



because
you
matter

THE LATEST NEWS
PUBLISHED FOR OUR
FRIENDS & FAMILIES

Fall 2024



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear friends,

With the start of the new school year, I am filled with hope for the future of our students and the many youth and families we are privileged to accompany. Gemma has positively impacted the lives of thousands in our local communities, guiding them through challenging times. This vital work is only possible because of the generosity and unwavering support of friends like you.



While we often measure our impact with the numbers of those we assist each year, Gemma's true influence goes beyond these figures. It is seen in the smiles of the children on the cover of this newsletter and evident in the stories of success and resilience of the children and families whom we walk beside every day.

We celebrate when a third grader at Martin Luther School, who arrived unable to sound out letters, can now proudly read their first chapter book. We rejoice when a teenager working with a therapist describes feeling hopeful after a long period of despair related to past trauma. And we share great hope when a family successfully reunites after a child's stay in residential care. Moments of transformation like these are the heart of our work. You help make our work possible.

Thanks to your generous support, during the 2023–2024 Fiscal Year, Gemma was able to:

- **Accompany more than 100 youth**, ages 6–14, on their healing journey in our Residential Treatment Program through nurturing care, trauma-informed clinical services, and enriching activities;
- **Provide a holistic and comprehensive educational experience for more than 220 K-11th grade students** at our Martin Luther School, helping them work toward their full potential; and
- **Assist nearly 2,300 youth and families in their own homes, schools, and communities** through a range of mental health, child welfare, and prevention services offered by our Community Based Programs.

Your generosity has been essential in enabling Gemma to make a profound difference in the lives of youth and families in our local communities. We are deeply grateful for the thousands of in-kind gifts you donated last year — whether toys, clothing, books, or school supplies — as well as for your financial contributions of approximately \$1.4 million, and for the more than 700 hours of volunteer time you invested in Gemma. Your support is vital to our mission. Together, we are working to create a world where every person knows they matter.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristen', written over a light blue background.

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

Please visit our website for more examples of the impact you helped make possible!
www.gemmaservices.org/about/impact

Celebrating Our Teacher Apprentice Program!



"At a time when schools across the nation are facing major teacher shortages, our Teacher Apprentice Program has become essential for Martin Luther School," shared Eva Morrison, Vice President of Education. "This program not only builds a vital workforce for our school but also supports our Teaching Assistants in pursuing higher education while working at Gemma." Martin Luther School

(MLS) launched its innovative Teacher Apprentice Program (TAP) in 2022 with nine participants. The program gives MLS Teaching Assistants the opportunity to obtain a bachelor's degree and student teach at MLS. Upon completing TAP, participants graduate and move into a Classroom Teacher position at our school.

TAP celebrated the graduation of its first participant this past spring. "The opportunity to finish my bachelor's degree while working at Martin Luther School was what I needed to advance my career," said Ashlee Cathcart, who graduated summa cum laude from Cabrini University, our prior higher education partner for TAP. She reflected, "Now that I have my degree in early childhood and special education, I am able to take on more responsibility. I'm excited to put my ideas and what I've learned through TAP into practice."

Participants now take teacher education classes at Arcadia University and also receive mentoring and support from MLS colleagues throughout their education and student teaching. "We have 17 participants in the program," said Morrison. "Three are expected to graduate this December. We are so excited for all of them." Teaching Assistants apply to join TAP and, once accepted, receive a stipend for their participation, Gemma covers the cost of tuition for teacher education coursework, and participants can apply for financial assistance for other educational fees owed. TAP is funded by donations and is possible thanks to the generosity of Gemma's donors.

TAP benefits MLS' students as well. "The TAP staff bring their rich experience as Teaching Assistants, allowing them to connect and build relationships with our students," Morrison stated. "This connection helps our students feel safe in taking the risks involved with substantial learning." As one participant shared, "The most rewarding thing about TAP is being able to actively watch my students grow while I grow myself."



To learn more about Martin Luther School and the Teacher Apprentice Program, please visit www.gemmaservices.org/mlschool.



Gemma Fit Club

Gemma's Residential Treatment (RT) Program has a new wellness initiative! The Gemma Fit Club highlights healthy nutrition and exercise education, activities, and nutritional counseling for youth in residence at Gemma. Hands-on activities like gardening, group wellness sessions, one-on-one health assessments, and individualized nutrition planning are all part of the Fit Club's programming.

"The RT Nursing team was excited to launch the Gemma Fit Club earlier this year to educate the youth in Gemma's Residential Treatment Program," said Kristine Jones, Nurse Manager. "The goal of Gemma Fit Club is to provide our kids with the knowledge to make healthy lifestyle choices and prevent risk factors that result in chronic conditions." She continued, "By growing our own vegetables and doing fun, active exercises, we are able to give our young residents opportunities to learn and adopt healthy habits to benefit them throughout their lives."

This summer, Gemma collaborated with Greener Partners, a nonprofit offering gardening and farm-to-table experiences. Youth have been excited to see the results of their efforts – fresh, healthy vegetables they helped plant! Thank you to our supporters for making the Gemma Fit Club possible!

To support this initiative, please visit www.gemmaservices.org/donate.



Summer Fun Abounds!



Students at Martin Luther School (MLS) and youth in our Residential Treatment Program enjoyed all summer had to offer this year.

The five-week Extended School Year Program at MLS engaged more than 180 students in academics and fun. Mornings were spent building literacy and math skills, while in the afternoon, students chose from a host of activities from playing bocce, to swimming, to honing their cooking skills, and more. Students also enjoyed field trip adventures to an indoor rock climbing gym and an aerial adventure park where they zip-lined through the trees. Visits from an ice cream truck, a foam party, and a day playing on a giant inflatable water slide rounded out their summer of fun.



Youth in residence at Gemma also enjoyed water play, exploring their creativity through art, and gardening, among many other activities. Fun off-campus trips included visits to theme parks and arcades, exploring sea life at the aquarium, and more. One child's exclamation, "It was great and so much fun!" perfectly captures everyone's feelings about the summer.



Setting Students Up for Success

Thanks to you, more than 1,000 students were able to start school with a brand-new backpack filled with supplies they need for a great year! Hundreds of friends heard our call and answered. Because of your generosity, Gemma was able to collect twice as many backpacks as last year. These supplies were distributed to students who participate in Gemma's programs and live in the communities where we work. We would especially like to thank:

- Abington Presbyterian Church
- Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church
- Chambers Memorial Presbyterian Church
- Colonial Area Democratic Committee
- Dakota
- Ellucian
- Gwynedd Square Presbyterian Church
- Newtown Square Presbyterian Church
- Overbrook Presbyterian Church
- Ridley Park Presbyterian Church
- St. John's Presbyterian Church, Devon
- St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Devon
- St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Chester Springs
- St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Springfield
- St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Sassamansville
- Strata Company
- Victory Church
- Zenith Insurance Company

Hundreds of youth and families picked up their backpacks in August at Gemma's 2nd annual Back-to-School event held at our Preheim Center location in Southwest Philadelphia. Fellow social service providers were on hand to share information with families about available resources. Families enjoyed refreshments and activities, too.

Thank you to everyone who helped so many local students know how much they matter!



Christmas Arrives at Gemma...in July!

We are grateful to our friends from Hogs & Honeys Foundation for Kids and the MontCo Centurions Motorcycle Club for once again visiting Gemma for their annual "Christmas in July" motorcycle ride on July 14th! Hundreds of motorcyclists, including Santa and Mrs. Claus, roared onto the Plymouth campus to deliver gifts for youth in residence at Gemma, and they presented Gemma with a donation as well. The kids had a great time watching the bikes parade through the parking lot and visiting with riders and local police officers who attended! Thank you, friends!



Congratulations to Gemma's Programs & Teams!



This past spring, Gemma's behavioral health, child welfare, and prevention programs participated in a **successful 3-year accreditation review by The Joint Commission**. According to its website, The Joint Commission's mission is to "improve health care for the public, in collaboration with other stakeholders, by evaluating health care organizations and inspiring them to excel in providing safe and effective care of the highest quality and value." Gemma is honored to receive renewed accreditation and that the reviewer expressed being inspired by the commitment and care for the youth and families we accompany. To learn more about The Joint Commission, please visit www.jointcommission.org.

Martin Luther School Receives Accreditation

Martin Luther School recently participated in its initial accreditation visit and review by Cognia, an internationally recognized accrediting body for Pre-K-12 and post-secondary institutions with a presence in over 80 countries worldwide. The review was a success, and Martin Luther School is now accredited! According to Cognia, "Approval for accreditation means that the institution has demonstrated its commitment to excellence and continued improvements in education." This partnership reflects our commitment to maintaining rigorous, globally respected standards that shape local and international future leaders. To learn more about Cognia, please visit www.cognia.org.



Healing Through Recreation



"Recreation Therapy is one way we help kids experience joy while they are with us," explained Debra Kubis, Supervisor of Adjunctive Therapy in Gemma's Residential Treatment (RT) Program. "Most of the kids we assist in the program have experienced traumatic events. Play is important because we want to make sure they have many positive experiences to help them along their path to healing."

As a core component of the RT program, Recreation Therapy includes weekly group activities and individual, one-on-one time as needed. "Kids learn that instead of turning to something harmful or unsafe to express or manage their "big" feelings, they can use activities and leisure to manage emotions, connect with peers, and take a break from stressful thoughts," said Kubis.

Furthermore, activities are a great way to discover interests. "Providing the kids with opportunities to participate in diverse activities helps them discover talents and build upon their coping skills," shared Robyn Radomicki, Clinical Services Director.

"One-on-one therapy is used when kids need additional support with coping strategies, social interactions, or developing friendships," Kubis explained. "We also support them through stressful events. For example, a child might have an upcoming meeting where they will be asked to talk about a difficult topic from their past. Providing something fun to do can help them stay calm and in better control of their stress responses."

Kubis shared the example of Max*, a child who had witnessed extensive violence at home prior to coming to Gemma. He often became angry and aggressive and had trouble making friends. "Working on puzzles helped Max take a break from situations that felt overwhelming. Through his time at Gemma, he began to pull out puzzles when he needed them. Best of all, building these skills helped Max to connect with his peers."

The impact of these enriching and therapeutic activities can be significant. "Many kids who come to us having experienced very difficult circumstances in their lives often try to fight, break things, or run away when they are upset," said Kubis. "As they participate in Recreation Therapy, we notice they begin to replace these behaviors with asking for time to do their favorite activity, which is terrific to see."

To learn more about Gemma's Residential Treatment program, visit www.gemmaservices.org/residential.

**Name changed for privacy.*

Welcome to Tiffany Chenery



We are pleased to welcome Dr. Tiffany Chenery to Gemma as Director of Treatment Homes and Adoption. Chenery brings extensive experience in behavioral health, having served as Director of Intake Services at an inpatient psychiatric hospital in Texas and director of a youth crisis team in Philadelphia. Chenery has two master's degrees in psychology and a doctorate in Developmental Psychology.

Of joining Gemma, Chenery said, "It's refreshing to

be at an agency where creativity is not only desired but encouraged. I am excited to implement new strategies to best match foster families to youth in need and to ultimately grow Gemma's Foster Family Care and Adoption programs."

Melissa Harvey, Vice President of Community Based Programs, shared, "Tiffany comes to Gemma with a wealth of clinical and leadership experience. I am excited to see how her expertise and dedication will lead us in our continued efforts to be the premier provider of services to our communities."

Learning Through Service



"The students were my favorite part," shared Lucy McFadden, a recent graduate of Germantown Academy (GA). Like many GA seniors before her, McFadden completed her month-long Senior Project volunteering in a Martin

Luther School (MLS) classroom in May. "I enjoyed getting to know the kids and seeing beyond their challenges. They are curious, complex, and extremely funny."

McFadden, a four-year member and leader of GA's student Community Service Organization, served as an additional classroom assistant with MLS 4th graders. While helping the students with their lessons, she was learning as well. "I learned that a student might struggle to express their needs, have something going on at home, feel frustrated that they cannot read at their grade level, or might just not have gotten a good night's sleep."

"We're always excited to welcome GA seniors in our classrooms," said Eva Morrison, Vice President of Education. "Every year, we're impressed by their dedication to their projects and the impact they have on our students at MLS."

"Doing a Senior Project at Gemma provides a truly unique and valuable chance to make even deeper connections that will last a lifetime," said Robert Moyer, GA Upper School History Department Chair and Community Service Organization Co-Director.

Reflecting on her experience at MLS, McFadden praised teachers and staff. "They provide the guidance and support students need to thrive and grow." She continued, "I saw them lead by example, teach respect, patience, and how to advocate for yourself. I am forever grateful for the lessons and people I have met during my senior project!"

Thank you to McFadden and to Germantown Academy for accompanying our students at Martin Luther School!

Join Us for



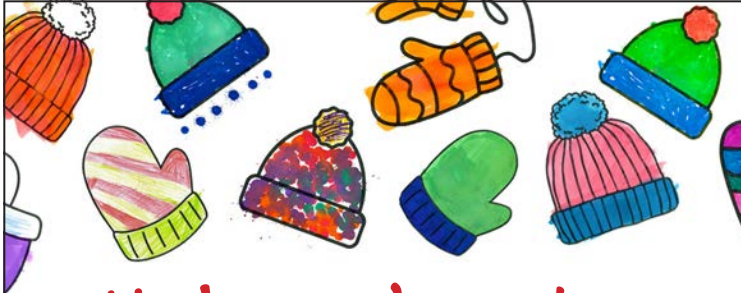
Friday, October 18, 2024

Doors open at 6 pm and Bingo begins at 7 pm

\$40 per person for 12 games





**Gemma Services | Harrison Centre Gym
512 W. Township Line Road
Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462**

<https://bit.ly/bingoforgemma2024>



Help Make the Holidays Special!

Here are some of the ways you can help:

-  **Make a financial gift to Gemma** in the spirit of the holidays.
-  **Suggest friends or family members make a gift** to Gemma in your honor.
-  **Donate gift cards** to assist Gemma's youth and families.
-  **Provide a present for a child.** Our wish list can be found at <https://bit.ly/GemmaNeeds>.

Questions? Contact us at (610) 825-4440 x3307
or info@gemmaservices.org.

Save The Date!

Friday, April 4, 2025 | 6-10pm



FEATURING

Chef Eli Collins

OF

a.kitchen+bar



**Benefitting Gemma Services and
Our Programs that Accompany
Youth and Families Through
Life's Challenges**

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