



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

NEWS RELEASE

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LSSI Recognizes Prader-Willi Awareness Week April 30—May 6, Provides Special Residence in Beardstown

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 Beardstown for adults with PWS. Washington Place is one of three facilities in the state for adults with PWS, ages 18 and older. The other facilities are LSSI's Fox Hill group home, in Aurora, which opened in 2005, and the Dixon Group Home, in Dixon, which opened in July 2000.

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Since its opening in January 1991, Washington Place has provided services to 14 individuals. Currently, there are seven residents with a capacity for eight.

Residents attend one of three different workshops or training centers each day. They are active in the community and serve on Beardstown's Fall Fun Festival Committee, participate in several area churches, do their own banking, go to the library and bowling, visit friends and attend community events. Several residents are involved in the Special Olympics, too. Staff members take residents on field trips to help them meet program goals. The staff works to coordinate services between residents' families, medical professionals, workshops and Washington Place in the way that best suits each resident's individual needs.

"Our residents are great," says Moore. She notes that the families of the residents – even those who live a couple of hours away from Beardstown – are very involved with them. "Which helps a lot," she says, adding that "we've become like a family."

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 Washington Place services and volunteer opportunities there, call 217/323-5367. For more information about Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, visit www.LSSI.org.

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