



St. Vincent's Home for Children: Enabling a Stronger Community

Paula Miller, UMSL Economic and Community Development, November 2020

Several organizations and resources located in the communities surrounding the University of Missouri-St. Louis are making a difference for people throughout the region. This month's highlight is on St. Vincent's Home for Children and an interview with Executive Director Latosha Fowlkes.

"Whatever the need is, just give us a call. We are here 24-hours at the Intersection of Florissant and Natural Bridge in Normandy, Missouri," announced Mrs. Latosha Fowlkes, Executive Director of St. Vincent's Home for Children. "There is a large building and it is sitting on 22 acres of land—really an unassuming building...but in that building is what's most important. In that building are children living there. This is where they sleep. This is where they eat. This is where they get their basic needs met. This is where their families come when they need some sort of support. This is where that family unit really coexists with case management, with a therapist and a team of about 60 other dedicated employees."

St. Vincent's Home for Children has been a resilient source of support for at-risk youth since 1850 and has called North County home for over 100 years. According to the website history (<https://www.saintvincenthome.org/us/history/>), this important community resource came into being in 1850 during a national as well as local crisis similar in impact as the current Covid-19 pandemic. In 1849, a cholera epidemic and a residential fire from a steamboat caused many St. Louis children to become orphaned, which in turn spearheaded the construction of the new home for children then called the German St. Vincent Orphan Society. Five sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet took charge of the new home in 1851 and the first orphan arrived on July 25 that year. Within two months of opening its

doors, the orphanage became home to some 30 children. In 1888, the Sisters of Christian Charity assumed the duties of the orphanage. They found 141 children placed in their care and an increasing number in the future. In 1914, a 20-acre plot of land was purchased in Normandy Park for \$18,000. In June 1916, this plot of land became the construction site for a new children's home, and on August 8, 1917, the children moved into their new home in Normandy at 7401 Florissant Road, its current location.

The mission of St. Vincent's Home for Children has not changed since 1850. It continues to help at-risk youth facing significant life crises through love, security and therapeutic support systems that enable them to improve their lives, their families and the community. "That's really important that we offer a variety of services to meet people where they are. And we do that with our clinicians, with our art therapists, with our music studio, with cooking, with things that people do in everyday life, so that we can help them build up skills that they'll use when they're not continuing to work with them in their homes," the Executive Director noted. "But at some point, though, we're hoping that we have done enough to allow people to be successful and to have reached their highest potential," she added.

St. Vincent's offers a number of resources and services for children and their families; thereby, providing assistance to enable a stronger community. "There in this building, we're working together to improve systems or improve their lives and their families lives and their community. And we're doing that in so many unique ways right in this building. There's a music studio. There's a clay studio. There's a lot. There's a gymnasium here with bleachers and there's game rooms, there's a large chef's kitchen, where we can teach kids how to prepare meals. There's a library. There's computer labs. There's housing..." continued Mrs. Fowlkes. To meet the changing needs of the community, St. Vincent's has transformed their programs by providing crisis intervention services with a youth emergency shelter, a Transitional Living Program, and a community based mental health services program. "I think that COVID even required us to change a little bit more and offer virtual opportunities for mental health services. My vision for St. Vincent's is that we remain this agile and transformational organization that is always there to meet the needs of the community," shared Mrs. Fowlkes.

St. Vincent's Home recently published their 2020 Year End Progress report which can be found at <https://www.saintvincenthome.org/us/financial-information/2020-annual-report/>.

St. Vincent's is open and accepting referrals. For more information, visit the St. Vincent's Home for Children website at www.saintvincenthome.org or call (314)261-6011.