



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **LSSI To Hold Premiere of Groundbreaking ‘Lifebook’ DVD, Celebrating Foster and Adoptive Families Who ‘Starred’ In It**

On January 14, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) will show a new training DVD, “Putting the Pieces Together: Lifebook Work with Children,” at a special, invitation-only premiere in Moline. The event is being held at First Lutheran Church, located at 1230 Fifth Avenue, beginning with a dinner at 5:30 p.m. to honor the children, youth, foster and adoptive parents (all local residents), LSSI staff and others who were instrumental in the creation of this groundbreaking resource. The Rev. Dr. Frederick Aigner, LSSI president, will also be present at the premiere.

The training DVD was made possible by a gift from an anonymous donor for LSSI’s Post-Adoption Services and was developed in collaboration with Dr. Jeanne Howard of the Center for Adoption Studies at Illinois State University (Normal), and in association with Rhondal McKinney at the Rural Documentary Collection at ISU.

Designed to provide a tool for foster and adoptive parents to learn how to create a Lifebook for the children in their care, the DVD is also available to other child welfare agencies and professionals around the country. The goal of the project is to impact child welfare training and practice nationally and in Illinois.

“We want every child in foster care to have a Lifebook,” says Ruth Jajko, associate executive director of LSSI’s Children’s Community Services.

The Lifebook DVD is unique in that it focuses on the needs of children in foster care, illuminating the need for all children in foster care to have a Lifebook. With Lifebooks, often the focus is primarily on children preparing for adoption. Children in the child welfare system — either foster or adopted children — often may lose track of the threads of their lives. Photos are lost, accomplishments are forgotten, and children are confused by moves from one place to another. One way to help these children regain a sense of their own history and self-worth is to help them create a Lifebook for themselves.

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“[Creating] a Lifebook helps children make sense of their stories,” says Jajko. She notes that a Lifebook isn’t just a photo album or scrapbook. “It’s a way to delve into questions of a child’s life in a safe, meaningful way,” she explains.

“A Lifebook helps a child to be more whole,” Howard adds. “It’s a chronological representation of a child’s life that is a means to heal.”

The DVD uses the stories and words of youth, foster and adoptive parents and professionals to build the case about why Lifebooks are important. Jajko adds, “This training DVD does not feature just professionals preaching about the importance of Lifebooks, but real families who have firsthand experience with them.”

“A Lifebook helps a child to keep the pieces of his or her life together,” adds Monica Johnson, statewide coordinator of LSSI’s Post-Adoption Training and Services in Rock Island, who led the development of the project. She says that children in the child welfare system are often missing pictures and records of their life events and accomplishments, which makes it hard to connect with their past. Creating a Lifebook is also a good form of therapy, since children can include not only remembrances from happy times, but also those from painful times.

Says Moline resident Markea Burrell, a foster and adoptive parent who is featured in the video, and will be at the premiere with her family, says, “It’s a book that you *have to have*, not a book that you want to have, especially when a child has to go from one home to another home or [has] two different families — a birth family and an adoptive family.”

Founded in October 1867, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois is celebrating its 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and is a statewide, not-for-profit social service agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

*For more information about the Lifebook project, call Monica Johnson at 309/786-6400 or visit [www.AdoptionIllinois.org](http://www.AdoptionIllinois.org). For more information about Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, visit [www.LSSI.org](http://www.LSSI.org).*

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