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May is Foster Parent Appreciation Month
*Illinois DCFS thanks foster parents; reminds the public
of the need for more foster families*

CHICAGO – May is Foster Parent Appreciation Month in Illinois, a time to thank the thousands of foster families across the state who are providing temporary safe havens to youth and urge other residents to become licensed foster families.

Youth are placed in the temporary care of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) by local courts when it is determined that their families cannot safely care for them. DCFS works with the family to make the positive changes necessary to reunite with their children while foster families step up and provide homes where the children are protected, nurtured and loved. Today, there are just over 21,000 youth living in foster care in the state: 8,200 are living with foster families, 11,300 with relatives and 1,200 in group homes and institutions.

“By opening their hearts and homes, foster parents give vulnerable children the stability and connections to community, friends and family members they need to thrive,” said Illinois DCFS Acting Director Marc D. Smith. “They are an invaluable part of the child welfare team; and we could not do the work of keeping children safe without them.”

Currently, foster homes are needed for sibling groups, adolescents, African American and Latino youth, children with special medical needs, teenage mothers and their babies and LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex) youth. To learn more about some of the youth in need of a foster family, visit the Heart Gallery of Illinois at <https://greenlightfamilyservices.org/heartgalleryofil/>.

Making the decision to become a foster parent is a serious commitment to a child who needs stability and love. DCFS and a network of private agency partners offer a range of supports to foster families, including a monthly stipend for the child’s basic needs, such as food, clothing and

housing costs; a medical card; therapeutic, educational, recreational and crisis support services; and access to caseworkers, training programs and support groups to meet the child's and family's needs.

Foster families also become part of a team, working with DCFS and private agencies, birth families, counselors, physicians and the courts to reunite children with their families whenever possible.

The licensing process to become a foster parent can take up to six months. Prospective foster families are required to:

- Participate in a social assessment and home inspection;
- Complete a training on foster care and the needs of children who are in foster care;
- Complete a criminal background check of all household members;
- Be financially stable; and
- Complete a health screening.

Foster parents must be at least 21 years old and can be married, in a civil union, single, divorced or separated. They can work full- or part-time, go to school or be a stay at home parent; and rent or own their own home.

There are many types of foster care, including traditional care, emergency/shelter care, medical/therapeutic care, relative/kinship care, respite/short-term care and tribal care.

To learn more about becoming a licensed foster parent, fill out the online interest form on the DCFS website: <https://www2.illinois.gov/dcfs>. Click on Loving Homes, then click on [Become a Foster or Adoptive Parent](#).

Organizations wishing to schedule a virtual or in-person presentation to learn about waiting children, how to become licensed and the adoption process may contact the DCFS Communications Office at 312-814-6847.

About the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Founded in 1964, DCFS is responsible for protecting children from abuse or neglect by responding to calls received on the Child Abuse Hotline, 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873). With the goal of keeping children safe, DCFS strengthens and supports families with a wide range of services. When keeping a child safe means removing them from the home, DCFS makes every effort to reunite them with their family. When the best interest of the child makes this impossible, DCFS is committed to pursuing adoption by loving families to provide children with a safe and permanent home. DCFS is also responsible for licensing and monitoring of all Illinois child welfare agencies.

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