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SOS ILLINOIS ANNOUNCES ITS BOARD OF DIRECTORS VOTES TO RECOGNIZE JUNETEENTH AS AN ORGANIZATION HOLIDAY

As SOS Illinois honors Black History Month, the Board's unanimous decision reaffirms the organization's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion

February 22, 2021 (Chicago, IL) – SOS Children's Villages Illinois, a non-profit, child-welfare agency that serves at-risk youth and children in foster care, announces its Board of Directors, in a unanimous decision, **voted to recognize Juneteenth, celebrated on June 19, as a paid organization holiday beginning this June 2021.** As SOS Illinois honors Black History with a series of activities and events beginning this month that will extend throughout the year, this forward-looking move by the Board reaffirms the organization's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Juneteenth marks the day when federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas in 1865 to take control of the state and ensure that all enslaved people be freed, which came a full two and a half years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Honoring Juneteenth is more complicated than just recognizing the emancipation of slaves in the U.S. It is a day to continue fighting to end racism in the U.S. that prevents equity, creates disproportionate suffering, and harms Black adults and children across the globe. As an organization, SOS Illinois is committed to continued education and advocacy to seek justice, fairness, and lasting freedom.

"We hope by taking this step, we can intentionally encourage and stimulate conversations on the important collective memory of our nation of the impact and cost of racial slavery in America," said SOS Illinois CEO Tim McCormick. "In so many ways, such an action creates the necessary space for purposeful conversations not just of the racial past, but also to move forward and discover solidarity among each of us." Tim continued, "The work of our Racial Justice Committee continues to uplift and support this very notion, that as we care for children in foster care, we too can make meaningful contributions to act on behalf of all of those whose lives are treated with biases and oppression."

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Established in May of 2020, the SOS Illinois Racial Justice Committee is working to shed light on the systems of inequity that disproportionately impact people of color, socioeconomic deprivation, poor education, and lack of access to resources. The Committee has been working behind the scenes to determine the best approach SOS Illinois can take to address the issues the organization faces today, in particular working to reunite families.

“The SOS Illinois Board of Directors knows we play a critical role in creating an organization that prioritizes, supports, and invests in diversity, inclusion, and equity,” shared SOS Illinois Board President Jim Wolfe. “By designating Juneteenth as a holiday for the organization, we establish a precedent that at every level of the organization, we advocate for social justice reforms both within the organization and surrounding communities.”

The SOS Illinois Racial Justice Committee’s first initiatives have been to develop [Black History Month activities](#) aimed at educating staff and children in its care, as well as a larger project focused on developing a parent handbook that will be provided to [birth parents](#), Foster Parents, and parents in communities served through our programs and services. The handbook will address topics such as: educating parents about their legal rights; training on navigating the court system & DCFS; and advising on utilizing community resources.

“It has been an honor to see the work the Committee has done thus far,” stated SOS Illinois Board Member Tarrah Cooper-Wright. “This group of staff members and Foster Parents are pushing boundaries in order to identify the areas of greatest need within our organization and surrounding communities to address racial bias and intolerance. Even more so, the committee has been courageous in creating opportunities for culture-sharing and respectful conversation without shying away from uncomfortable topics that are the groundwork to real and lasting change.”

SOS Illinois believes that issues of diversity, racial inequality, and justice are crucial for all children in foster care. To learn more – read about [Why Black History Month Matters for Children in Foster Care](#).

About SOS Children's Villages Illinois:

SOS Children’s Villages Illinois, founded over 30 years ago, is a 501(c)3 child welfare agency that provides an individual licensed home in a supportive, community environment that marshals all the resources needed to help children heal and achieve their permanency goals. The Village Model of Care prioritizes the following: 1) Children live together with their siblings; 2) Children receive care and support from a full-time, professionally trained and licensed Foster Parent; 3) Children thrive in a private, single-family home; 4) Children are supported by the Village, designed as an intentional community of care; and 5) The entire family is supported through our Family Strengthening Services to keep families in-tact whenever possible.

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SOS Children's Villages Illinois unites brothers and sisters in foster care and provides a safe space to heal for at-risk youth. Currently, the organization operates four sites: three Villages providing sibling group foster care at an 18-home Village (opened in 1993) in Lockport, Illinois; a 19-home Village (opened in 2004) in the Auburn Gresham, Englewood neighborhood of Chicago; a 14-home Village (opened in 2014) in the Roosevelt Square Community of Chicago, as well as Casa Tepeyac (acquired in 2011), a facility that offers preventative and in-home services in the Back of the Yards neighborhood of Chicago.

SOS Children's Villages Illinois celebrates a 100% high school graduation rate, compared to a national average of 50% for children in foster care. Additionally, SOS Illinois has been awarded Charity Navigator's highest rating of Four-Stars and recognized by GuideStar with a Platinum Seal of Transparency. For more information on SOS Children's Villages Illinois visit: [sosillinois.org](https://www.sosillinois.org).

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