



cribnotes

Prevention in Practice: How Research and Heart Guide Lisa & Jerry O'Brien's Giving

How It Started

Lisa O'Brien first encountered the Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery while working in pediatric psychology after earning her PhD from the University of Minnesota's Institute of Child Development. She often referred families in crisis to the Nursery as a trusted resource.

Through her work conducting evaluations—many through child protection and adoption services—she often asked herself, “How do you prevent children from coming to child protection?”

*“These parents didn’t know me, and they immediately trusted me, and the reason they did that is because **they trusted the Nursery.**”*

When she had more time to volunteer, she sought opportunities rooted in prevention, and the Crisis Nursery was the perfect place. “I learned intimately what the Nursery was when I volunteered to help run the parent support group,” Lisa says. “These parents didn’t know me, and they immediately trusted me, and the reason they did that is because they trusted the Nursery.”



Lisa and Jerry O'Brien celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary with their three children [with matching grant for the Nursery's Fund-a-Need.]

| Lisa and Jerry O'Brien

"People hear a parent describe finding safety, hope, and a plan, and they say, 'I get it now.'"

From Sympathy to Empathy

Parenthood deepened her commitment. "When you are just reading the psychology textbooks, you don't see all the obstacles that can interfere with actually doing the textbook thing," Lisa reflects.

"When you become a parent, you experience the emotion and everything else that interferes with what you can do. At the Nursery, you meet families who are taxed, stressed, even traumatized by daily living."

"One of the reasons I continue to support the Nursery is knowing what I can give back and knowing what I have—a support system, housing, healthcare—and that's why I stay."

Leadership that Opens Doors

Lisa joined the Board in 2007, later serving as Board Chair in 2015. Today she still volunteers "wherever the Nursery needs," because, as she puts it, "when you volunteer, it leads to the next thing. It opens another door to what else we can do to make the Nursery better."

The Nursery Way

The research-to-practice thread runs through our trauma-informed approach to care, the Nursery Way, where Lisa helps train staff. "If you understand the behavior and the reasons why, you can empathize and come up with a better response. Training childcare workers in the Nursery Way makes their interactions with children better, and it makes the organization better as a whole."

Investing in Prevention

The O'Briens' commitment is reflected in both hands-on service and heartfelt generosity. Over the past two decades, they've provided resources for **over 2,250 days of care**, plus countless more through friends they've inspired. Jerry says, "We have 20 years of observing the Nursery's brand of promises made, promises kept."

Why Give & Legacy

Lisa sums it up: "It puts research into practice, and it's all about prevention." Jerry adds, "I am most proud that we've provided an example to our children...that they've seen what it means to be stewards of something in the community that's important for other people."

"We have 20 years of observing the Nursery's brand of promises made, promises kept."

Thank You

We are deeply grateful for the O'Briens' steadfast support and the prevention-focused legacy they continue to inspire.

give TO THE MAX

Nov. 20, 2025

Thank you to everyone who donated, spread the word and participated in Give to the Max Day this year! Your generosity changes lives and builds brighter futures.

Give to the Max Day is Minnesota's largest day of giving. This year, generous donors gave over \$104,000 to support the Nursery!



“ I have no support, so when the 'walls are caving in' with parenting, it's relieving to know I have a safe place I can send them. -Nursery parent ”

Missed Give to the Max Day? There's still time to make an impact. Your gift today helps provide comfort and stability for children and families in crisis.

“ It is difficult to have to rely on strangers for childcare, but we've never felt anything but support and understanding from GMCN. -Nursery parent ”



Harvesting Hope: A Goodnight Gala

Thank you to everyone who made our 21st annual Fall Gala such a success! Together, we raised more than \$440,000, funding more than 1,000 Goodnights of safety and comfort for children and families in crisis. We're deeply grateful to all our sponsors, donors, volunteers, and guests for celebrating and supporting the Nursery.



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Mary & William Zimmer

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Volunteer Spotlight: Pet Therapy with Justin & Murphy

Describe your enrichment activity:

My dog Murphy and I visit the children, giving them the chance to interact with a friendly, certified therapy dog. Murphy is a lazy, lovable 3-year-old beagle-setter mix, and we're part of North Star Therapy Animals.

Why I volunteer:

It's a great fit, Murphy loves kids, and I've worked as a preschool teacher with children facing difficult experiences. People dear to me had difficult childhoods and would have benefited from a place like the Crisis Nursery, so I hope to help provide that for other children.

Memorable moment:

A toddler sat crying on the playground until Murphy gently laid his head on her knee. She held his paw, then smiled and ran off to play. It was a quiet, powerful moment of comfort. I felt like he was able to give her the comfort she needed in that moment.



Scan for volunteer opportunities:



Volunteer Spotlight: Sensory Enrichment with Susan

Describe your enrichment activity:

Since school started, I've focused on sensory and fine motor activities that support children's success in self-care and school.

Why I volunteer:

My goal this year has been to help create a safe space where children can be curious and enjoy learning.

Memorable moment:

The first time I brought in the sand sensory bins, the kids hadn't seen how when you pack the sand in a container then turn the container upside down the sand comes out in the shape of the container. One boy LOVED it! Every time I showed him and then when he did it himself, he would be so excited! It was such fun!

We  Our Volunteers!