

Power of commitment fuels successes in school

Tammy and John Keller have been foster parents in Abingdon for over eight years. Tammy loves children and she knew she had a special place in her heart for children who were in need of a family to watch over them. Crystal was a foster child who had been in the child welfare system for most of her young life. She had moved from foster home to foster home, never able to find that sense of belonging she so desperately wanted. Six years ago, the Kellers' world came in line with Crystal's and a match was made.

Crystal moved in with the Kellers during her eighth grade year. After being moved many times and starting a new school almost every year, Crystal's main struggle was reading. She had been enrolled in special education classes. However, the new school district placed her in a regular classroom and monitored her work closely.

"I found some books about other foster children for her. They were very interesting to her and encouraged her to read. To this day, she has not stopped reading," said Tammy.

Crystal finished eighth grade with promising grades and continued improving through high school.

In ninth grade, she received an Honorable Mention for her grades. In 11th grade she received the Honors Award, and in 12th grade, her senior year of high school, she received the High Honor Award. She also received the Outstanding Senior Choir

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-Tammy Keller

Member Award. During her last two years of high school, she also worked part-time.

On to college she went. Crystal was accepted at Quincy University and received two scholarships. One scholarship was awarded from the American Legion and the other scholarship from Quincy University. At the present time, Crystal is studying both nursing and accounting.

Crystal also works part-time on campus while attending classes, and is maintaining a "B" average her freshman year.

"We are very proud of our daughter, Crystal Keller. She is a true inspiration and a success story that may encourage others," her mother said.

In the midst of the school accomplishments, Crystal, John and Tammy celebrated another milestone. The Kellers adopted Crystal in February of 2001. That degree of commitment from a family helped Crystal gain the confidence and determination she needed to do well in school. John and Tammy gained the joy of seeing a child find happiness in the classroom and at home.

Books for kids about foster care and adoption

- Maybe Days: A Book for Children in Foster Care, by Jennifer Wilgocki and Marcia Kahn Wright
- My New Family: A First Look at Adoption, by Pat Thomas
- My Special Someone: A Child's Perspective of Adoption, by Brittany and Sherry Kyle
- What's a Foster Family, Anyway?, by Martine Golden Inlay

For more information go to www.tapestrybooks.com.

“Trippin’ List” answers questions from Central Region teens

Hey! youth in Central Region! We, the members of the Central Region Youth Advisory Board thought it would be cool to get some time with you in each newsletter. The **Trippin’ List** is our way of getting answers from DCFS to the questions that have us trippin’ out or trippin’ over ourselves as we try to find our way day to day.

Question: I’ve just graduated from high school. Now what?

Answer: Congratulations. That is quite an accomplishment. We know first hand that when there are a lot of things going on in your life, finishing your education can sometimes be a low priority for a kid.

The first thing you need to do is **celebrate!!!** Maybe you have had a party with your family, maybe you didn’t. Either way, come celebrate with us. The Central Region Youth Advisory Board is hosting a graduation party for all Central Region youth who graduated this year from **high school, junior college, college, trade school**, or who have gotten their **GED** this year.

The party is August 6 from 4:30 to 6:30. You may bring two guests, and your caseworker will provide transportation. Come, receive a very nice gift, meet Director Samuels and enjoy a delicious cake. This is for real guys.

Call your caseworker today for details and to reserve your spot!

There are a couple of other opportunities you need to know about.

Youth in College (YIC) is a program for youth in DCFS care who want to go on to college. Check it out with your caseworker to see what you can do to keep your medical card going and get help with expenses while you continue in community college or a four-year program.

Youth in Employment (YIE) works a lot like the college program, but is designed for youth who are trying to get set up in life while entering the workforce out of high school. See your caseworker about this one too. So there you go. A little bit to think about and prepare for.

If you have a “Trippin’ List” question or would like to become a member of our regional board, the door is always open. Ask your caseworker for information or call the Youth Hotline at 1-800-232-3798.

Teen Speak

Sam is an 18-year-old youth now studying at the University of Illinois.

I’m a sinner that’s far from a winner.

I put my hope in life, but that hope is getting thinner.

I wonder if life is ever going to be easy.

I doubt it, because family members start getting sleazy.

And these politicians are only in it for their self.

And we show no love to the people who are losing their health.

All we do when we get drunk or high, is let the true facts of life pass us by.

To avoid these repeated cycles, we must reflect.

Instead of being too concerned about the next president we are going to elect.

And I have a question that concerns us as a people.

If everyone is unique, bearing no identical sequel,

Then why does sin make us equal?

Send your Teen Speak submission to Tina Frier at TFrier@idcfs.state.il.us.

Central Region honors Hampton family as Foster Parents of the Year

Stephanie, 14 has found a new reason to love her life. Sally and Jerry Hampton of Elkhart prompted her to write about her family life with them for the DCFS sponsored Foster Parent of the year essay contest in May. Members of the Statewide Youth Advisory Board selected the Hamptons from the Central Region nominees. Below are excerpts to illustrate why Josie thinks so much of Jerry and Sally.

“My foster parents have inspired me to try harder in everything

that I do. They have inspired me to make something of myself. They have encouraged me to keep my grades up so that I can play sports in school.”

“I thought I was just another stupid kid. I thought that no one cared about me. Now I realize that’s not true. They love me like their own kid, like I am something.”

“They have given me a lot of things. The most important one of all is also something that I



Sally and Jerry Hampton were nominated as Foster Parents of the Year by their foster daughter Stephanie.

haven’t had in a long time, a family—a loving caring family.”

Tips for helping children deal with bullies

- Teach your children early on to steer clear of youth with bullying behavior.
- Teach your children to be assertive rather than aggressive or violent when confronted by a bully. Instruct them to walk away and get help from an adult in more dangerous situations. Practice various responses with your children through role-playing.
- Teach your children to never defend themselves from bullies with a gun or other weapon.
- Keep communication lines open with your children. Encourage your children to share information about school and school-related activities.
- Pay attention to the following symptoms that may indicate your child is being bullied: withdrawal, abrupt lack of interest in school, a drop in grades, or signs of physical abuse.
- If your child is a victim of bullying at school, inform school officials immediately. Keep your own written records of the names, dates, times, and circumstances of bullying incidents. Submit a copy of this report to the school principal.
- Respond to your children’s concerns and fears with patience, love, and support.

Regional Reporter Change

Tina Frier, a Foster Parent Support Specialist for the Peoria Field Office, has accepted the position as regional reporter for Central Connections. She replaces Mary Dixon, who has accepted another position with DCFS. Tina has been a support specialist for almost 11 years. Prior to becoming a support specialist Tina was a social worker for LSSI and a stay-at-home mom. Tina and her family live in Peoria.

Tina invites everyone to make Central Connections their own by contributing article ideas. She is especially interested in news from private agency families.

Best wishes and many thanks to Mary. Welcome aboard, Tina!

DCFS Lending Library offers alternatives for education credits

The Training schedules were unavailable at press time, due to the state's transition to a new fiscal year. Please consult your local education provider to obtain a schedule for any upcoming training sessions.

When you cannot attend training in person, the DCFS Lending Library can be used as an alternative for

obtaining approved training credit for license renewal. The Lending Library is a resource to allow foster and adoptive parents access to a multitude of books, audio cassettes and videos for self-directed training in parenting and family life. The materials span 17 categories. Licensed foster and adoptive parents can borrow materials for a two-week

period at no charge. The order form is available in the 3rd Edition of the lending Library Catalog, which can also be viewed on the DCFS website at www.state.il.us/dcfs.

Champaign Area ~ 888-467-6065
Peoria Area ~ 888-507-7433
Springfield Area ~ 888-817-1825

Lending Library Categories

- Child Sexual Abuse
- Children with Sexually Aggressive Behaviors
- Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Children with Behavioral Disorders/Emotional Disturbances
- Disciplinary Strategies for Difficult Children
- Separation and Visitation
- Drug-Affected Infants and Children
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effects (FAS/FAE)
- The Medically Complex Child
- The Child With HIV/AIDS
- Promoting Educational Success Through Improved Learning Skills
- Building A Healthy Self-Esteem in Kids
- From Foster Care to Adoption
- Child Development and Parenting
- Parenting Adolescents
- Families and Diversity—Parenting with Greater Understanding
- Children With Mental Health, Language and Physical Challenges

Excerpts from the many titles available to borrow...

When a Child or Youth is Sexually Abused...A Guide for Youth, Parents, and Caregivers
by Children's Aid Society Foundation

Foster parents can read this comprehensive booklet or listen to the audio cassette. Both give the same overview of child sexual abuse focusing on the caregiver/child relationship after disclosure. The information contained in this booklet/audio cassette is valuable to all caregivers of children who were sexually abused.

Reading Level: Easy
 Credit: 1 hour

Bruised Before Birth: Parenting Children Exposed to Parental Substance Abuse

by Amy Bullock, Elizabeth Grimes and Joan McNamara

This book introduces and describes the signs and effects of a child that was prenatally exposed to drugs. It offers various parenting tools, techniques, and strategies that may assist in positive and effective caretaking.

Reading Level: Easy to Moderate
 Credit: 2 hours

All About Attention Deficit Disorder: Symptoms, Diagnosis, and Treatment
by Thomas W. Phelan

This book touches on basic symptoms of ADD and how it effects the child at home, school, and socially. The book also discusses possible treatments through counseling, school intervention, behavior management, and medication.

Reading Level: Easy
 Credit: 3 hours

Central Connections

Sponsor

Deborah Kennedy, DCFS
 Central Regional Administrator

Regional Reporter

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Call with foster parent association news and schedules of local training, features on foster families and community members working for children, photos and news articles and supports all foster, adoptive and guardianship families can use.