Russ and Jan Williams have long “had a heart” for philanthropy, especially in Africa where Russ served on medical mission trips for decades, including at Tenwek Mission Hospital in Kenya.

But recent years have brought their charitable giving closer to home in Springfield, as Jan founded a Christian ministry called The James Project – which provides homes and support for fostering families in Sangamon County – and the couple has become involved with the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln.
The Williamses first became familiar with the Community Foundation from the nonprofit side. As co-director and founder of The James Project, Jan began applying for grants offered by the Foundation.

The James Project then decided to create its own fund to create long-term sustainability, and after hearing a presentation from Foundation staff about various fund options, Russ approached Jan about initiating a family fund as well.

“We feel heavily invested in Springfield as his practice has served the community, and The James Project is quite invested in the community as well,” Jan said. “We’ve been impressed by the Community Foundation and the impact it has had on the community and those it serves.”

The Russell and Jan Williams Family Fund will support causes involving children, particularly orphans and children in the foster system, as well as causes that share Christian values. The couple has a daughter from Kenya, which helped to spur their passion for orphan and foster care.

“Kenya does not let you adopt, so she has been here on a visa since she was 13, but she is very much our daughter. My husband has been to Kenya 25 times, and one of those times, God just nudged me,” Jan said.

“Now we also have two adopted grandchildren; two of our daughters each have a boy adopted from Korea.”

Jan explains that the process to start their family fund was seamless thanks to the work of Foundation staff – “it was basically just sending in a check!” – and they look forward to stewarding their fund for the good of the community.

“The spirit of philanthropy was instilled in us by my father, and it’s important for us to instill that in our children and grandchildren,” Jan said.

“Two of our four children have come back to Springfield to spend their lives here, so we now have a second generation making their living and making their homes in the Springfield area.

“We have a vested interest in the community and seeing it do well. Through the Community Foundation, we’re investing our money to be used locally.”

For more information on how to start an donor-advised fund, please contact the Community Foundation at 217.789.4431 or visit CFLL.org.