

Caritas Family Solutions Offers Foster Care, Shelter and Other Services to Promote Wellbeing

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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CARITAS

FAMILY SOLUTIONS

ALTON/GLEN CARBON - Caritas Family Solutions will host their 11th annual [Heart and Soul Gala](#) to raise money for their services, from foster care and family interventions to residential treatment programs and an emergency shelter.

On Feb. 3, 2024, attendees will enjoy the gala at The Regency in O'Fallon. While the registration deadline has passed, community members can still support Caritas through a live auction on their website or by [donating online](#). All of the money raised by Caritas

goes back to the services they provide for families throughout the Metro East and Southern Illinois areas.

“We use those proceeds to help us advance the mission of Caritas. And our mission is really simple, right? We want to take care of the social and emotional wellbeing of families,” explained CEO Gary Huelsmann. “We want to create healthy relationships. And then really when that happens, we can create loving homes, and if we can have loving homes, then we have strong communities.”

Caritas works with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to match children in the foster care system with homes and foster parents. They currently have approximately 1,400 children under their care.

In addition to [foster care](#), the organization has a [child welfare program called “Intact Family”](#) that provides case management, counseling and more with the goal of keeping kids out of the child welfare system by addressing underlying issues in the family.

The organization also has a [residential treatment program](#) for kids who need more intensive behavioral health services. There is an emergency shelter available for unhoused youth, as well as a [maternity center](#) for people of all ages who are pregnant and experiencing homelessness. Caritas also offers [assisted living programs](#) for senior citizens and group homes for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Caritas is typically working with 7,000 families at any given time. You can see a full list of services on [the organization’s website](#).

“Those aren’t light touches. Those are very heavy touches in terms of the work the caseworkers do and in terms of the supportive services we provide,” Huelsmann explained. “Those services are also sort of interrelated no matter where you are in life. And that’s what we keep on trying to do, respond to the needs that are there and keep families together, keep kids safe, keep the vulnerable safe. Really, the work is trying to get individuals and families to wellbeing, and that’s what we focus on.”

Huelsmann said that Caritas takes a trauma-informed approach that aims to help people reach a “sense of wellbeing.” While he admitted it can be a taxing job, he said it’s also “very rewarding work” and he is proud of his employees.

“The people who come to us, the clients that we serve, the families that we serve all come to us with a certain level of trauma,” he added. “How you respond to that trauma and how welcoming you are makes a big difference on their ability to trust and to feel as

though their experience with Caritas is one that is helpful to them, and that they're able to initiate that change that they need to in their life or get that support that they need in order to get to that sense of wellbeing.”

Caritas has several locations throughout Illinois, including Alton and Glen Carbon. The organization is always looking for more staff members and foster families. For more information about the [Heart and Soul Gala](#) or the services offered by Caritas, visit their [official website at CaritasFamilySolutions.org](http://CaritasFamilySolutions.org).