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January is Human Trafficking Awareness Month

Illinois DCFS joins the RTA Group, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Chicago Alumnae Chapter and community partners at annual Girls Night Out: A Stroll Through the City to raise awareness

CHICAGO – On Saturday, January 11, National Human Trafficking Awareness Day, Illinois DCFS will join advocates and volunteers and take to the streets of Chicago as a physical demonstration of support against sex trafficking in our communities.

Volunteers will gather at D'Estee (Chicago Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.), 4525 S. King Dr. in Chicago at 7 p.m. to assemble packets that include toiletries and information about substance abuse services, shelter care programs and human trafficking referral services. After a short program, groups will walk to various Chicago Transit Authority Red Line train stops throughout the city to distribute the packets to homeless women and youth who are the most vulnerable.

“It’s important for everyone to understand that human trafficking is not something that only happens in other countries. It is alarming that children are trafficked in big cities and small towns across the United States and in Illinois every day,” said Illinois DCFS Acting Director Marc D. Smith. “The public can help keep children safe by learning the signs of human trafficking and by immediately calling 911 or the Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-25-ABUSE) if they notice changes in a child’s behavior or appearance.”

In Fiscal Year 2019, Illinois DCFS investigated 255 allegations of human trafficking of children, 119 of those in Cook County – a number experts believe is lower than the true number of incidents that occurred during that time. Often, victims of human trafficking do not seek help because they are fearful, ashamed of their situation, distrust law enforcement or become dependent on the perpetrator. The Illinois Safe Children Act ensures that all children who are lured or coerced into prostitution/human trafficking are innocent and immune from criminal prosecution; and will be placed in the child welfare system instead of the criminal justice system.

“The RTA Group is dedicated to bringing awareness to human trafficking through training, evaluation, coaching and counseling to ensure that vulnerable populations are afforded the best care and treatment possible without violating their dignity and safety,” said Dr. Kisha Roberts-Tabb. “In a nation coined as the land of the free, the exploitation of women and children has become a common occurrence in impoverished communities. It is important that we give a voice to the voiceless and those who find themselves with limited choices.”

Organizations participating in this year’s Girl’s Night Out include: AIDS Healthcare Foundation; Bag Lady Outreach; Chicago Children's Advocacy Center; Chicago PEP; Cook County Juvenile Probation; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Chicago Alumnae Chapter; Future Superstars; Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; Kappa Alpha Psi, Evergreen Park (IL), Silhouette Chapter; New Beginnings Church; Purple Path; RTA Group; Safe and Sound Connect; Straford Memorial Seven-Day Adventist Church; Traffick Free; Women of Service Being of Service; and the Young Women's Professional League, Queen Beatrice, Grand Chapter.

KNOW THE SIGNS. A trafficked child might:

- Have an adult control them by speaking for them
- Seem out of place given the time of day or night
- Look disheveled or dressed in clothes that they could not afford to buy
- Show signs of physical abuse such as bruising or red marks
- Not possess any form of identification
- Perform inappropriate work for their age and not be compensated

Event schedule:

- 7:15 p.m. Volunteer arrival/make signs and assemble outreach packages
- 8:15 p.m. Program begins
- 8:45 p.m. Departure to track locations for outreach
- 10 p.m. Facebook livestream begins (at the various track locations)

Outreach track locations:

- 127th & Ashland
- 119th Halsted to Michigan

Chicago Transit Authority Red Line train stops:

- 76-78th Halsted
- 62nd Ashland
- 59th Halsted
- 47th Western to California
- 47th Kedzie-Pulaski
- South Cicero 47th-55
- Chicago Ave.
- Roosevelt/Cicero
- 5th & Cicero
- Fullerton/Pulaski
- Cermak (Cali-Kedzie)

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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