**DID YOU KNOW?**

- **16 adoptions were finalized virtually** during the Stay Home Stay Safe order.
- Heart of West Michigan United Way awarded DABSJ's Behavioral Health program a $50,000 grant from Kent County's Coronavirus Response Fund. This funding will help us continue providing essential mental and behavioral health services to those affected by COVID-19 in our community.
- The Perrigo Foundation granted $50,000 to help implement the Sanctuary Model, an evidence-based, trauma informed treatment approach designed to improve outcomes for children in residential care.
- COVID-19 and Mental Health DABSJ's Family Preservation Services offers a variety of services to partner with, engage, and empower parents to provide the warmth and structure needed to support their child's mental health. If you or someone you know needs support in these areas, call us at 616.451.2021.
- We feel honored and humbled that the following individuals have chosen to advance the mission of DABSJ as board members: Mallory Korpalski and Raphael Trujillo.

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**A Journey To Find Unconditional Love**

“Growing up, my life was indeed different,” said Deja, a former client of D.A. Blodgett - St. John’s (DABSJ). She was born in Grand Rapids, along with her five other siblings. Her family moved around so much throughout her elementary and middle school years that she attended at least 10 different schools. Because her mother had difficulties providing the care that she and her siblings needed, Deja entered the foster care system at 12 years old. She went through both the foster care and residential care programs at DABSJ, as well as respite care facilities, until she aged out of the system at 21 years old.

Foster care and residential care were difficult transitions for Deja. It was hard for her to relate to the foster families that took her in. They always seemed to have the perfect life and she wasn't sure where she fit in within each family. Living in a residential program also had its challenges. For the first time in her life, she had a routine and rules to follow, and she struggled listening to staff. Reflecting on her time in these programs, she sees that her foster parents and staff were just trying to help her. “I've met some amazing individuals that I can call my friends and family now,” she said.

One of these amazing individuals was Jody, her foster care worker at DABSJ. Deja was 15 and pregnant when she met Jody. Jody believed that Deja had the courage and wisdom to get through the many challenges in her life and become an excellent mom. “Deja is a strong advocate for herself,” said Jody. “She works hard, picks herself up after she falls down, and isn't afraid to ask for help. Deja is the hope I have for the future.” Jody is very proud of all that Deja has accomplished, and is still part of her life today. “Jody has helped in more ways than I think any social worker could ever have for a child,” said Deja. “She’s taught me unconditional love. She’s seen the transition of that wild child into the young lady I am today. She’s connected me with so many opportunities, and has always seemed to turn my cloudy days into sunny ones.”

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Sanctuary Model Supports Children’s Success

It’s been nearly a year since we began the implementation of the Sanctuary Model on our Residential Campus and we wanted to share an update.

In the last year, 35 staff have been trained in the Sanctuary Model, and we formed a core team and a steering committee that is dedicated to the implementation.

Why are we implementing The Sanctuary Model?

Our residential program has seen many successes over the years as evidenced in the thousands of kids we have helped, but we need to evolve to meet the changing needs of children. We want to be a program that works together as a team using one program model and providing the best care possible while keeping kids and staff safe.

We want youth to have every opportunity to be successful, which requires us to provide the most impactful, best care.

We chose the Sanctuary Model to help us do exactly that.

We look forward to providing updates as we continue to see the positive impact of the Sanctuary Model.

48 Children in West Michigan Are Waiting For a Forever Family

In West Michigan alone, there are 48 waiting children, most over the age of 11, listed on the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE). These children will spend the holiday season without family traditions or a permanent place to call home. Many of these children are advocating for themselves by participating in various recruitment activities, in hopes that a family out there will say “yes” to adoption.

“These 48 children show that there aren’t enough families coming forward to adopt older children. If these children are not adopted, they will become adults, and will have had no one to teach them how to be part of a healthy family,” shared Angela Potts, Adoption Supervisor at D.A. Blodgett – St. John’s (DABSJ). “We need to help find forever families to show these children what it means to have a family to trust and care for them.”

**On November 9 we are inviting families who may have considered older child adoption to come hear about the process.** Our Foster Care Information Meeting covers not only traditional foster care, but also highlights the need for families interested in adopting waiting kids to become licensed as foster parents.

“When kids are placed into a home through foster care, we are able to connect families and children to more services that give families a chance to stabilize and acclimate to one another before making the commitment to adopt,” said Angela. These children need families now more than ever. Many of these children have been waiting for a very long time. They deserve more. It doesn’t take anything special to be an adoptive parent to an older child; you just need a heart full of love, passion, and commitment.

Deja’s Story  Continued from cover.

With the encouragement of her new support system, Deja was able to graduate from high school. This is an achievement that she is immensely proud of, as she was the first person in her family to walk across the stage to receive a diploma.

Deja is excited to start her college career in Human Science this fall. She hopes to become a social worker to help others who share a similar story to hers. “I’ve always said that I want to become the person that I needed in my life when I was younger,” she said. “My outlook on my future is bright. I have high hopes for myself and my child. Having a little girl motivates me to push harder to reach my goals, and chase my dreams. I want her to experience the things I couldn’t.”

To RSVP for the virtual information meeting, send an email to fosterparentinfo@dabsj.org or call 616.451.2021.

To STAY UP-TO-DATE on our mission and services, subscribe to receive our monthly e-newsletter at dabsj.org/newsletter.
Mill Steel Company and Business Partners Raise $220,000

Even in the midst of a pandemic, the commitment of Mill Steel Company and their business partners & friends never wavered. The rescheduled 24th Annual Golf for Kids event on September 11 was another huge success, raising an additional $220,000 for DABSJ’s Mentoring Services program, which brings the total impact from Mill Steel Company and the event to over $3.2 million.

Visit dabsj.org to view photos and a full list of sponsors.

Kids First Open Supports Agency Programs with $62,600

DABSJ has one mission: to help children and empower families by providing safety, advocacy, and support. We do this through a variety of services, all of which are supported by our Kids First Open. Thanks to our sponsors, golfers, and donors, we raised $62,600. This year’s event looked a little different but it was clear that there was no lack of passion towards DABSJ’s mission.

Thank you to our Double Eagle sponsors for your support of DABSJ and the families we serve.

Will you help us get to the finish line for the sake of kids? Please consider supporting the campaign by visiting dabsj.org/together-for-kids. Give $100 or more and receive a commemorative star in the lobby of the future building.
YOU’RE INVITED TO
D.A. BLODGETT – ST. JOHN’S
VIRTUAL GUILD BALL
A Night of Love
RSVP BY NOVEMBER 2

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2020
6:30 pm optional “cocktail hour”
7:00 pm virtual program

Be the key to unlocking hope for children and families.
For more details or to RSVP visit dabsj.org/virtualball2020.

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We believe everyone deserves a childhood.

VIRTUAL HOLIDAY GIFT DRIVE

Visit roonga.com/dabsjgiftdrive to provide holiday gifts for a child at DABSJ. If you have any questions, please contact Shelly at sfriend@dabsj.org or 616.774.4613.

You can help make this holiday season one to remember by purchasing holiday gifts through our Virtual Holiday Gift Drive. These gifts, along with a gift card, will be distributed to over 500 kids in our counseling, foster care, adoption, mentoring, and residential programs.

Help us reach our goal.

VirtuAL HOLIDAY GIFT DRIVE