youth. In fact, in this last year,

the program increased the number of children and families they serve by approximately 20%, a remarkable feat during challenging months for both staff and families. "It was painful for families and staff alike when the Family Court closed in March 2020," shared Sam Wojnilower, Adoption and Permanency Supervisor. In Philadelphia, the court shifted to virtual proceedings in May 2020 and delayed some cases altogether. The court began accepting new cases in September 2020. Wojnilower continued, "Families whose dreams had been deferred were overjoyed when their special day finally came! For staff, this made our work even more gratifying."

Marquis* is one of the children whose adoption was recently finalized. Marquis came to Gemma first through the Foster Family Care Program at

theVillage and later to the Residential Treatment Program at Silver Springs prior to the 2019 merger of the two organizations to become Gemma Services. After he left residential care, Gemma's Adoption and Permanency Program began to work with Marquis and his new loving family through a long process that culminated in his formal adoption. Congratulations to Marquis' family and all our forever families!

To help celebrate joyful milestones such as this one, Gemma is thrilled to be able to support these new families with a gift basket filled with games, snacks, and a photo album. Thank you to the many friends, such as those at Wayne Presbyterian Church, who are collecting and donating these gift baskets to help the new forever families make lifelong memories! Wojnilower shared, "The families are grateful for the thoughtfulness of our supporters in making their day even more special."

To learn more about our Adoption and Permanency Program, please visit www.gemmaservices.org. If you would like to support the gift baskets for new families, please contact us at info@gemmaservices.org.

**Name changed to protect the child's privacy.*

Help Make the Holidays Bright for Children and Families

Far too many of the children and families we serve feel unloved, forgotten, and hopeless. With your help, **we strive to make sure they know they do matter and they are loved** – at Christmastime and throughout the year. With your generosity, we will once again make sure the holidays are bright and filled with joyful memories for the deserving youth in our care, and for their families, too!

Here are ways you can help Gemma and "our" children and families:

- **Make a generous financial gift** in the spirit of the holidays to support children and families.
- **Suggest friends or family members make a financial gift** to Gemma in your honor.
- **Donate a gift card** to help Gemma's children and families have a bright holiday, and to also provide support when needed throughout the year. The most useful gift cards include **ShopRite, Target, Walmart, Amazon, Five Below, Marshalls/TJ Maxx, and Best Buy** in \$25 increments.
- **Provide a gift for a child.** A wish list can be found on our website or on Amazon (<https://bit.ly/GemmaNeeds>). **We ask that all gifts are new and unwrapped, please.**

Our offices continue to have restricted access. **Gift delivery is BY APPOINTMENT ONLY Monday, November 29 to Tuesday, December 7.** Please contact Amanda Bryant at (610) 825-4440 x3307 or abryant@gemmaservices.org or Betty Wu at (610) 519-1615 or efwu@gemmaservices.org to schedule your appointment.



formerly theVillage & Silver Springs
512 W. Township Line Road
Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462

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**NEW
DATE!**



Save the Date!
SATURDAY, MAY 14, 2022

FEATURING
**Chef Chad &
Hanna Williams**
of
Friday Saturday Sunday

Supporting Programs for At-Risk Children, Youth, & Families
bidpal.net/chefsforgemma2021

Dinner and Auctions | Event will be streamed online for those at home