

For Immediate Release

Contact Martha Lindberg Mann, 781 997-0814 or mmann@lssne.org



**LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES RESPONDS TO EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS
IN HAITI AND IN NEW ENGLAND**

Agency Seeks Foster Homes to Welcome Displaced Children and Teens

Wellesley, MA: In the immediate wake of the earthquake in Haiti, Lutheran Social Services of New England (LSS) issued a mass appeal to 15,000 constituents via e-mail and regular mail, with the promise that LSS would forward 100% of their donations to Lutheran partners on the ground in Haiti. The agency reports that they're closing in on \$30,000, all of which is being sent to Lutheran World Relief.

"Now, the implications of the Haitian tragedy are being felt in our own backyard" states CEO Heather Feltman. "We're facing the challenge at home in New England of caring for the Haitians in our midst and those who will be sent to us, including children and teens."

Eastern Massachusetts is home to the third largest Haitian community in the United States. Many are here on temporary work or student visas. The U.S. Government has authorized an 18-month Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians so that they will not be forced to return to their ravaged homeland. This temporary status will expire in March 2010

The Lutheran agency, in partnership with other relief organizations, is hastening to set up legal clinics and information sessions in Haitian neighborhoods across New England. These clinics will assist hundreds of immigrants to apply for legal status in the United States and to make sure that they understand their rights. "In addition to the comprehensive social services that we provide all refugees, we will assist Haitians to petition for family members in Haiti, file for orphans in Haiti, apply for Temporary Protected Status, and receive advice from attorneys about immigration options in complicated cases," states attorney Julie Dahlstrom of the LSS Services for New Americans program in Worcester.

As for the children: Lutheran Social Services has the only program in all of New England that serves unaccompanied and undocumented children and teens exclusively. This Massachusetts program is preparing to welcome an influx of Haitian children – in all probability several dozen. A more precise number will be known as soon as officials in Haiti can identify the status of the thousands of children caught up in this catastrophe.

States Feltman, "We are appealing to people concerned about the incalculable pain and suffering of the Haitian people to continue to support all relief efforts, both on the ground in Haiti and here at home. No one budgets for earthquakes, yet that cannot keep us from responding with our own resources!

"There is one more gift that some families might be willing to consider," adds Feltman. "Welcoming a Haitian child or teen into your home as a temporary or long-term foster child."

More information about helping a Haitian child is available at www.lssne.org or by calling 781 997-0814.

Lutheran Social Services, 888 Worcester St., #160, Wellesley, MA 02482 – www.lssne.org