

Rod R. Blagojevich
Governor



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 17, 2007

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**DCFS WELCOMES THOUSANDS TO ILLINOIS STATE FAIR ON
FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES DAY**
*DCFS, Illinois Foster Adoptive Parent Association offer family photos and
information on foster and adoptive care;
Over 9,500 family members enjoy food, rides and fun*

SPRINGFIELD – Building on a summertime tradition, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) hosted thousands of foster and adoptive families today at the Illinois State Fair, providing admission, food and ride tickets to over 9,500 family members. Located across from the carnival midway, the DCFS tent is transformed one day each year by families from throughout the state who come to celebrate the State Fair experience and affirm their fellowship with other foster and adoptive families.

“These families have opened their hearts and homes to abused and neglected children, and we welcome them to the Fair to thank them for that generosity and commitment,” said DCFS Acting Director Erwin McEwen. “This community of caring families in Illinois is the key to providing loving, permanent homes for the children we serve.”

The DCFS tent provides information to all who visit on how to become a foster or adoptive family, while it also promotes child safety and well-being initiatives such as Childhood Drowning Prevention and the Foster Kids Are Our Kids campaign to increase public support for community-based child welfare agencies statewide.

“The Illinois Foster Adoptive Parent Association would like to express our appreciation to Acting Director McEwen and everyone at DCFS for inviting us to share the tent at the Fair,” said Gladys Boyd, President of IFAPA. “It is always a pleasure working with DCFS for the good of our parents and children.”

The DCFS tent also offers free family photos to all who visit. Those photos have become an annual tradition for many families, and they also serve a special purpose for foster families, helping the Department maintain its database of digital photos of children in foster care. That database serves an important protective role, aiding DCFS and law enforcement in identifying and locating children should they ever be missing from care.

A decade ago, Illinois was widely viewed as having one of the worst child welfare systems in the country. The state held the largest concentration of children in foster care on a per-capita basis, with over 51,000 children in

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care in 1998. Today, Illinois is widely regarded as a national leader in finding permanent families for abused and neglected children, through family reunification, adoption and subsidized guardianship. The *Congressional Research Quarterly* highlighted the state's accomplishments as setting the "gold standard" for child care. In addition to the 10,000 children moved to permanent guardianship since 1997, Illinois has returned 32,000 children to their birth families and found adoptive homes for another 39,000 children. The overall movement of these 81,000 children out of foster care to permanent families has reduced the size of the foster care population in Illinois from 51,000 children to less than 16,000 today.

Under the administration of Governor Rod R. Blagojevich, DCFS has also increased access and quality of services to children in state care. Those initiatives have included:

Fatherhood Initiative: a system-wide effort to engage fathers in their children's care and remove obstacles to fathers' participation in child welfare services.

Child Protection: a wide-ranging initiative to further improve the safety of children:

- the statewide average caseload staffing ratio for investigators was lowered in 2006 from 12-to-1 to 9-to-1
- online training for mandated reporters of abuse and neglect was launched in 2007, the first such online training offered in the nation
- new training on the impact of methamphetamine on families was developed and provided in 2006, and DCFS established an Interagency Agreement with the Illinois State Police and launched regional pilot projects to better serve these families

Education: DCFS revised statewide child welfare policy in 2006 to now require education to begin at age 3 for all state wards, and changed its foster care placement policy for wards in 2006 to look first to place the child within a foster family in their current school catchment area, helping to support family reunification and the educational stability and success of children.

Abuse & Neglect Prevention: DCFS created Strengthening Families Illinois, a collaboration between DCFS and over 40 public and private partners to work through early childhood education centers to build protective factors around families, preventing abuse and neglect. The initiative has established 6 regional child care networks, encompassing over 60 centers. DCFS was recognized in May 2007 as a national model for this work by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP).

Services to Older Youth: Illinois is 1 of only 4 states in the nation to routinely keep youth in care beyond age 18, to age 21, which has been shown by research to significantly improve adult outcomes for this population. To serve these youth transitioning to adulthood, DCFS offers the most comprehensive network of transition services in the nation. All of these services have been initiated, redesigned or expanded since 2003, including: Youth in College & Vocational Training, Community College Tuition Payment, Youth in Scholarship, Find Your Future Internship Program, Employment Incentive Program, Transitional and Independent Living Program, Youth Housing Assistance Program, Life Skills Training, and Youth Advisory Boards.

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