

Finding educational resources in suburban Cook

DCFS has been hard at work establishing partnerships and supporting families with DCFS youth enrolled in suburban Cook school districts. Because there are many differences across districts, it is best to contact the actual district for specific information about the school serving a child. For example, each suburban district may differ in its fee waiver policy, but note that students who qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch program do qualify for fee waivers in the school district. Foster parents should request a fee waiver.



Charles
Ingram

Yasmina
Johnson

Diane
Fitzhugh

The DCFS Education Advisors serving Cook County can help foster and adoptive families navigate the suburban school districts. They can answer questions, serve as advocates and identify resources.

The Education Advisors are:

Charles Ingram
Cook Central Suburbs
773-854-2336

Yasmina Johnson
Cook South Suburbs
708-210-3051

Diane Fitzhugh
Cook North Suburbs
847-745-3008

The Education Advisors have compiled the following list of just a few of the programs available to families in the suburban areas.

Evanston Early Head Start

A federally funded program serving eligible children and families from birth to three years old living in Evanston. For information, call the Childcare Network of Evanston at 847-745-2661, ext. 34.

Thresholds Transition Support Group of Skokie

Open to everyone—all friends and family. Meets the 4th Saturday of the month. Contact Carla Pate at 847-729-7973.

Harvey Family Education Center

A Illinois Workforce Advantage Funded Project. This program emphasizes whole family education by linking children and their family members to available community resources and services. The phone number is 708-225-9522 and the address is 15147 South Myrtle, Harvey, Illinois 60426.

Metropolitan Family Services SW - Parent Plus Partners

A home-based parent program and support program for families with children 0-5 (may have older children as well). Parent Educators visit families in their homes to help the parent enhance their skills and knowledge about parenting through fun activities, support and information. Also, developmental screenings are regularly conducted by the Parent Educators for testing children's intellectual, physical and language development. The address is 10537 S. Roberts Road, Palos Hills, Illinois 60465. Contact Karen Allen at 708-974-5103 for more information.

Resources, cont'd.

Family Enrichment Program

A free early learning program that provides Infant Playgroups, Toddler Playgroups, Parent Support Groups, Dad's Groups and Family Field Trips. The address is 150 West 137th St., Riverdale, Illinois 60827. Call 708-841-5950 for more information.

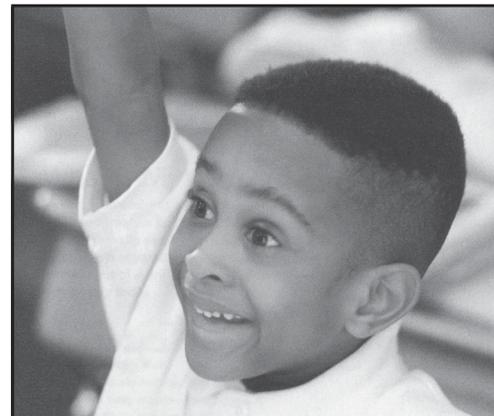
Upward Bound Program

A federally funded program by the U.S. Department of Education at Governor's State University. The Upward Bound Program seeks to help economically disadvantaged youth break the cycle of poverty by improving the chances that they will become college graduates. The program provides eligible high school students with the opportunities for one-on-one academic tutoring, career counseling, and enrichment activities such as field trips to colleges and universities across the country. Families in Ford Heights and Chicago Heights are the focus of program efforts. Students in the program primarily attend schools in the Bloom Township High School District 206. Contact Sharon Spence at 708-235-2206 for more information.

Go prepared when registering for school

All children must be enrolled within two days of placement in a home and no later than five days. Foster parents are encouraged to partner with their caseworker to register their children in school. Each school district is different. Please contact the individual school for specific requirements, but in general a foster parent will need to bring:

- Child's certified Birth Certificate
- Child's Social Security number
- An Illinois Transfer Form
- Proof of foster parent's residency (driver's license, lease, voter's registration card)
- Proof of child's placement in the home (medical card, 906 form, letter from the licensing agency)
- A copy of the child's physical/immunization records
- Any support education materials (education report form, IEP; information that will help school appropriately place/access the child)



Giving consent for school activities

Foster parents or other caregivers are authorized and encouraged to sign consents for general school related activities, which include, but are not limited to:

- Field trips within Illinois
- Routine social events (picnics, school parties, etc.)
- School enrollment
- Attendance at sporting events
- Extra-curricular activities (excluding athletic participation)
- Cultural events
- Case study evaluations
- IEP or IFSP
- Three year re-evaluations of special education services

Foster parents or other caregivers are **not** authorized to sign consents for the following situations, but shall contact the child's caseworker when a consent is needed for:

- Athletic participation
- Media coverage/events
- Slide show productions
- Photographs
- Voice reproductions
- Research projects
- Field trips outside of Illinois
- Liability releases
- Medical examinations or care

Project S.T.R.I.V.E. Network assists youth in 17 Chicago schools

Project STRIVE (Strategies to Rejuvenate Interest and Value in Education) is a school-based program that combines counseling and case management to help keep educational success a priority for youth. Students whose home life is often unsettled can get help from professionals to make a successful transition into high school and college so they can graduate and have a plan for the future. Project STRIVE's goal is engagement and attachment, leading to educational achievement and success. It combines the young person's need for individual caring relationships with a no-nonsense approach to getting on with their lives during and after high school.

The program design is simple, although the implementation is far from routine. A trained social worker is sent into a school with a significant number of students in DCFS care to engage them in the whole educational process. The worker serves a wide variety of functions, depending on the climate of the school and the needs of the youth who are there. The worker may counsel the student, attend staffings, initiate conferences with teachers, broker tutoring and other services or introduce a student to an appropriate activity sponsor. They can help the young person find a job or get a scholarship, or even pick up a truant student at his home.

Whatever the circumstance, the worker must also engage the student's family in both the program and in the school itself. This can be a difficult (but crucial) process.

The outcome goals for Project STRIVE include:

- Student stabilization at school and home
- Truancy/suspension/expulsion reduction
- Recruitment of youth to participate in DCFS youth advisory program
- Improved academic performance
- Value given to education through increased involvement at the school by foster/relative parents and workers
- Enhancement of DCFS, CPS, agency and community partnerships

Students in the care of DCFS who attend one of the 17 STRIVE schools will initially be identified to the Project STRIVE Network (PSN) worker for the purposes of gathering baseline data to determine if services are warranted based on:

- Poor academic performance
- Low class standing
- Low standardized test scores (used as promotion criteria at CPS)
- Poor disciplinary records
- Poor school attendance
- Multiple school placements (3 in one year)

- Multiple foster care placements (3 in one year)
- Lack of parental and case-worker school involvement.

Youth may be referred by a teacher, other school personnel, foster parent/relative, case-worker or education liaison by submitting a referral form to the PSN worker. Project STRIVE will take over from there to do the assessments and line up the appropriate services. For information about Project STRIVE, please contact Holly Bitner, Cook County Transition Services Administrator, at 312-814-4696.

17 Project STRIVE School Sites:

- Alex Haley Elementary
- Bunche Elementary
- Bowen High School
- Calumet High School
- Clemente High School
- Corliss High School
- Curtis Elementary
- Englewood High School
- Percy Julian High School
- Austin High School
- Harper High School
- Parker High School
- Phillips High School
- Oglesby Elementary
- Robeson High School
- South Shore High School
- Douglass Elementary

Phillip and Erma Lee receive **Cook South** Foster Parent Honor

Jeremiah, 15, has been part of the Lee family since he was a toddler. The consistent support of Phillip and Erma Lee prompted him to nominate them for the Foster parent of the Year Essay Contest held in May. Below are a few excerpts from his letter to illustrate why he has a special bond with the Lees:

“My mother, Erma Lee, is a very strong and powerful woman. About four years ago... she made sure that the family stayed

together and all the bills were paid from her sick bed at the hospital.”

“My father is an amazing man himself. He does all the fatherly things like waking me up every morning and seeing me off to school.”

“I love both of my foster parents. As a matter of fact, I don’t look at them as foster dad and foster mother, but just as Mom and Dad by itself.”



Ellyse Worrell (right) of DCFS congratulates Erma Lee as she and her husband Phillip were selected as Foster Parents of the Year in Cook South.

“I plan on making all of their wishes of me being successful come true.”

Cook South Support Group plans new agenda

One of the reasons that the Foster Parent Support Group was established was to address issues of concern to foster and adoptive parents. In the new fiscal year, one theme will be Community Resource Awareness. The agenda for the coming meetings is still open. If you have suggestions for topics or would like to attend the meetings, all foster parents are encouraged to join the group on the second Tuesday of each month at 10 a.m. at the Emerald Office located at 6201 S. Emerald. Caregivers can earn two hours of credit towards re-licensure.

For more information about the group, please call 773-371-6113.

Cook South Celebrated Foster Parent Appreciation Month



The Planning Committee for Cook South’s Foster Parent Appreciation event had plenty to smile about after a very successful evening.

May was an exciting month for the foster parents at Cook South. The month was filled with activities aimed at showing foster parents how much the staff appreciate their hard work, dedication, and commitment to the children of Illinois. The month began with a Meet and

Greet Coffee Sip, so that the staff and Cook’s Administrative staff could express their gratitude. There were movie days and Book Fairs at both the Emerald and Harvey offices. There was also a Health Screening Fair at our Emerald office. The highlight of the month was the Appreciation Dinner held at the Harrabee House.

Even though DCFS could never repay foster parents for the dedication and the services they provide for the children of Illinois, the staff at Cook South hoped that they enjoyed their month.

Cook North Council meetings changing

The Cook North Regional Advisory Council will not be meeting over the summer in July or August. For the month of September, the meeting will be held on Monday, September 13 from 10 a.m. to noon at 1911 S. Indiana Ave.

All foster parents in the Cook North Region who are licensed with DCFS or private agencies are welcome to attend. The advisory council meetings are one way to stay informed of new policies and to address local issues. Regional

Administrator Chris McGrath attends the meetings regularly, and looks forward to building more partnerships with families and agencies.

Professional staff from the areas of adoption, education and nursing, along with the foster parent support specialists, make a point of being accessible to caregivers during the meetings. Make plans now to get involved with the Regional Advisory Council this fall.

Teen letter wins Cook North foster parent honor for Appreciation Month

Robin, 15, wanted everyone to know that she felt her foster mom deserved the “label of the best foster mom or even the best mom. She nominated Desiree and Joe Benbenek for the Foster Parent of the Year Essay Contest held in May. Below are a few excerpts from her letter to illustrate why her time with this family has been so special.

“She [Desiree] loves me like her other four children in the household, and she does it with all her heart. We’re a family.”

“She makes me feel like a regular child, and you have to be a heck of a parent to do that.”



Desiree and Joe Benbenek

“I look to her for guidance, protection and encouragement. She has changed my life...I can live life to the fullest knowing there will always be someone to catch me when I fall.”

“Not a night went by that I wouldn’t dream of wondering into a house that could be a home for me. I found my home.”

Cook North Youth Fair focuses on education and jobs

The Cook North Regional Youth Advisory Board is hard at work making plans for the first Youth Fair. After gaining experience working on other regional events, the YAB is ready to tackle their own fair, focusing on education and jobs.

The Youth Fair will be held September 17 at 2500 W. Bradley from 5 p.m. - 8 p.m. All teens are invited to learn about education resources, including planning for college. Additionally, there will be information on job programs that provide employment preparation, training and placement.

Cook County Advocate

Regional Reporters:

Cook North

Sari Rowitz
312-328-2484 office
312-328-2688 fax
SRowitz@idcfs.state.il.us
1911 S. Indiana Ave.
Chicago, IL 60616

Cook Central

Donna Cain
773-292-7937 office
773-292-7861 fax
DCain@idcfs.state.il.us
3718 W. Division
Chicago, IL 60651

Cook South

Bobby Evans
773-371-6146 office
773-371-6065 fax
BEvans@idcfs.state.il.us
6201 S. Emerald
Chicago, IL 60621

Cook Central aunt makes an award-winning caregiver for her nephew

Brandon thinks the world of his aunt, Anne Palmer. His essay for the Foster Parent of the Year essay contest held in May was selected to honor a Cook Central foster parent. Below are a few excerpts from his letter that express how he feels about his aunt.

“She gave up everything for me. She is always there for me with another plan ready, just in case I mess up.”

“She always tells me, ‘You deserve a future. You don’t owe me anything only respect, but you owe yourself a life and a future.’”

“She never turns a child away.”

“I am very proud and lucky to have an aunt like her.”



Anne Palmer was selected as Foster Parent of the Year in Cook Central. She was nominated by her nephew Brandon.

Cook Central Education Advisors can help students prepare for a new year

Make sure you contact the Cook Central Education Advisors to answer questions or help solve problems with schools. They work with DCFS licensed families of students attending Chicago Public Schools or schools in the suburban districts of the Cook Central Region. They also support adoptive families.

“Every child deserves to have someone fight for them. Sometimes I am up at night, pulling my hair out to solve problems,” said Christina Feldman, who handles the Chicago schools.

Look to the Education Advisors for assistance creating an Individualized Education Plan for

a student in special education. The advisors also can accompany caregivers to school meetings and help advocate for services. They host trainings for foster parents throughout the year, as well as organize literacy events and other programs.

The Cook Central Advisors are:

**Christine Feldman
(Chicago schools)**

3518 W. Division

773-292-7731

cfeldman@idcfs.state.il.us

**Charles Ingram
(Suburban schools)**

4909 W. Division

773-854-2336

cingram@idcfs.state.il.us

Tips to help 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 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 written records of the names, dates, times, and circumstances of bullying incidents. Submit a copy of this report to the school principal.

Wednesday's Child goes off the deep end with new families at the Shedd Aquarium



Wednesday's Child brought parents and children together for a day at the Shedd Aquarium and a lifetime of family memories. Staff from DCFS, WNBC and the Freddie Mac Foundation enjoyed seeing the happy endings to the stories that air each week.

The Shedd Aquarium was the place to be on an early June Saturday last month. The children highlighted on the Wednesday's Child feature on NBC5-Chicago were invited to Breakfast at the Shedd with the parents that had made a home for them. The dolphins and other sea creatures played host to the new families, followed by a day of thrills throughout the aquarium.

Freddie Mac Foundation, a national sponsor, was on hand from Washington D.C. to add congratulations. Larry Wert, the President and General Manager for NBC5, spoke of his commitment to helping unite children with forever families. He was joined by Wednesday's child host Allison Rosati and many of the behind the scenes television professionals who work to make each segment special. The DCFS Office of External Affairs, which executes the program, made sure that families felt appreciated.

Yet the day was truly about children. Their wonder was apparent from the breathtaking view of Lake Michigan in the breakfast room and continued through whale-watching and the dolphin exhibition.

The Northeast Foster Parent Association has royal fun at Enchanted Castle

Buses with nearly 100 youth and their foster/adoptive parents headed for the Enchanted Castle for a spring vacation outing. The Northeast Foster Parent Association stays on the go with plenty of activities. The group also tends to the needs of foster parents with an active agenda of trainings. The boundaries of the group are flexible and stretch from the Near-North Side of Chicago to the South-East Side. Contact Don-



Antoinette Collins, 12, and her mother Mattie Lathion Collins joined nearly 100 kids at Enchanted Castle with the Northeast Foster Parent Association.

setta Blakely at 773-778-7445 for details of upcoming meetings.

LAN 82 holds community forum in Chatham area

The agenda was as full as the lunch spread for the Local Area Network LAN 82 Community Day last month. The Police Station at 71st and Cottage Grove was a welcome place for foster parents, agency staff and other community leaders to come and discuss ways to support children. The LAN serves families residing in South Shore, Avalon Park, Burnside, Chatham and Greater Grand Crossing.

The Garden of Prayer social service agency presented its local programs that address the need for respite for caregivers and life skills for youth. Education was in the spotlight with a presentation on the No Child Left Behind initiative. Caregivers also discussed adoption and DCFS policy. The Police Department also presented its Young Explorers program as one way youth can have positive interaction with law enforcement.

LAN 82 meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month to collaborate with agencies and families on needs in the community and local services that can help. July and August are off-months, so the next meeting will be held on September 23 from 10 a.m. - noon at the Whitney Young Library, 7901 S. King Drive.

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/dfcs.

**Harold Washington College ~
312-553-5821 or 312-553-3031**

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

The Explosive Child

by Ross W. Greene, Ph.D.

For some children, the standard approach of reward-and-punishment doesn't always work. Such children may have difficulty telling you what they're frustrated about or thinking through potential solutions to problems. In this book, the author discusses that the difficulties of these children comes from developmental deficits in two critical skills: flexibility and frustration tolerance. Using stories about the lives of children, parents and teachers with whom Dr. Greene has worked, he offers the reader a systematic approach and advice to helping these children.

Reading Level: Moderate

Credit: 4 hours