



because
you
matter

THE LATEST NEWS
PUBLISHED FOR OUR
FRIENDS & FAMILIES

Spring 2025



**Navigating Life's
Challenges Together**

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear friends,

Right now, threats of federal funding freezes and budget cuts are putting essential services at risk—services that thousands of children, youth, and families depend on through Gemma Services. These programs provide hope, stability, and a path forward for so many in our communities.

The uncertainty and challenges we face do not change the urgent needs all around us. They do not alter our vision of a world in which everyone knows they matter. And they do not diminish our resolve to make that vision a reality. Together—with our dedicated staff and with you, our community of supporters, we remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring that those we accompany continue to receive Gemma's critical services.

Gemma's life-changing work is vital, and more important now than ever.

While the recent threats can be distracting and create uncertainty about the future, we must remember that right now, there is a child in our Residential Treatment Program who came to us after suffering horrible abuse—and who is well on her way to healing because of the dedication of our gifted staff. Right now, there is a child in our Martin Luther School who once felt like a failure but is now able to read and feels proud, thanks to the transformative education we provide. Right now, there is a parent in one of our Prevention programs who once felt hopeless and alone but is now learning new skills and receiving caring support to strengthen her family.

We can achieve this impact together.

Charitable donations have never been so essential to sustaining this work. In the face of potential cuts to government funding, private generosity becomes ever more important to helping Gemma continue providing life-changing services and vital support for children, youth, and families. Every gift, no matter the size, makes an impact. Your donations to Gemma help a child receive the mental health services they desperately need, a struggling student access an education tailored to their unlimited potential, and a family in crisis obtain the guidance and care necessary to heal and thrive.

Gemma has been serving our community since the 1800s, and we stand firm in our mission.

With your support, we can continue to be a beacon of hope, resilience, and transformation.

Your generosity and dedication bolster us as we move forward despite uncertainty. Thank you for accompanying Gemma as we walk beside youth and families in our communities who seek our help. Thank you for believing in this precious mission and for helping us build a future where every person truly knows they matter.

Together, we will continue this vital work.

With deep appreciation,



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



Supporting Gemma Through the Years



Friends from SEI

"My journey with Gemma started over twenty years ago," shared Suzanne Kelso, Head of Total Rewards at SEI, and SEI Cares Champion for Gemma. "I have watched the organization evolve and grow, adding programs to reach more people," she said. "Every

staff member shares the same goal: helping those they encounter know they matter. This is at the heart of everything Gemma does." Through financial donations or volunteering throughout the year, SEI uplifts Gemma's work in many ways. We are grateful for their ongoing commitment to our mission. "I am proud to support Gemma and look forward to the next twenty years!" Kelso concluded.

Another partner we are proud to highlight is St. Luke Lutheran Church in Devon. Each month, a group of youth and adults from the congregation can be found laughing and playing games with youth in residence at Gemma on a weekend afternoon. "Volunteering with Gemma is an important part of the Youth Program at St. Luke," explained Reverend Mycah McNett, Associate Pastor. "Volunteer service is about being present with one another. In those few precious hours on a Sunday, we get a bunch of kids together to connect with one another."

Like many of Gemma's congregational supporters, friends from St. Luke contribute to Gemma's mission beyond volunteering. Their support includes donating backpacks for students returning to school, contributing gifts for youth during the holiday season, sponsoring our annual *Chefs for Gemma* event, and more. We are grateful to St. Luke for all the ways the congregation and its members help Gemma to accompany youth and families. "There is no better gift than reminding children that they matter," said McNett. "That is what engaging with Gemma allows us to do."



St. Luke Lutheran Church Youth Group Members

Q&A with Guest Chef, Eli Collins!

Q: What is your favorite thing about cooking in Philadelphia?

A: The sense of community within the dining scene. There is so much talent in this city across all facets of the industry and everyone has respect for each other. It's great to be part of something that is constantly evolving and pushing forward. It keeps me inspired.

Q: What is your favorite thing to eat in Philadelphia (that may or may not come from your restaurant)?

A: Pizza at *Beddia*, *Kim's bbq*, anything at *Emei*, semolina gnocchetti at *Palizzi*, desserts at *Meetinghouse*, soft shell shrimp at *Mawn*, and cheesesteaks (too many to list).

Q: Do you have a favorite cooking or meal prep "hack" to share?

A: Microplane garlic. Finely grating the garlic will help it dissolve into dishes and mellow the flavor while also giving a richly flavored base.

Q: What is an underrated ingredient that you love to use?

A: Broccoli gai lan. I love the flavor of this vegetable cooked simply with roasted garlic and lemon. It's a great accompaniment to any roast meat or fish.



Q: What excites you about being the featured guest chef at *Chefs for Gemma 2025*?

A: Just to be considered among the esteemed chefs who have participated in the *Chefs for Gemma* event is quite the honor. But I truly love giving back to the community by using my skill sets and feel extremely fortunate to be able to do this for Gemma Services.

Visit www.bidpal.net/chefs2025 to learn more!

Announcing the LaunchPAD Program



Gemma is excited to announce our newest program: LaunchPAD*, funded by a grant

from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). LaunchPAD will help meet the emotional and behavioral health needs of young children and their families in Southeast Pennsylvania and connect community members to important services. "LaunchPAD is an exciting opportunity to expand mental healthcare reach," said Melissa Harvey, Gemma's Vice President of Community Based Programs. "It also empowers families and community members with skills needed to be better caregivers and strengthen their communities."

The LaunchPAD program consists of three components: Family Check Up Online, Mental Health First Aid, and a Young Child Wellness Council. "These offerings will help give families and caregivers tools to care for young children," explained Valerie Colquitt-Wright, Gemma's Senior Director of Prevention Services. "The ability to include three important components in one program is very exciting!"

The program components in more detail are:

- **Family Check Up Online:** an evidence-based tool to help parents gain confidence in their abilities and build skills to handle challenging situations, conveniently and privately through an online visit.

- **Mental Health First Aid:** a training program that teaches parents, caregivers, and community members to support behavioral health needs of those in their lives. Training is designed to help recognize and respond to signs of stress or worry, and how to be a supportive listener.
- **Young Child Wellness Council (YCWC):** will be formed for community members to have a voice about their needs for services, and to help connect families with support to improve their and their children's well-being.

This innovative, evidence-based program is projected to reach approximately 4,000 people each year, and 20,000 over five years. "LaunchPad will provide the opportunity for more people in the community to learn mental health support techniques to respond to mental health crises," said Colquitt-Wright. "It will play a crucial role in recognizing challenges, offering initial support, and guiding people toward professional help."

To learn more about this program, please visit www.gemmaservices.org.

**The LaunchPAD program is supported by a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), grant number 1H79SM087688-01. The description of the program is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of SAMHSA.*

Welcome Yolanda Wearing, LaunchPAD Director



Gemma Services is excited to welcome Yolanda Wearing to the role of Director of our new LaunchPAD program! Wearing previously served as Director of Gemma's Family Empowerment Center. With a Master's in Social Work from Temple University

and more than 20 years' experience in the child welfare field, Wearing has also taught courses at the University of Pennsylvania and Alvernia University.

Wearing will lead Gemma's newest program, which will endeavor to assist thousands of youth and families each year, expanding awareness about mental, emotional, and behavioral health needs of

young children and their families and connecting community members to available services. "The opportunity to build a new program from the ground up is so exciting," shared Wearing. "To start something new and expand the impact of Gemma's work is such an honor."

Valerie Colquitt-Wright, Senior Director of Prevention Services, stated, "We are excited to have Yolanda return to Gemma! With her experience, she will be an excellent fit as the Director of LaunchPAD. We are looking forward to having her lead this program to become a great resource for our local communities."

Welcome to Yolanda!



Thank You for Helping Create Holiday Magic

The holidays are a special time at Gemma, thanks to the support of many generous friends. The magic of the season was felt by youth and staff alike this year through longstanding and cherished traditions. From the happiness that children in our Residential Treatment Program experienced when they received a beautifully wrapped stack of gifts donated by caring friends, to the enjoyment of hearing a story read by the fireplace by a fellow student before the start of winter break at Martin Luther School, experiences of community and joy were abundant.

This magic was possible thanks to you! Nearly 200 friends — both individuals and groups — supported our annual holiday collection with financial contributions or

by donating gift cards and gifts. Thank you, also, to the more than 30 volunteers who wrapped presents, filled stockings, and adorned the railings in the children's residence with more than 125 stuffed animals for the children and teens to choose from!

The impact of your generosity is felt far beyond the holiday season, and we are grateful to you for helping make our work possible. To share the impact of your efforts, we share the words of one grateful parent upon receiving support: "Thank you so much for your help. I'm so overwhelmed with joy!" Thank you for helping Gemma make sure that youth and families in our communities know they matter — this holiday season and all year long!



Nearly 100 families enjoyed a special Thanksgiving meal thanks to donations of "Everything but the Turkey" gift bags this fall.



Volunteers wrapped **600+ gifts**, stuffed **60 stockings**, and adorned the stair railing of the children's residence with more than **125 large stuffed animals**.

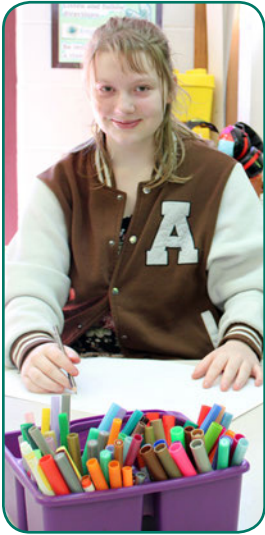


500+ youth and families who participate in Gemma's programs received presents and gift cards.



More than 185 friends, both individuals and groups, supported Gemma's annual holiday gift collection.

Our High School Continues to Grow!



"Welcoming our first class of 12th graders this year was something special," said Dr. Eva Morrison, Head of Martin Luther School and Vice President for Education at Gemma. After adding one high school grade each year over the last four years, we are thrilled that we are now a k-12 school. "We've been building toward this moment and now—here we are—an entire high school program filled with opportunities for our students! It's a milestone for MLS, and we're just getting started," shared Morrison.

As the high school has grown, so has the curriculum. "This year MLS has reached new heights in reading, expanded the math curriculum, and is offering more electives to meet the needs of our growing student body," explained Declan French, Assistant Head of School for Teaching and Learning. "We added several courses to support the needs of our seniors, too, including Environmental Science, Finance, and World Government."

Excitingly, MLS welcomed a new Outdoor Education Coordinator who is planning to use the full campus

for learning experiences and is collaborating with teachers to create engaging, hands-on lessons. "Next year," French says, "we are planning to create more permanent outdoor learning spaces so all classes can add outdoor experiences into their curriculum."

A popular elective is Family and Consumer Sciences, which offers hands-on learning such as sewing and cooking. "It allows our students to strengthen life skills," explained Family and Consumer Sciences teacher, Christine Oakes. "We want to teach them how to sew on a missing button instead of throwing a piece of clothing away, and how to cook dinner for themselves as they get older." She continued, "We also teach them about the cost of ingredients and how to budget for their meals." With a kitchen available for students in grades 9–12, the whole school recently was able to enjoy a delicious meal planned and prepared by students. Oakes loves to see her students' learning put into action. "One of my students had a hole in his pants. He came to me and said, 'I need a needle and thread!' I was so happy to see him self-sufficient, and he was so proud of himself!"



Keep up with news about our growing school by visiting www.gemmaservices.org/mlschool.

Congratulations TAP Graduates!



Three Recent Graduates

We are proud to congratulate and celebrate five participants in our Teacher Apprentice Program (TAP) who graduated with their bachelor's degrees in December from Arcadia University, and one participant who graduated last May from Cabrini University!

"We know that when we invest in our staff, we invest in our students," shared Dr. Eva Morrison, Head of Martin Luther School and Vice President of Education at Gemma Services. "That's why we're so proud to celebrate the latest graduates of our

Teacher Apprentice Program—a program that helps our teaching assistants earn their degrees, get certified, and step into lead teaching roles."

This innovative teacher training program recently was featured in a Montgomery County Intermediate Unit Learning Network podcast available at www.learn.mciu.org/podcast. Check it out to learn more about our program, which is possible thanks to the generosity of our donors.

We are proud of these graduates and will be thrilled to celebrate additional participants who will earn their degrees this spring.

Congratulations to Martin Luther School's newest teachers!

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

Gemma Expands Family Support Program

Gemma's Family Support Program (FSP)* partners with families who have young children ages two-to-five. In this in-home visiting program, Parent Support Partners meet with families to help them assess and strengthen their parenting and problem-solving skills, connect with additional resources, and promote their children's well-being.



with hundreds of families at local libraries, daycare centers, resource fairs, and more.

This past year, the program has been busy expanding its reach beyond Philadelphia to Delaware County. According to Sally Hamid, FSP Outreach Specialist (shown left), by attending local events and networking with community groups, Gemma has been able to connect

"We are thrilled to be able to provide this much-needed service to families in Delaware County," said Valerie Colquitt-Wright, Senior Director of Prevention Programs. "With the program's expansion, we have assisted families beyond Philadelphia." Since beginning to assist Delaware County families in January 2024, the program has been able to accompany more than 40 such families. "We look forward to the continued growth of the program into possibly Montgomery County," said Colquitt-Wright.

Thanks to the hard work of our staff, this vital service worked with nearly 200 families last year, connecting them with resources to help strengthen their families.

To learn more about the Family Support Program, visit www.gemmaservices.org/community/prevention.

**This program is supported by the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) of Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services (DHS) and Pennsylvania's Department of Education (PDE). For more information, visit dhs.pa.gov and education.pa.gov.*

Help Children Make Summertime Memories



Summer fun is just around the corner! Gemma is thrilled once again to provide children and teens in our Foster Family Care Program the opportunity to attend summer camp.

"Summer camp experiences are a healthy outlet that give youth the chance to learn and grow," shared Tiffany Chenery, Director of Treatment Homes and Adoption. "The interactions they have at camp, in an atmosphere created to nurture physical, social, and emotional wellbeing, create memories that last a lifetime."

Thanks to generous gifts from caring friends, eleven youth were able to attend summer camps and other special recreational activities last year.



"I support the campership fund because camp benefits the whole family," shared one supporter. She continued, "Camp provides kids an enriching summer experience giving young people a fun and structured time away from home with new friends and caring adults."

To support Gemma's Campership Fund, visit www.gemmaservices.org/donate.

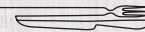
Grab Your Seat at the Table!



Friday, April 4, 2025



FEATURING
Chef Eli Collins
OF
a.kitchen+bar
Best Chef, *Philadelphia Magazine*, 2022



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