



Over the last two decades, the number of children and youth in foster care in the U.S. has nearly doubled from 302,000 in 1980 to 571,000 by 2004. The need for more leaders in child welfare is great. Caring, committed child welfare workers who have been trained in a Christian environment are vitally needed.

Children who have experienced abuse, neglect, or abandonment by parents or other caregivers need dedicated and competent professionals to serve them. The need for caring individuals to work in public and private child welfare services is critical, especially the need for professionals with the cultural competence to address issues facing children from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Concordia University Texas is growing rapidly, showing the highest enrollment in its history. Many students are interested in the Behavioral Sciences, a strong academic program that prepares students for a variety of vocations, including many careers in the helping professions. Students have expressed an interest in entering the underserved area of child welfare, and because Concordia did not have adequate resources to educate and train students for this work, a program was developed. Concordia University will collaborate with Lutheran Social Services of the South, Inc. (LSSS) in this project. Annually, LSSS serves more than 35,000 children, elderly and poor regardless of religion, race, income, gender or age. LSSS serves 1500 children in foster care and supports more than 500 foster families.

Students in the program will begin with an extensive week-long summer training institute, including time for spiritual reflection on vocation and a calling to work with children along with presentations by researchers and practitioners and site visits. Students from throughout the Concordia University System will be eligible to attend the summer institutes.

After completing the summer institute, students at Concordia University Texas will be placed in internships with Lutheran Social Services that last for two semesters. Through their internships, students will gain knowledge and the experience working with children in the child welfare system. In addition, many students from Concordia will have the opportunity to participate in mission trips serving children in the care of child welfare organizations throughout the U.S. At the end of the internship year or mission trip, students will make presentations to their campus community, detailing their experiences and encouraging others to become involved with projects and volunteer opportunities related to vulnerable children.

The \$80,000 grant will enable students across the Concordia University System to receive educational, spiritual and vocational training that will prepare them for future service to vulnerable children.