



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
August 22, 2007

**Contact:** Jo Ann Dollard  
847/390-1446

## **Burroughs, Mitchell Lead Celebration of Women and Families Who Have Rebuilt Their Lives after Prison**

On August 17, Dr. Margaret Burroughs, artist, poet, educator and founder of the DuSable Museum of African-American History, was the keynote speaker at “Connect & Celebrate,” an event hosted by Connections, a program of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI). The event celebrated formerly incarcerated women and their families who have rebuilt their lives after prison, individuals served by Connections. Mary Mitchell, *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist, was master of ceremonies. The event, attended by nearly 200 people, was held at St. James Catholic Church’s annex, at 2920 S. Wabash in Chicago.

Participants included Connections clients, staff, volunteers and supporters; the Rev. Dr. Frederick Aigner, LSSI president; Jane Otte, executive director, Prisoner and Family Ministry (of which Connections is a part); representatives from the Community Renewal Society, CLAIM (Chicago Legal Advocacy For Incarcerated Mothers) and Illinois Department of Corrections prisons; and Illinois State Senator Mattie Hunter.

Opening the event, Mitchell said, “Today, we are here to celebrate the journey that we as women have taken together.” Referring to the women who have returned to the community following prison, she shared her favorite story of the prodigal son and added, “Whenever someone finds [her] way home, it’s a real celebration.”

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

When Mitchell introduced Burroughs, she fondly recounted the story of their first meeting over a cup of tea at Burroughs’ home years earlier, and also recognized Burroughs’ status as a cultural icon in Chicago. After reading her famous poem, “What Shall I Tell My Children Who

-more-

Are Black?” and also from her autobiography, Burroughs received a standing ovation. With Mitchell and Bhargava at her side, she also answered questions from members of the audience about her life and the need for creative expression. Emphasizing the importance of remaining active in old age, she mentioned that every Tuesday, she teaches creative writing, poetry and art to inmates at Stateville Correctional Center, saying, “I don’t have no time to die.”

The event also included “Strong Women” — a powerful performance by Still Point Theatre Collective, a three-woman show featuring a script developed from writings by women incarcerated at area jails and the Dwight Correctional Center.

The Community Renewal Society recently featured Connections in its *Chicago Reporter* and *Catalyst Chicago* publications, 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 kick-off this spring.

Connections provides a variety of services and programs for incarcerated parents, their children and their caregivers, as well as re-entry services for women who have left prison and are returning to the Chicago area. The program is perhaps best known for Visits to Mom, which provides transportation for the children of incarcerated mothers and their caregivers to every prison in Illinois that houses women.

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, call 312/567-9224, ext. 13, or visit [www.LSSI.org](http://www.LSSI.org).

###

*To link to an 8/15/07 article entitled “Mothers, Families, Prison and Rebuilt Lives” featured on the Community Media Workshop’s Web site about “Connect & Celebrate” and Connections, click [here](#).*