



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Jo Ann Dollard
847/390-1446

LSSI Celebrates Families and Women Affected By Incarceration Who Have Rebuilt Their Lives

On Friday, August 17, beginning at 4:00 p.m., Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) will hold “Connect & Celebrate,” an event celebrating families who have rebuilt their lives after a parent’s incarceration. Dr. Margaret Burroughs, artist, educator and founder of DuSable Museum of African-American History, will be the keynote speaker at the event, which will be held at St. James Catholic Church’s social hall, at 2920 S. Wabash in Chicago. Mary Mitchell, *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist, will be master of ceremonies.

“‘Connect and Celebrate’ is about success,” explains Ranjana Bhargava, director of Connections, an LSSI program. “For women released from prison who are working to rebuild their lives, success can be measured in small ways. Success is when women reunify with their families and understand themselves, so they can go back to their communities as valuable and contributing members.”

The event will include a presentation by Still Point Theatre Collective, a three-woman performance of a script developed from writings by women incarcerated at area jails and the Dwight Correctional Center. The 30-minute performance will be followed by the performers’ brief reflections on their own experiences in the prisons, and then an address by Burroughs, who, after retirement, began teaching art classes to inmates at the Stateville Correctional Center. The event will conclude at 6:00 p.m.

The Community Renewal Society recently featured LSSI’s Connections programs in its *Chicago Reporter* and *Catalyst Chicago* magazines, as part of its “Children of the Incarcerated” campaign, which “combines public education, civic engagement and direct advocacy to end the cycle of intergenerational incarceration.” Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, which is the only agency in the state that works with incarcerated mothers and their families from conviction to release, was featured at the campaign’s kick-off event this spring.

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Connections provides services and programs for incarcerated parents, their children and the caregivers of their children, including **Re-entry Services** for women who have left prison and are returning to the Chicago area. It links women with area resources, such as food pantries, job training programs and substance abuse treatment services. “Through Re-entry Services, we’re trying to help women released from prison raise their self-esteem by connecting them with the services they need, as well as counseling,” explains Bhargava, adding that Connections is now incorporating creative activities for the women into its programming. “Art projects provide a way for these women to talk about themselves and their experiences — internal stress, turmoil and strength can be expressed through art.”

Visits to Mom, another Connections program, provides transportation for the children of incarcerated mothers and their caregivers to several prisons via a bus or volunteer-driven car, while **RAPP (Relatives As Parents Program)** provides support groups at Decatur and Lincoln Correctional Centers for caregivers who accompany the children. Connections also offers **Saturday Surprises**, a monthly program for children ages 6-11 in Chicago whose parents are incarcerated.

Participants at “Connect & Celebrate,” a private event, will include Connections clients and staff; the Rev. Dr. Frederick Aigner, LSSI president; Jane Otte, executive director, Prisoner and Family Ministry (of which Connections is a part); the Community Renewal Society; CLAIM (Chicago Legal Advocacy For Incarcerated Mothers); officials from the Illinois Department of Corrections; and supporters of Connections and LSSI.

Founded in 1867, LSSI is a statewide, not-for-profit social service agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), as well as an agency of the United Way. LSSI serves people through an array of services at 89 program sites across Illinois. For more information on Connections, call 312/567-9224, ext. 13, or visit www.LSSI.org.

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