



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **LSSI Recognizes Prader-Willi Awareness Week, Provides Special Residence in Dixon**

With obesity reaching epidemic proportions worldwide, one little known syndrome is perhaps one of the best windows of opportunity to gaining further understanding of hunger and metabolic mechanisms in the body. Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS), although rare, is the most common known genetic cause of life-threatening obesity. Current estimations figure that up to 80 percent of individuals who have PWS in the United States do not know they have it and may see doctors who do not know about it or test for it.

In an effort to reach individuals who are struggling unknowingly with PWS, Prader-Willi Syndrome Association (USA) has launched PWS Awareness Week, a public education initiative to increase awareness and save lives. Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) joins other organizations, families, and professionals from around the nation in highlighting this observance from April 30-May 6.

PWS is a complex genetic disorder that causes a chronic feeling of hunger. If left unchecked, people with the condition can literally overeat to the point of death. To survive, they must have assistance to control their eating and manage their weight. It is estimated that one in 12,000 to 15,000 births results in a baby born with PWS. That means close to 25,000 people in the United States have PWS. The syndrome affects both males and females and all ethnic groups. At this time, there is no cure for PWS, which also involves learning disabilities, borderline mental retardation and obsessive/compulsive behaviors, such as repetitive thoughts and verbalizations. An involuntary urge to eat constantly, coupled with a reduced need for calories, leads to obesity.

LSSI provides a group home in Dixon for adults with PWS. The Dixon Group Home is one of three facilities in the state for adults with PWS, ages 18 and older. The other facilities are LSSI's Washington Place, in Beardstown, which opened in 1991, and the Fox Hill Group Home, in Aurora, which opened in 2005.

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“There is hope for people with Prader-Willi,” says Judy Netz, Dixon Group Home program director. “With the proper care and intervention, people with the condition can accomplish many of the things their “normal” peers do — complete school, pursue hobbies and be successfully employed.”

The Dixon Group Home, which opened in July 2000, is home to eight males and females. The Home provides a structured environment. During the week, residents work at Kreider Services, a sheltered workshop where they perform a variety of duties, including light industrial machine work, and product assembly, packaging and labeling.

Residents exercise before and after work, either taking brisk walks or working out in the home’s exercise room. The staff serves low-calorie, filling meals and snacks at the same time every day. Because of residents’ compulsion to eat, all food is secured in a locked pantry.

The program also offers some independence. Residents have the freedom to choose recreation activities, whether it’s staying in to assemble puzzles, or going out to the bowling alley, movies, library, a local football game, theater or church. Residents also are free to visit their families frequently.

Since its opening in July 2000, the Dixon Group Home has provided services to 11 individuals with a combined weight loss of 760 pounds.

“Prader-Willi Syndrome Awareness Week is an opportunity to educate individuals about Prader-Willi,” says Netz. “Very few people know about the disease, let alone that there are people living productive lives in our community who have been diagnosed with Prader-Willi Syndrome.”

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 with more than 100 program locations, as well as an agency of the United Way.

***For more information about LSSI’s Dixon Group Home or PWS Awareness Week, please call 815/288-4108. For more information about Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, visit [www.LSSI.org](http://www.LSSI.org).***

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