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Contact: DCFS Communications: (312) 814-6847
Karen.Hawkins@Illinois.gov
Veronica.Resa@Illinois.gov

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Marks 50 Years

*Public, past directors and elected officials celebrated DCFS'
50th birthday with ceremonial cake cutting*

CHICAGO – Approximately 250 staff members, private agency partners, elected officials and the public gathered for the kickoff 50th birthday celebration for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) on June 17. The program began at noon in the Auditorium of the James R. Thompson Center, 100 W. Randolph Street.

Special guests included past directors Jess McDonald, Sue Suter, D. Jean Ortega-Piron, Dixie Peterson, Arthur Bishop and Wynne Korr Brieland, wife of first director Don Brieland; Acting Director Bobbie Gregg; State Rep. Patricia R. Bellock; and guest speaker April Curtis, a former youth in care and national child welfare advocate.

“For the past 50 years, the people of DCFS and our private agency partners have been on the front lines of protecting children and supporting families. During these years, thousands of children have been protected and reunified with their families, while others have found forever families or a temporary haven in a safe and loving home,” said Acting Director Bobbie Gregg. “But we can’t help children that we don’t know about. Please contact DCFS at 1-800-ABUSE whenever there is reason to believe that a child may be abused or neglected.”

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services was established on January 1, 1964, as the nation’s first cabinet-level state child welfare agency. Until that time, the state’s child welfare responsibilities were housed in the Department of Mental Health.

Office of Communications
100 W. Randolph St., Suite 6-100 • Chicago, Illinois 60601-3249
312-814-6847 • 312-814-7092 Fax
www.DCFS.illinois.gov

Limited services and placement programs for children were provided by several state agencies, private agencies and county courts. Approximately 4,000 children were served during the department's first year of operation, compared to a peak of 51,000 children in foster care in 1997 and 15,000 today.

The department's history is steeped in a long tradition of service and innovation for the state's most vulnerable children. Illinois is home to the nation's first juvenile court, counts itself as the birthplace of social work (Jane Addams' Hull House), was among the first states to establish child protection laws, was an early signatory to laws mandating the reporting of child abuse and neglect and created one of the nation's first statewide child abuse hotlines.

DCFS remains the largest child welfare agency to earn accreditation from the Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services. From helping more than 17,000 Illinois children find permanent, loving homes through adoption and reunifying over 21,000 children with their birth families over the last decade to the licensing of nearly 1,200 day care facilities and provision of services to 60,000 families annually, the department and its 2,600 staff are dedicated to providing unrivaled professional service to ensure safe, loving homes and brighter futures for every child in Illinois.