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## **GOVERNOR EDGAR HONORS SYCAMORE FAMILY**

### **WELFARE REFORM SUCCESS STORY: PROGRAM HELPS LOCAL FAMILY MOVE FROM WELFARE TO WORK**

Governor James Edgar will honor Julie Roloff and her sons, Nick and Trevor of Sycamore with the Family of Distinction award on September 27, the DeKalb County Community Services Department announced today.

The family will receive the award in recognition of success in moving from welfare to work. The Roloffs are one of 27 families statewide receiving the award. They will meet with Governor Edgar in Springfield to discuss how, one year after welfare reform, the state's Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are helping low-income and welfare-dependent families improve their lives.

Julie's dream was to be an elementary school teacher, but she had no childcare and couldn't afford the tuition to get the degree she needed. She had trouble paying her rent, and she contacted DCCSD looking for financial help. The agency provided rental assistance to see her family through its immediate crisis.

DCCSD awarded Julie a college scholarship that made her education affordable. With the help of this scholarship and other services provided by DCCSD's Community Mentoring program, she was able to earn a degree in elementary education and will begin teaching this fall.

"After my experiences with DCCSD, I believe anything is possible," said Julie. "You just need a vision and people who believe in you to offer support and encouragement."

Julie is currently working as a youth counselor for the summer until her teaching job begins. Her responsibilities include teaching job skills to people ages 14-21, case management, job development, and monitoring job sites. Her salary allows her to minimize usage of welfare benefits and support her family on her own.

"Julie has done what she needed to do to improve her family's situation," said Mary Olson, executive director of the DeKalb County Community Services Department. "She never would be where she is without incredible hard work and determination."

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Julie knows that sharing her experiences can help other single parents overcome their own

obstacles. She started a support group called the "Single Parent Network" to provide a forum for single parents to discuss common issues and provide support for each other. Roloff is the facilitator for the group which meets at 7:00 p.m. every 3rd Friday of the month at the Kishwaukee YMCA.

"The Single Parent Network is a social and educational network for single parents throughout the DeKalb area," said Julie. "I have received so much support from other people, and I just want to give something back and help other people where I can."

Community Action Agencies, a statewide network of social service agencies located in every county in Illinois, have provided services for low-and no-income Illinois residents for over 30 years. CAAs are experts on the issues facing low-income residents and at providing services to address those issues.

"These 'Families of Distinction' demonstrate how families can help themselves if they have the right support structure," said Vincent Thomas, board president of the Illinois Community Action Association. "People cannot become self-sufficient without the right attitude and the right assistance. The CAAs know what services their clients need, and these families put themselves in a position to benefit from those services."

Last year the DeKalb County Community Services Department provided services to over 1400 families, including a community mentoring program, community services block grant scholarships, and emergency financial assistance. For many families, these services were the difference between remaining on welfare and becoming self-sufficient.