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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY**

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Statewide News Release

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Video link: Watch Cabinet for Health and Family Services Secretary Vickie Yates Brown Glisson describe the project giving 2,000 teddy bears to foster children. <https://youtu.be/9G582eGFkgl>

State agencies partner to give 2,000 teddy bears to foster children

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Dec. 28, 2016) – A gift of teddy bears is helping to make winter a bit warmer for some children in need. The Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services' (CHFS) Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) has 2,000 handmade teddy bears that social services staff can use to help comfort children during crisis situations.

"These cuddly teddy bears are such a comfort to children who are facing trauma because they have been removed from their birth family," CHFS Secretary Vickie Yates Brown Glisson said. "Our DCBS case managers are so appreciative of efforts like this that help our children cope during a difficult time."

The bears were sewn by male inmates at the Luther Luckett Correctional Complex in LaGrange and were offered to DCBS through a partnership with the Kentucky Department of Corrections. Luther Luckett started the program in 2014, providing inmates with a way to give back to the community, and seven inmates are currently participating.

"This program serves the dual purpose of helping children in need while teaching our inmates about empathy, kindness and the importance of community," said Kentucky Justice Secretary John Tilley. "Many of these inmates endured similar experiences as children, and I want to commend the Department of Corrections and DCBS on this innovative partnership."

Each of the state's nine DCBS regions received 222 bears and regional leadership distributed them to county offices. Staff is using the bears where they will make the most difference – by giving to all children in care, having available in family visitation rooms, sending to families having financial struggles during the holidays or providing to children just coming into care because of abuse or neglect that is no fault of their own.

Two Rivers Service Region Administrator (SRA) Joey Minor, whose region includes Daviess and Warren counties, said the bears will make a great impact on many grateful children, though the success may be hard to immediately see. "Sometimes seeds of kindness sown today may not produce fruit for years. We are hoping for smiles and hugs all around with these bears."

April Davis, SRA for the 10-county Southern Bluegrass Region, which includes Fayette, said that her staff hopes the children receiving the bears will see them as something special and intended just for them when they are experiencing the emotional impact of neglect or abuse.

“Very often when children come into foster care, they have limited items to call their own,” Davis said. “We hope that the bears will offer comfort in times of need and be a treasure they can keep. Projects like this one offer a resource for workers to help children in potential times of crisis. It is our mission to provide children with a safe and caring environment that includes the comforts of childhood, such as these little bears.”

Secretary Glisson said that the state is not able to purchase items like the bears with state funds, and that makes them even more appreciated.

“This time of year, we see community organizations and the general public giving gifts to our children in foster care, and we greatly appreciate that generosity” she said. “One of the greatest gifts we can give Kentucky’s children is permanency through a loving, safe home – they all deserve that. We hope that more families will choose to open their hearts and homes to our children in foster care.”

Secretary Glisson said there are about 8,100 children in out of home care, which is meant to be transitional until children can safely return home or be adopted.

Northern Bluegrass Region SRA Kathleen Mullins said that some of her region’s bears are going in “Angel Bags” that staff pack for children who move from one foster home to another. The bags may include necessities like personal hygiene items, diapers, blankets, rattles, and now a soft bear.

Mullins said children of all ages come into foster care, and they are often scared and confused by the transition.

“I hope these bears bring comfort to these kids as a way of helping them adjust to their new home environment,” Mullins said. “This project may also highlight our need for more foster parents – not only for young kids, but also our teenage population, sibling groups and medically complex children.”

Mullins said that the need for loving foster families is continual, and that families who do not want to be full-time foster parents can consider becoming a respite provider.

Families interested in fostering can log on to <http://adopt.ky.gov/Pages/index.aspx> for more information or call 800-232-KIDS to request an information packet.

Watch Secretary Glisson describe the project giving 2,000 teddy bears to foster children at <https://youtu.be/9G582eGFkqI>

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state’s human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services, the Department for Public Health, and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.