



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**CONTACT:** Jo Ann Dollard

847/390-1446

## **LSSI Honors Dr. Peter Benson, Child Development Scholar and Advocate, with Amicus Certus Award**

On November 3, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) honored Dr. Peter Benson, president of the Minneapolis-based Search Institute, at its 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Amicus Certus Gala. The event, hosted by the Women's Network of LSSI, was held at the Four Seasons Hotel in Chicago. Orion Samuelson, WGN agricultural broadcaster and 1996 Amicus Certus honoree, served ably as master of ceremonies of the event, which featured a variety of entertainment including captivating performances by cirque-style dancers. The event was chaired by Kathy Johnson, a Barrington resident.

The Amicus Certus Gala annually recognizes individuals or organizations that have made significant contributions to the human community. Benson, one of the world's leading authorities on positive human development and author of "All Kids Are Our Kids: What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents," is recognized for weaving together rigorous scholarship with a passionate commitment to influencing society to be more attentive to children and adolescents.

"There is no thinker in child development like Dr. Peter Benson, who looks at the development of children in such a positive basis, and who focuses not only on the importance of loving children, but also on teaching them to be loving people," said the Rev. Dr. Frederick Aigner, LSSI president, as he presented the award to Benson. "He has had a remarkable influence across our nation in shaping both how we as mentors, teachers, leaders and communities view and approach children and adolescents, enabling them to thrive and engage constructively in life."

As he received the award, Benson said, "I am thrilled about receiving this award and being at this event with people who love life, love community and love kids. There are a number of reasons why this award means so much to me. We get so busy sometimes that we lose sight of the meaning of our work. ... [This award] reenergizes me for the work that I do." Also recognizing the

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efforts of the staff at the Search Institute, he added, “I will be sharing this [award] with them. It’s not about me — it’s about us.”

The evening also highlighted LSSI’s 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary. On October 31, 1867, the Children’s Home at Andover — the first Lutheran charitable institution in Illinois and the forerunner of the agency — opened its doors to children orphaned by a wave of cholera epidemics that had ravaged the area. Since that beginning, a tradition of caring has been passed on, and grown into the organization now known as Lutheran Social Services of Illinois. Today, as an agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, LSSI offers a wide variety of services — including adoption, foster care, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, senior housing, nursing care, and services for prisoners and families, to name a few — to tens of thousands of people of all ages, races, religions and economic classes in Illinois each year. LSSI is based in Des Plaines.

The Amicus Certus Gala raised approximately \$65,000 for LSSI’s Telepsychiatry Program, which enables LSSI to provide psychiatric services to clients via videoconferencing technology. Using special equipment, Dr. Chris Fichtner, a psychiatrist and former director of the Illinois Department of Mental Health, is able to “meet” with adolescent clients at Nachusa (Ill.) Lutheran Home from a conference room in LSSI’s Des Plaines office. The program has been so successful in its first year that the agency is looking at the possibility of expanding the service into other rural areas in Illinois. Fichtner, who worked with LSSI to help establish and now expand the program, also spoke at the gala.

Former Amicus Certus honorees include the late Paul Simon, former U.S. Senator from Illinois; Anne M. Burke, Chicago Special Olympics founder; The Retirement Research Foundation; The Erickson Institute; Rotary International; and the Rev. Donald Hallberg, former LSSI president who was in attendance at this year’s gala. In 2006, LSSI honored men’s head basketball coaches Bruce Weber and Homer Drew of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and Valparaiso University in Indiana, respectively.

*For more about LSSI, call 847/635-4600 or visit [www.LSSI.org](http://www.LSSI.org).*

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