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PRESS RELEASE

LA County DCFS Social Workers Honored for Life Changing Work With Prestigious Cornelia Funke Awards

(LOS ANGELES, September 29, 2016) — On Thursday, September 29, at 6 p.m., the Violence Intervention Program and internationally acclaimed author Cornelia Funke will honor four social workers from the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) for their outstanding efforts on behalf of children and families. This unique awards presentation will be held at the Children's Medical Village lobby, located at 2010 Zonal Avenue in Los Angeles. Ms. Funke has personally financed these awards of \$5,000, presented to each social worker. The money is to be used to provide a weeklong retreat for the honored social workers to rejuvenate and refocus on the job of protecting children (see profiles of social workers below).

Cornelia Funke is a multiple-award winning children's author best known for her books "Dragon Rider," "The Thief Lord" and "Inkheart," which were made into major motion pictures. Cornelia grew up in Germany and after graduating college worked as a children's social worker in Hamburg, Germany. Her social work experience has influenced her depiction of children in her books.

Ms. Funke sits on the Board of Directors for the Los Angeles County Violence Intervention Program and dedicates herself to helping abused and neglected children. Her compassion, unyielding generosity, and support of those committed to the safety and well-being of Los Angeles County's children has led her to create this award.

"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"

“I want to show my gratitude with this award to all the men and women in this city who walk into the darkness for us. I want to show my respect to all the ones who fearlessly face the shadows of our society and reach out for the weakest - the children who learned about fear and pain far too early and live lives that would break most of us. The winners of these awards devote their life to bringing light into their darkness. They made it their job to heal the wounds others caused, to bring joy where there was just pain, support and love to children who never experienced either. There is no nobler task in our society, and none is harder. I wish I could do more and I hope there will be others who make this work more bearable by showing the social workers of LA that we all know what we owe them.”

Philip Browning, Director of Los Angeles County Department of Children & Family Services stated, “Our social workers are unsung community heroes. They bravely walk into unimaginable and dangerous situations to protect children and strengthen families. We are grateful to the Violence Intervention Program and Cornelia Funke for honoring four of our social workers for their extraordinary efforts in serving our children and families.”

Led by Dr. Astrid Heger, the Violence Intervention Program has served as the primary hub for all child abuse cases in Los Angeles County, establishing a multidisciplinary family advocacy center that provides medical, forensic, mental health, advocacy and supportive services to victims of child abuse, neglect, sexual assault, domestic violence, elder abuse and dependent adult abuse.

The social workers profiled below will be available for interviews before and after the reception. If you plan to cover the event, please contact Neil Zanville or Amara Suarez with the DCFS Office of Public Affairs at (213) 351-5886.

Twanette Crabb

Operating from a position of caring and compassion, Twanette Crab engages youth with limited connections and high-risk behaviors, by trying to understand the hurt and trauma they've experienced. She successfully interceded for one difficult teen on her caseload who was in danger of losing her last and final placement. Twanette also works diligently to find placements for youth living in group homes so they can reside in a less restrictive level of care, while receiving the support they need. Through understanding the individual needs of youth and seeking to engage the support of lost family members, Twanette has found home placements for *all* of the youth in her care. Twanette's compassion, understanding and hard work has provided hope for foster children whose lives have been adversely affected by trauma.

Ariel Rivera

Ariel Rivera is an insightful and compassionate social worker willing to take on the most difficult cases. On one of his cases, a 14-year-old youth arrived in the U.S., abandoned by his father. Ariel was able to get the youth to open up and trust him. Ariel approached the situation with an open mind, cultural humility and respect, bringing about the reunification of the son with his estranged father. Ariel is also one of the first social workers in the county to receive specialized training in the Core Practice Model, a strategy that identifies common standards, values, and principles that promotes empathetic working relationships with our children and families. He is also the lead worker in his unit, as well as a coach and mentor for trainees, even as he pursues his Licensed Children's Social Worker certification.

Dana Rose

Through her committed caring, Dana Rose helps her clients understand their challenges and motivates them to make necessary changes in their lives. In one success story, Dana reunited an infant with his mother who had struggled with drug use. It was a long and arduous process, but Dana persisted, even providing life-saving support when the mother became suicidal. Since that time, Dana has helped the mother get residential drug-treatment and acquire stable housing. Dana worked tirelessly, often driving long distances on the weekends to facilitate visitation between the mother and son, ultimately leading to a reunion. This mother is now paying it forward. Every Christmas she provides stuffed stockings for social workers to give out to mothers who would otherwise not receive gifts. Dana's work not only brought about this mother and son's healthy reunion, but inspired her to help others as well.

Alisha Von Lewis

Alisa Von Lewis focuses on providing resources for the 18-21 year old non-dependent minors (NDMs) who have transitioned out of the foster care system. Alisha was especially proud when one of her NDMs recently graduated from UC Berkeley with a pre-med degree. Alisha coordinated and implemented the first ever DCFS Resource Fair and Open Mic Talent Showcase for NMDs. MAPFest 2015, "Making a Plan with a Purpose," provides resource options for education, job training, housing, medical, dental and mental health services to help NMDs successfully transition out of foster care to become educated, prepared and independent citizens. Over 174 youth benefitted from the event which also included a talent show put on by 17 registered youth.

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