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JCFS To Close Residential Group Home Program; Agency's Child Welfare Focus Shifts to Foster Care Services

Chicago, Illinois – May 25, 2016 JCFS board of directors and management has made the decision to close its Residential Group Home program, shifting the agency's child welfare focus to the continuing growth of family-based services through its existing Foster Care and related programs. JCFS, and before it the Jewish Children's Bureau (JCB), has positively impacted the lives of thousands of children and youth in Illinois who were subjected to abuse or neglect, and will continue doing so into the future.

External and internal factors informed the difficult decision. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) signaled its belief that youth are best served in strong foster care placements, not in group care. The DCFS FY17 budget reflected this, with plans for a \$23-million dollar cut in residential and institutional care funding, combined with a \$19-million dollar increase in foster care funding. DCFS is further backing up its conviction with funded pilot projects and programming to increase foster home resources, and has definitive plans to remove beds from the residential agencies. JCFS works in close partnership with DCFS; staff members are active on many DCFS committees charged with the evolution of the Illinois Child Welfare system, giving JCFS a clear, detailed view of the goals and direction of DCFS.

JCFS's specialized and traditional foster care services have grown substantially, from 70 children in care just a year ago to more than 110 this year, another sign of DCFS's direction. In addition, JCFS was selected for a 5-year pilot treatment foster care project specifically designed to keep high-risk youth with complex issues in family-based care. With the goal of reducing the need for residential services, this project is anticipated to add an additional 30 youth in JCFS's care over the next two years. The agency's related Intensive Placement Stabilization Services (IPSS) and Maintaining Adoption Connections (MAC) programs have also grown significantly at the request of DCFS.

The decision to close JCFS's residential group was made after a careful and thorough analysis of its programs through the lenses of mission impact and financial sustainability. What this

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analysis determined was that the financial burden of funding group home care had grown each year, now to an unsustainable level. Absent the economies of scale that larger programs can leverage to meet their obligations, smaller programs like JCFS's 39-bed residential program will be impacted the most strongly. DCFS has placed additional burden on the program by requiring that JCFS generate funds through Medicaid billing, a burden that has proven impossible for direct care staff to meet.

JCFS is responding to all of these factors by making the painful decision to close this program. The transition of the youth into their next placement will begin now and, with one exception, is likely to require 3-4 months to complete. The Price home for pregnant and parenting teens may remain open for up to one year at the request of DCFS. Group Home staff are among the most passionate, committed, resilient and caring anywhere. In the face of this most difficult of decisions, JCFS is paying close attention to supporting all affected staff in every way possible, while they focus on helping the youth in JCFS's care with the repercussions of this change. JCFS is assisting staff in finding their next job once the program closes.

Since the agency's inception, JCFS has been at the forefront of providing care for children who could not be cared for by their parents. From the orphanages of the late 1800s, through residential group homes through foster care, JCFS has bravely responded to the shifting field of child welfare. JCFS remains strongly committed to its work with abused and neglected children and their families, and looks forward to working closely with DCFS leadership in building its family-based services.

Jewish Child & Family Services offers people of all backgrounds assistance as they face challenges with life transitions, mental health, developmental/intellectual disability and basic human need. For access to help call 855.275.5237 (855.ASK.JCFS), email ask@jcfs.org or visit jcfs.org.

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