



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

NEWS RELEASE

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LSSI Celebrates National Foster Care Month, Seeks Prospective Foster Parents

“Foster parenting can be a very rewarding experience, and I recommend it to anyone who wants to try it,” says Myrna Donaldson. “It’s rewarding because you get to share your life with children who ... desperately need love and attention, and you can make the world a better place by helping children who truly need help.”

Myrna and her husband Scott, who live in a northwest Chicago suburb, became licensed foster parents with Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) in 2004. The agency has placed three foster children with the couple – a sibling group which includes two girls, ages 2 and 5, and a boy, age 4. They also have a 10-year-old biological daughter.

“I don’t know that there is anything else better in life than to be a foster parent,” says Michelle Hutchison, another LSSI foster parent. “There is nothing more rewarding than seeing a kid respond – whether medically or emotionally.”

Hutchison should know. She’s fostered six children and adopted one, Victor, who has serious medical issues – issues so serious that he wasn’t predicted to live long, let alone walk or talk. He does both and more. “You know you’re making a difference [in a child’s life],” Hutchison says of fostering children needing specialized care.

The Donaldsons and Hutchison are just some of the people who have taken a leap of faith and become foster parents through LSSI, a social service agency with program sites around the state of Illinois. LSSI cares for more than 1,700 foster children statewide – approximately 10 percent of the children in Illinois’ child welfare system. And they are some of the many foster parents being thanked this month during National Foster Care Month.

“We are thankful that there is a designated month to bring awareness and empathy to our children who are impacted by the child welfare system,” says Bernadine Drew, LSSI Foster Care licensing supervisor. “It is also important to bring recognition to our foster families who offer safe and supportive homes to our children,” adding that LSSI is hosting its 3rd Annual

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Foster Parent Appreciation Banquet in Chicago on May 25 for families served by the agency.

LSSI has traditional and specialized foster care programs, but all children placed in foster care need caregivers who can respond in sensitive and nurturing ways to help them grow and develop, while efforts are made to help them reunify with their birth families. LSSI provides intensive training for foster parents who care for children with serious medical, emotional or behavioral problems. Training is also provided to behavioral specialized parents who play a key role in helping foster children learn new skills and express their feelings appropriately.

In addition to overseeing the care of the children in its foster care network, LSSI is also working with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to provide emergency foster care for medically fragile children. These children have specialized medical conditions, such as diabetes, shaken baby syndrome, HIV/AIDS or cerebral palsy, or are burn victims or equipment-dependent.

Most recently, LSSI announced its support of and participation in the landmark “Don’t Write Me Off” campaign, which focuses on how people can make a difference in the lives of foster children in a number of ways. The campaign is a collaboration of Illinois foster care agencies, Voices for Illinois Children, Family Support America and WGN-TV.

LSSI encourages couples or individuals to consider taking a very personal approach to National Foster Care Month – becoming a foster parent. Married or single applicants are welcome. The successful candidate must have a source of income, available bedroom space for the child(ren) and the ability to respond sensitively to children’s needs.

Founded in 1867, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois is a statewide, not-for-profit social service agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. LSSI is an Illinois Licensed Child Welfare Agency (license no. 013005).

For information on LSSI’s foster care programs, call 1-888-322-LSSI (5774). Or visit www.LSSI.org and follow the links to the Foster Care page. For information on the “Don’t Write Me Off” campaign, visit www.FosterKidsAreOurKids.org.

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