



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

NEWS RELEASE

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LSSI Offers Week-Long Camp Getaway for Families Affected by HIV/AIDS

Des Plaines-based Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) is the new sponsor of Camp Getaway, which provides an annual, week-long camp experience for families impacted by HIV/AIDS. LSSI acquired the new ministry from another human service organization, Access Healthcare Network.

The camp, held at Lutherdale Bible Camp in Elkhorn, Wis., was started 15 years ago by a Lutheran pastor who has since moved to North Carolina. The camp serves approximately 30 families — including 65 children — a year. The camp's goal is to take families out of everyday situations that can be stressful and provide a unique, family-oriented experience. Young campers enjoy arts and crafts, water sports and visits to see farm animals. The program for adult campers incorporates healing elements, such as art therapy, and, if needed, sobriety meetings.

“Camp Getaway continues and expands LSSI's commitment to serve children and families impacted by HIV/AIDS,” says Dan Schwick, assistant to the President of LSSI.

“In the early years of the AIDS epidemic, LSSI created our Second Family program to transition children whose parents were dying of AIDS into a new home in which the children would be cared for and loved,” he adds. “With the dramatic increase in the life expectancy of people with HIV or AIDS, the focus has turned from a focus on dying to a focus on living with HIV.”

Camp Getaway is administered by a team of independent contractors — a camp director and an associate director — who oversee the volunteers serving as camp counselors and activity directors. The camp, which is free to participants, is funded by a number of grants and additional fund-raising efforts. This year, the camp ran from August 12-17. Ninety-seven campers from Chicago and the suburbs, along with one family from Madison, Wis., participated. Forty volunteer camp counselors also participated.

Staff members are Mark Freedlund, who is returning for his third year as camp director, and Danielle Neff, who is returning for her second year as assistant director. Freedlund has been involved

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with Camp Getaway since 1995 as a volunteer camp counselor. “This camp truly is a getaway for families that really need a safe place to relax and reconnect with each other,” he says.

“Camp Getaway is such a transformative experience,” adds Neff, who is responsible for recruiting volunteers and campers, and completing the necessary paperwork. “You can see the healing that takes place through these connections [with each other, nature and the volunteers].”

Previous campers are enthusiastic about the camp. “I love Camp Getaway because I get to be positive without worrying about the stigma that goes with HIV/AIDS,” says one, adding “At camp, my children get a chance to say the word HIV, and they get a chance to talk about it.”

“It's the best chance my family has to connect with others impacted by HIV,” says another. “It's a break from the ‘rat race’ of clinic and therapies and work ...”

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's services include foster care, adoption, pregnancy counseling, Head Start, child care services, services for at-risk families, residential services for youth, counseling, mental health, substance abuse treatment, residential programs for adults with developmental disabilities, housing and services for older adults and individuals with disabilities, nursing care and rehabilitation, and programs for prisoners and their families.

For more information on Camp Getaway, contact Mark Freedlund at 847/635-4645; or at camp.getaway@LSSI.org. For more information on LSSI, visit www.LSSI.org.

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