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ILLINOIS HONORS ADOPTIVE PARENTS DURING NATIONAL “ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH”

17,639 kids find loving homes through state program over last decade

SPRINGFIELD –The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is celebrating the lifelong commitment of thousands of adoptive Illinois parents who have opened their hearts to children in need of loving homes as part of National *Adoption Awareness Month* in Illinois.

The dreams of 1,697 Illinois children came true as they were adopted into permanent, loving families during the last year, and 17,639 kids found homes through DCFS over the last decade. But DCFS and child advocates say there is still much to be done.

“Every child deserves to grow up safe, secure and loved,” said DCFS Director Richard H. Calica. “This month, we honor and thank all of the families who have made a lifelong commitment to children in need of love.”

Children from all across the state of all ages, backgrounds and abilities are taken into temporary state care when their home life is unsafe. Most are temporarily placed with a loving relative or licensed foster family while DCFS strives to reunite children with their birth families through a wide range of supportive programs. When reunification simply is not possible, adoption into a permanent, loving family provides children with the nurturing, guidance and sense of belonging they need to grow and develop to their fullest potential.

Adoption is a serious and permanent commitment to a child. DCFS offers a range of supports to adoptive families, including reimbursement for attorney fees and court costs, a monthly subsidy, a medical card and other benefits which assist in defraying expenses associated with raising a child. Many considering adoption decide to become licensed foster families first, giving them a better understanding of the needs of kids from disrupted families before making a life-changing decision.

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"Adoption is a wonderful way to build a family," says Ruth Jajko, statewide director of adoption services at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), a statewide, multi-service agency and one of Illinois' largest child welfare providers. "Children adopted from foster care need the love and security of a family to help them achieve their potential. At the same time, adoptive parents experience the joys that come with helping a child grow and develop, discovering all they were meant to be."

"When a child, or children are adopted, a new family is born with all of the adventures and joy that comes with raising children," says Nancy Ronquillo, president and CEO of the nonprofit Children's Home and Aid, one of the state's largest and oldest child welfare organizations.

"Every child is born with potential," says Julie Tye, president of The Cradle in suburban Evanston. "We aren't all going to grow up to be *somebody*, but we are going to grow up to be *someone*. The most important ingredient in a child's ability to realize his or her potential is family. Adoptive parents help their children become the people they were meant to be."

Added Tye: "In the process, those children help their moms and dads become what they were meant to be: *parents*."

Today there are 2,040 Illinois children under state care who are legally available for adoption and in need of permanent, loving families. While the majority of adoptive parents are married, a growing number are single, divorced, legally separated and in civil unions. Those with the desire and ability to adopt children with younger brothers or sisters will have additional support this coming year thanks to legislation championed by State Representative Sara Feigenholtz, an adoptee herself. Under Public Act 97-1076, enacted by Governor Quinn, DCFS is intensifying efforts to maintain the ties between siblings while they are in the state's temporary care, preserving important family connections when siblings are either reunited with their birth parents or adopted by a loving family.

"I've talked to hundreds of adoptees across the state, and over time they come to understand and accept why they had to leave their birth parents. But you never get over losing your brother or sister too," Feigenholtz said. "Maintaining the family bond between siblings provides them with irreplaceable love, security and nurturing that ensures their emotional well-being."

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Over the last decade, Illinois has made great strides in child welfare, thanks to the efforts of Feigenholtz and other child advocates. In 1997 there were over 52,000 children in state care. Today, thanks to thousands of families across the state who have come forward to provide permanent, loving homes for these children through adoption and guardianship, there are fewer than 15,000 children in state care.

Families interested in adopting should call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois (AICI), a nonprofit partner of DCFS, at 1-800-572-2390 or visit www.adoptinfo-il.org. For more general information about adoption in Illinois, contact the newly-created Adoption Support Line at 1-888-96-ADOPT (962-3678).

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About Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. Founded in the 1960's, DCFS has the primary responsibility of protecting children and strengthening families through the investigation and intervention of suspected child abuse or neglect by parents and other caregivers. Over the last four years, DCFS received more than one million calls to our Child Abuse Hotline, offering and coordinating services wherever needed to help children remain in their homes safely. In instances where children must be removed from the home for their safety and well-being, DCFS makes every effort to return them safely to their homes as quickly as possible. When that simply is not possible, DCFS is equally committed to pursuing adoption by loving families to provide children with the permanent, safe, and nurturing homes they need and deserve to reach their fullest potential. As part of its duties, DCFS licenses and monitors all Illinois child welfare agencies and more than 14,000 day care centers, homes, group homes and day care agencies in the state.

About Children's Home + Aid. A leading child and family service agency in Illinois, Children's Home + Aid protects, educates and counsels 42,000 children, youth and families and is recognized for establishing best practices and achieving outstanding results through its programs. Children's Home + Aid offers a continuum of programs throughout 50 counties in more than 20 locations across Illinois including Chicago, Rockford, Bloomington-Normal and the St. Louis Metro East. Programs include: foster care, adoption, and intact family services for children who have suffered abuse or neglect; early childhood education; and a broad array of clinical and community services to help children, youth and families thrive. Visit www.ChildrensHomeandAid.org for more information.

About The Cradle. Renowned as one of the foremost adoption agencies in the country, since opening in 1923 The Cradle has helped place more than 14,000 children into permanent, loving homes. Understanding adoption as the commitment of a lifetime for a lifetime, The Cradle provides lifelong support to anyone touched by adoption. Visit www.Cradle.org for more information.

About Lutheran Social Services of Illinois. Founded in 1867, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) is a statewide, not-for-profit social service agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. LSSI serves people through an array of services at approximately 85 sites across Illinois, including its foster care and adoption offices in Chicago, Aurora, Peoria, Champaign, Marion, Rockford, Rock Island, Galesburg, Nachusa, Canton, Danville and Harrisburg. Visit www.LSSI.org or [LSSI's Facebook page](#) for more information.

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