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**CEDA HEAD START AND IDCFS ANNOUNCE PARTNERSHIP
TO ENHANCE FAMILY SERVICES FOR ILLINOIS' AT-RISK CHILDREN**

Collaborative agreement will offer focused comprehensive child-welfare approach

CHICAGO – (Oct. 7, 2008) – In a effort to ensure Illinois' most at-risk youth are given the best chances of functioning in normal family-oriented environments, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and CEDA Head Start, will announce a joint collaborative agreement that will align two of the state's largest family services programs into one full-service-referral-style operation. Officials from the DCFS and CEDA Head Start will sign a joint agreement Thursday, Oct. 9, at 10 a.m. in the Energy Conference Room of CEDA's headquarters, located at 208 s. LaSalle Suite 2010.

“This is a wonderful partnership that will ensure we're able to add increased value to the lives of the families and children we serve,” said Unita Sims, vice president of Children and Family Services at CEDA. “Both organizations work with the mission in mind to strengthen families so that children can be raised in healthy, productive and loving environments that will foster better youth development and this is what this agreement symbolizes.”

The agreement will allow the DCFS to refer wards of the state that are in substitute care, children of wards, and children in intact families, to enroll in CEDA Head Start, which provide before and after school programs, daycare, home-based care and other services for expecting parents, disabled youth and children up until the age of five with educational, nutritional and youth development resources.

In addition, the DCFS will train CEDA Head Start staff on preventive child abuse and neglect measures so that staff can adhere to performance standards that support family strengthening and child safety. In return, CEDA will actively recruit children and families referred by the DCFS whenever slots are available and both organizations will conduct ongoing information sharing on programs, services and clients that officials from both organizations believe will create a more streamlined, efficient approach.

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“We protect children when we support families,” said DCFS Director Erwin McEwen. “This collaboration helps DCFS staff work more closely with Head Start staff in Cook County, to address issues before they result in harm to children. We can build protective factors around children by engaging and serving parents, and we thank CEDA for joining us in this partnership.”

CEDA Head Start serves more than 2800 families annually at 28 sites throughout suburban Cook County with child and family services. Programs are available to income-eligible families and parents who have children living with disabilities. For more information visit www.cedaorg.net.

The agreement is part of the work of Strengthening Families Illinois, a DCFS-supported initiative of over 40 public and private sector partners collaborating with early childhood education centers to build protective factors around children. Through six learning networks supporting over sixty early childhood programs, DCFS helps early childhood staff work with parents to prevent harm to children before it begins. In 2007, the Center for the Study of Social Policy recognized DCFS as the foremost national model for its leadership and innovation in implementing the Strengthening Families approach. Learn more about Strengthening Families Illinois through www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org, or by calling 312-421-5200, ext. 25.

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