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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **PRESS RELEASE**

#### **Team DCFS is in it for the Long Run More than 60 DCFS Staff Train for the L.A. Marathon XIX to Benefit Children**

On Sunday, March 7, 2004, more than 60 social workers, support staff and family members from the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) will take to the streets to run the Los Angeles Marathon XIX on behalf of the children they serve.

The task may seem daunting to some but social workers are used to marathons. Dealing with horrific child abuse, emotional families, demanding legal requirements and miles of paper work takes stamina, perseverance and an unwavering belief that their efforts will result in positive outcomes.

Abused children brought into the child welfare system likewise undergo a marathon journey often taking them away from home and all that is familiar for months, sometimes years. This arduous journey is frequently challenging to both child and social worker, an emotional rollercoaster with obstacles and frustrations at every turn. Trying to balance the safety and welfare of a terrified child with potential abuse and legal mandates is no easy task.

Team DCFS celebrates the ongoing effort of social workers, children and families who despite hardships frequently accomplish everyday miracles: the rehabilitation of a drug addicted parent; a child's therapeutic recovery from horrific abuse and the ultimate goal, the reunification of a child with his or her family when possible.

One of the unsung heroes running on behalf of her children and families is 26-year-old Jessica Ambroz, a Children's Social Worker who spent most of her childhood in foster homes when her mentally-ill mother could no longer care for she and her siblings. Her experience motivated her to pursue a Master's degree in Social Work at USC and help other kids deal with the emotional marathon that is foster care.

"Foster kids need to see other foster kids become successful. I want to prove that foster kids can do anything, even run marathons," said Ambroz.

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Jose Zavala, a 34-year-old Child Protection Hotline Supervisor, finished the 1991 L.A. Marathon 36<sup>th</sup> place overall with a time of 2:38:20 and has a personal best marathon time of 2:28:50. Perhaps more impressive is his dedication to his DCFS clients including former foster child Lance Corporal Jose Gutierrez, the first Green Card soldier killed in action in the war in Iraq. Zavala first met Gutierrez while working with the Runaway Adolescent Project (RAP). Over the next two years, Zavala worked with Gutierrez to learn English, excel as a student athlete and graduate with a B average. "I'm dedicating this marathon to the memory of Jose Gutierrez who demonstrated resiliency, unselfishness and made the ultimate sacrifice in representing our country," said Zavala.

Typical of the tenacious quality that marks many of the dedicated Team DCFS members is Ginger Lassy, a 61-year-old Adoptions Supervisor who completed her goal of running 25 marathons by her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, including the Death Valley Marathon. "Being focused on a 26.2 mile marathon, having the perseverance to continue running when every part of you wants to quit, and knowing that the satisfaction one feels upon completing the course, makes it all worthwhile. This perseverance translates into the determined way we marathon runners face the myriad tasks attached to handling difficult caseloads. In turn, the children have social workers who model the commitment to complete a job which needs thought, planning, heart, flexibility, and determination in the face of enormous odds. It's a good way to face one's life," said Lassy.

Team DCFS runners have already raised \$10,000, which will benefit the Children's Trust Fund. Established in 1968, the Trust Fund enriches the lives of abused and neglected Los Angeles County children by providing beds, clothing, dental services, educational field trips, team sports, music and dance lessons, special summer camps, music instruments, prescription glasses and martial arts for the more than 40,000 children currently under the care of DCFS. These services, not covered by existing government funds, help children lead a more normal life.

The public is invited to support the ongoing work of social workers and DCFS staff on behalf of the abused and neglected children of Los Angeles County. To sponsor a Team DCFS member or make a direct contribution to the Children's Trust Fund please contact Michael Wrice at (213) 639-4821.

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