

# Illinois Families Now and Forever.®

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship



## Letter from the Governor



### OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

JRTC, 100 W. RANDOLPH, SUITE 16-100  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60601

**BRUCE RAUNER**  
GOVERNOR

Dear Foster Parent,

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude for all that you do to improve the lives of the children in your care. The role that you have chosen to take is an essential part of our society and provides acceptance and stability for the most vulnerable among us.

As the new Governor of the state of Illinois, I am committed to working with the General Assembly, state agencies and other groups and organizations to ensure that you have the assistance you need to continue the important work of improving the lives of the children in your care.

I am sure that you are aware that our state is in the midst of troubling economic times and that shared sacrifice will be needed to help the state fulfill its most basic of duties. I will do everything in my power to keep the needs of the children a top priority. These needs include strengthening our state's school system, particularly in lower income and rural areas; ensuring that medical services are available and accessible for the most vulnerable and that our state agencies have the appropriate staff in place to provide you and children in care the stability and consistency that is so desperately needed in foster care.

Again, thank you. The work you do each and every day makes a huge difference in the lives and the futures of our children, and you should be commended.

Sincerely,

Governor Bruce Rauner

## DCFS Scholarship clears path to college for youth in or after care

The DCFS Scholarship program started with just four awards in 1964. It expanded to 48 annual recipients. This year that will increase to 53 students, with four awards reserved for the children of veterans. Scholarship recipients receive up to five consecutive years of tuition and academic fee waivers to be used at participating Illinois state community colleges and universities, a monthly grant of \$511 to offset other expenses and a medical card. Currently, the 48 recipients from 2014 are pursuing degrees with the support of the DCFS Scholarship program and the staff in the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services. More than 200 students applied for the competitive scholarship. It requires a lengthy and thorough review process to select the finalists, based on their academic achievements, community involvement and personal successes.



The 2014-15 scholarship recipients gathered before heading to school.

### Applications DUE March 31

The DCFS Scholarship Program is open to youth who are currently in DCFS care, whose cases were closed through adoption or guardianship or who aged out of care at 18 or older. Youth at least 16 and not yet 21 on March 31 can apply for the 2015-16 academic year. The application process includes a form, SAT/ACT test reports, documentation of legal relationship with DCFS, three letters of recommendation from non-relatives, high school (college) transcripts or GED.

### Applications are available:

- at any DCFS regional office,
- on the Department website at [www.dcf.illinois.gov](http://www.dcf.illinois.gov) (on the bottom of the home page under "DCFS Features")
- on the DCFS Youth In Care website at [www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov)

Call 217-557- 2689 (Springfield) or 312-814-5959 (Chicago) for more information.

## DCFS 2014-15 Scholarship Recipients

Aaron K. Albrecht  
Tramell T.M. Albritten  
Elias J. Allen  
Tabitha Birtell  
Haley R. Blankenbeckler  
DeShawn J. Bloom  
Diane R. Blue  
Ayonna M. Britt  
Kaylia M. Brown  
Tonda K. Chasteen  
Matthew P. Chausse  
Barretta C. Chullen  
Dea D. Deja  
Annalise C. Dunsmore  
Christian S. Gomoll  
Destiny D. Gray

Jamie M. Griffin  
Terry J. Gruns  
Tarina L. Hargrays  
Dumar J. Harris  
Edmond L. Hogan  
Amber M. Holt  
Mark E. Kroll  
Frederick H. Laroc  
Alexa N. Lawson  
William W. Lenz  
Charmaine A. Levenson  
Nyssa A. Markham  
Medalya L. Martinez  
Dominique M. Matthews  
Helena B. Mattson  
Chelsea M. Mehegan

Senoria A. Mitchell  
Bre' yah J. Moses  
Alexus D. Murden  
Malik A. Nailing-Yamini  
Tashawna M. Nash  
Chaqueatta Neal  
Shaun M. O'Hara  
Kali R. Pray  
DaShae J. Rodriguez-Harris  
Demetrius J. Ruffin  
Alexus K. Rusk  
Hayley A. Shaver  
Mariah D. Stewart  
La'Rie S. Suttle  
Thelma Trujillo  
Shaun M. Wollenweber

# Adoption and foster care can open opportunities at tax time

The decision to support children through foster care and adoption can bring benefits as tax time nears.

## Child Tax Credit

Caregivers may qualify for up to \$1000 credit per child, depending on the household income, if the child:

- the child is your son, daughter, stepchild, foster child, brother, sister, stepbrother, stepsister, or a descendant of any of them (for example, your grandchild, niece, or nephew). An adopted child is always treated as your own child;
- the child was under age 17 at the end of 2014;
- the child did not provide over half of his or her own support for 2014;
- the child lived with you for more than half of 2014;
- the child is claimed as a dependent on your return;
- the child does not file a joint return for the year (or files it only as a claim for refund); and
- the child was a U.S. citizen, a U.S. national, or a U.S. resident alien.

See *IRS Pub. 972 Child Tax Credit* for more details.

## Charitable Deductions

If you itemize deductions, you may be able to deduct unreimbursed out-of-pocket expenses to care for a child in foster care.

## Adoption Tax Credit

Legislation in 2012 made the Adoption Tax Credit permanent. A family adopting from foster care in 2014 can claim up to \$13,190, the maximum amount allowed under

the credit. Families with incomes under \$197,880 are eligible for the full credit, which diminishes gradually at higher incomes. Beginning with 2012 tax filings, the credit was no longer refundable. So people who do not owe taxes will not get the credit, which can only be used to offset tax liability.

## Earned Income Tax Credit

- The federal credit for low income, working families can be as much as \$496 to \$6,143, depending on the number of qualified children. To qualify: the household income must be under \$14,590 - \$52,427, depending on family size and filing status.
- you must have earned income – usually wages or self-employment.
- In some cases taxable disability benefits qualify as earned income. See *IRS Publication 596* for details.

## Dependency Exemption

The exemption for dependents could lower your income tax, and lead to benefits in these areas: child care credit – for working parents (IRS pub. 503) education credits – based on out-of-pocket college expenses (IRS Pub. 970) head of household filing status for unmarried parents (IRS Pub. 501)

Be sure to explore these topics more at [IRS.gov](http://IRS.gov) or with a professional tax advisor. Additionally, the Center for Economic Progress provides free tax preparation services for families with income under \$50,000. To find a location, go to: [www.economicprogress.org](http://www.economicprogress.org).

## ADOPTION TAX CREDIT ONLINE COURSE

**Adoption Learning Partners** offers a broad catalog of online courses for current and prospective adoptive families. The adoption tax credit is one way the federal government promotes and supports adoption. Though the adoption tax credit provides a very valuable benefit to adoptive families, it is also a complicated tax law provision.

The course will help adoptive families:

- Determine their eligibility for the adoption tax credit
- See how the adoption tax credit works with different types of adoptions and financial situations
- Track and document expenses
- Prepare for year-end tax planning and work with a tax professional.

This course is available for free. Caregivers can register at [www.adoptionlearningpartners.org](http://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org)

# Financial aid options for youth who have been in DCFS care

Students planning to attend college must apply for financial aid. This is done by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). After submitting the completed FAFSA form, the student will receive the Student Air Report (SAR) which will list a number called Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The schools use the EFC to determine what type and how much financial assistance can be offered to the student towards the Cost of Attendance to attend that particular school. It does NOT mean that the student can plan to attend any school and only pay the amount of EFC listed on their SAR. A student will still need compare schools' awards to determine if they can afford to attend a specific school based on the amount of financial aid being offered, the amount and type of possible loans and the cost of the school.

For students who have been or are still in the child welfare system, the major factor for determining the type and amount of financial aid is the student's status as a "dependent" or "independent" student. As an independent student, the parent's income will not be included in the formula which typically results

in eligibility for more financial aid. When calculating financial aid, foster parents' income or the board payment is not considered on the application. There are two child welfare-specific questions on the FAFSA used to determine "dependency" status. One question asks "At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?" A youth who is currently in foster care, adopted at age 13 or older, or who reunited with the parent after age 13 should answer this question "Yes" and parental information will not be requested on the FAFSA filing. The other question on the FAFSA is "As determined by a court in your state of legal residence, are you or were you in legal guardianship?" Those students who had been in a guardianship relationship are also considered "independent." Most students will be required to prove this independent status. Many school financial aid departments will accept a letter on agency letterhead as documentation or some may ask for the actual court document.

It is important that each youth submit their FAFSA applications

as soon after January 1 each year as possible as many grants are "first come, first served." Students can access the FAFSA application at [www.FAFSA.gov](http://www.FAFSA.gov) (not .com). The student's high school and local community college can assist in filing the application. In addition the DCFS Education Advisors and Transition managers can also help families make plans for college. For more information contact DCFS at 312-814-5959.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov)

Fastweb scholarship search [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

Foster Care to Success [www.fc2success.org](http://www.fc2success.org) (formerly Orphan Foundation of America)

United Negro College Fund [www.uncf.org](http://www.uncf.org)

Scholarships for black students [www.blackstudents.com](http://www.blackstudents.com)

Hispanic Scholarship Fund [www.hsf.net](http://www.hsf.net)

Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute [www.chci.org](http://www.chci.org)

Illinois Student Assistance Commission [www.isac.org](http://www.isac.org)  
(Look for free college workshops across state and assistance in choosing a college for your major)

## New Count Down to 21

DCFS is "counting down to 21" to make sure that a young person leaving DCFS care can emancipate with a firm foundation to transition to adulthood. The goals for the Countdown to 21 program are to enable young adults to:

- have connections to family, community and social supports
- live in a safe, affordable and sustainable housing situation
- be employable, (and/or in college full-time)
- to manage money effectively

- be registered to receive health care

At age 19 and again three months prior to discharge, every youth in placement will participate in a Discharge focused Clinical Intervention Placement Preservation (D-CIPP) staffing. The transition team, including the youth, caseworker, supervisor, transition manager and other supporters, will meet with a professional facilitator. The team will assist the youth to develop a comprehensive, realistic plan for transitioning from foster care. Countdown to 21 also includes the

requirement that at 19 the young adult participates in a Department-approved course on financial literacy. The course is designed to help youth prepare to manage funds during the time left in placement and throughout their lives after discharge. Youth who successfully meet the "Countdown to 21" requirements and demonstrate that they are likely to safely manage funds will receive \$1,200 in emancipation funds to assist them in financing elements of their transition plan.

# DCFS education and work programs prepare youth for adulthood

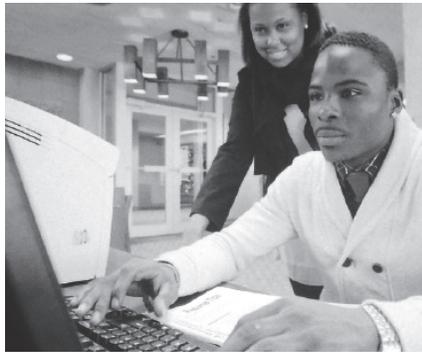
There are several education and employment programs for older youth who are still in DCFS custody, offered by the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services. Youth who achieved permanency through adoption or guardianship typically fall outside of eligibility. However, they can apply for the DCFS Scholarship program and the Education and Training Voucher is available to youth adopted after 16. To clarify eligibility or for further information, DCFS has transition coordinators assigned to each region. These individuals can help youth and their families explore different educational and employment resources from DCFS and in the community. To contact a regional transition coordinators, call the office in Chicago at 312-814-5959 or in Springfield at 217-557-2689.

## Youth In College/Vocational Training Program

Students may choose to attend an accredited vocational school, four-year college or community college. They receive a monthly grant in the amount of \$471 provided each month for up to four (4) years. Medical cards are provided to Illinois students until the participant reaches the age of 21, with eligibility for extended coverage to age 26. Reimbursement is available for books not covered by financial aid. Benefits are available until the earlier of four (4) years, or the semester of the 23rd birthday.

### Eligibility Requirements:

- Be at least 16 years old, and not yet 21
- Be under court-ordered, legal responsibility of DCFS
- Maintain at least a “C” average each semester
- Maintain full time status and submit a class schedule and grades each term



*Derrick Wright, a 2010 DCFS Scholarship recipient, is doing well at Southern Illinois University.*

## The Employment Incentive Program (EIP)

The Employment Incentive Program is designed to provide financial and supplemental services to help adolescent youth gain marketable skills through on-the-job work experience or through job training programs. Participants receive a monthly stipend in the amount of \$150.00 for a maximum of 12 months. They may also be eligible for start-up funding of work-related items (e.g., tools, work clothing, etc.). Funding is need-based and limited to a one-time disbursement of up to \$200.00.

### Eligibility Requirements:

- Be 17 years of age, and not yet 21
- Have a high school diploma or a GED certificate
- Be under court-ordered responsibility of DCFS
- Complete Casey Living Skills assessment
- Be involved in job training through a certified job skills training program or be employed for at least one month prior to applying for the EIP and working a minimum of 20 hours per week

## Education & Training Vouchers

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program assists youth with post-secondary education related expenses not covered by financial aid grants and scholarships. Qualifying students can have access to funds up to \$5000 annually for education related expenses such as tuition, fees, books, supplies, uniforms, equipment, and/or transportation not covered by other grants or scholarships. Funding is available until age 21. However, if the student is enrolled in a post-secondary program before age 21, has used ETV prior to age 21 and is making satisfactory progress toward completing the program, funding is available until age 23.

### Eligibility:

- Youth for whom DCFS is legally responsible or who aged out of care at age 18 or older
- OR
- Achieved permanency at age 16 or older through either subsidized guardianship or adoption.

## DIGITAL DELIVERY

Many caregivers have decided to skip the paper and request electronic versions of the newsletter, Illinois Families Now and Forever. We will email you each time a new issue is online.

When you move to the online version, you still receive all the same valuable information with more benefits. It comes faster, is easier to file, saves money and protects the environment. To make the switch, send an email to

[vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov)

*(there is a dot before “james”) Be sure to include your name and mailing address.*

# New online training keeps brothers and sisters connected

DCFS recently launched a new training prepared specifically for children and youth in foster care who have brothers and sisters who are also (or used to be) in foster care. The training provides information on the new law for sibling rights and the new policies and procedures.

In child-friendly terms, the course explains the importance of sibling relationships and the youth's rights to be connected with their brothers and sisters. It also discusses the ways the adults involved in a child's life will support the connections between brothers and sisters.

The training takes about 10 to 15 minutes. It is available on demand on the DCFS Virtual Training Center at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org). It is included under the public content



menu so children will not need to have a VTC account. They or their caregiver can simply select the course and begin watching.

After a short introduction, there is a point to choose to continue viewing the information for children or for the adults. Caregivers may even want to do both and spend

some time talking about what you learned. This training complements the training that staff will receive so all can work together to support connections between brothers and sisters during and after their time in care.

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## Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Update



*New members: (front) Pauline Barlow, Kurt Kalas (back) Kelly Fargher, Pamela Webb, Stephanie Jones, Kellye Norris and Charlene Burris*

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council met in Joliet for the January meeting.

### Update from Training

The council reviewed and provided feedback on the revamped PRIDE curriculum, now called PRIDE Illinois. The pre-licensing training will be offered in the classroom and in a hybrid model that includes portions of guided

computer portion and in-person group sessions. Social media information is included in this new training and other foster parent suggestions are being implemented. The new version will be rolled out in September.

### Implementation Plans

One key task is to receive and score the Foster Parent Law Implementation plans from all foster care programs. The council has completed the review of the plans and will be recommending standout plans for awards. The policy committee is also reviewing proposed changes to streamline the evaluation process. Later this spring the group will conduct on-site reviews at specified agencies. These ensure the programs put into practice the rights and responsibilities they include in their implementation plans.

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council was founded in conjunction with the Illinois Foster Parent Law. Membership consists of caregivers representing the DCFS regions, agency representatives and other experts in child welfare, who are appointed by the DCFS Director.

### THE NEXT MEETING

of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council will be March 20 in Alton at 9:00 a.m.

Call DCFS Caregiver and Parent Support at 217-524-2422 for details.

# Illinois Adoption Advisory Council Update

## *Illinois Adoption Advisory Council recognizes individuals for contributions to adoption cause*

At the November meeting of the Illinois Adoption Advisory, members marked National Adoption Month with a twist on a tradition. Each year the council recognizes an individual for his or her contribution to adoption and adoptive families. This year the council selected two people to show special appreciation.

Vince Champagne recently retired from DCFS where he served as an administrator in the Office of Health Policy. He was a reliable advocate on behalf of the council. He evaluated and recommended state and federal health policy changes that took into account the potential impact on adopted children. He also made significant efforts to keep the council informed of changes in store and to listen to

the concerns that the council raised on behalf of adoptive families across the state. Due to his responsiveness, many adopted youth had more avenues for medical care and mental health available to them and also avoided obstacles that would have diminished their care.

The council also recognized the contributions of Ray Gates of DCFS. As a statewide administrator, Gates helped establish the council's role as a designated advisor to DCFS. He assisted the leadership in adopting its by-laws and growing in stature as a well-structured advocacy group. Gates supported the council professionally in his DCFS role and in spirit as a fellow adoptive parent. He was instrumental as a liaison between the council and several DCFS entities crafting the recently passed Sibling Rights legislation. Gates has been re-assigned to other duties in DCFS. The council made sure that he knew how much his years with them were appreciated.



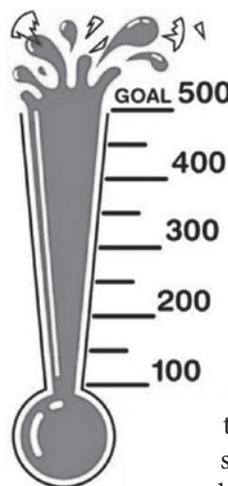
*Adoption council co-chairs Elizabeth Richmond (L) and Jim Jones (R) presented appreciation awards to Ray Gates and Vince Champagne for their outstanding support of adoptive families.*

**THE NEXT MEETING**  
of the Illinois Advisory Council will be April 10 in Springfield at 10 a.m.  
Call DCFS  
Caregiver and Parent Support  
at 217-524-2422  
for details

## DCFS moves more than 500 cases to adoption in 50 days

As 2014 came to a close, DCFS had one more important milestone to hit during the agency's 50th anniversary year. Former Acting Director Bobbie Gregg announced an ambitious and important goal to mark National Adoption Month in November. DCFS was going to help 500 children currently living in foster care find loving and permanent homes, within 50 days, through adoption and guardianship by January 5, 2015.

The "500 in 50" project rallied those on the frontline with families, high-level decision makers and partners with private agencies and the court system to remove barriers and identify resources that would open the path to permanency. The project's efforts were



focused on two primary populations: the 307 children statewide with cases in the final stage of approval for adoption or guardianship; and the 374 children statewide who were waiting for a court date to finalize. In all, 512 children found their forever home.

"Illinois DCFS has done a tremendous job of recognizing the significance of permanency," said Anita Shannon, of Casey Family Programs. "For DCFS to accomplish a big task in such a short timeframe shows dedication and leadership."

## Finding family connections to better outcomes

DCFS is in the fourth year of a five-year federal grant designed to link children in foster care with family members. In partnership with Adoptions Unlimited, Inc. the grant provides intensive family finding services in Cook County. It focuses on new cases of children ages 6 through 13. The goal of the demonstration project is to confirm that locating and engaging family members at the beginning of a child welfare case will decrease the likelihood of placement disruptions,

decrease the length of stay in care, and will improve permanency outcomes.

Kin Connection Specialists will start working with the birth family immediately after the court grants temporary custody. They will work to identify family members who can act as resources for placement, back-up placement, hosting sibling visits, or mentoring the family. That information will be shared with caseworker and be part of the child's records.

“The Kin Connection Specialist contacted me once the kids came into foster care and I was able to reconnect with them. I can help them and their mom,” a grandmother said about the program.

An evaluation team from Loyola University follows the treatment group to determine if early family finding efforts have contributed to keeping children connected.

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## Fresh Start offers youth free surgery



*Medical staff volunteer weekends for youth surgeries.*

DCFS has entered into a partnership with Fresh Start, a California-based nonprofit that provides free reconstructive surgery and related healthcare services to infants,

children and teens with physical deformities caused by birth defects, accidents, abuse or disease.

Fresh Start has expanded into Chicago by partnering with the University of Chicago Medical Center's Comer Children's Hospital. In February, a young man in DCFS care will be part of the surgery weekend in Chicago. His ear is severely deformed.

He is eagerly looking forward to a brighter future with a family and without the detraction of his injured ear.

Fresh Start sponsors surgery weekends three times each year for multiple children.

Children do not have to live in Chicago to be eligible for the program. If you would like to refer a child to Fresh Start or have questions about the application process, including completing the application, go to [freshstart.org](http://freshstart.org) or ask your caseworker for more details.

### LENDING LIBRARY IS BEING PHASED OUT

After many years of operation, the DCFS Foster Parent Lending Library has been suspended and will be closed by July. The need to monitor the breadth of materials and ensure they were all in line with the evolving standards of best practices and DCFS policy proved to be beyond the scope of the program.

Caregivers will still have an avenue to receive credits hours for educational materials they obtain from local libraries or other sources to help to care for the children in their home. After finishing the book, complete the Training Credit Approval Form (TCAF). A copy of the table of contents must be included to determine applicability of the information to the care of children. When approved, the eligible hours will be part of the caregiver's transcript. Caregivers can view their transcripts and download the TCAF at the DCFS Virtual Training Center at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org)

## Cook County Region sent 19 scholarship recipients to college

This academic year, 19 students whose cases were served by programs in the DCFS Cook County region headed to college with the benefits included in the 2014-15 DCFS Scholarship program. The scholarship includes a waiver of tuition and mandatory

fees at one of the nine Illinois state universities or an Illinois community college, a monthly maintenance grant of \$511 and a medical card.

Scholarship recipients were chosen statewide on the basis of scholastic aptitude, a written personal

statement and demonstrated community involvement. The 2015 scholarship application process began in January and ends in March. Contact the youth's caseworker or the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services at 312-814-5959.



**Tramell Albritten**

graduated from Perspectives Leadership Academy in Chicago, where he earned a 3.49 GPA on a 4.0 scale.

He was on the academic honor roll and had perfect attendance. Tramell played football for all four years of high school, was a student ambassador and participated in the prestigious E & Y Mentoring Program. Tramell is now a student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with plans to major in business.

volunteered at the Chicago Public Library's summer reading program, participated in anime club, was a founding member of the poetry club. She competed in the City of Chicago math league competitions where she had earned 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place ribbons. Now Diane is studying at Jackson State University, majoring in criminal justice.



**Kaylia Brown**

graduated from Breman High School in Chicago. She earned a 4.61 GPA on a five-point scale. While in high school she was a member of

National Honor Society and she was named "Most Improved" on her state-qualifying cheerleading team. She ranked second in Illinois for the job interview section in the Future Career and Community Leaders of America Club. Kaylia also loves to volunteer at local blood and food drives. She attends Columbia College in Chicago and plans to

major in business management.



**Dea Deja**, from Chicago Heights, began her college studies in 2013 at Prairie State College, where she maintained a 3.59 GPA on a 4.0 scale. While at

Bloom Trail High School, she played basketball and volleyball. She was a member of drama club and the mathlete team. She also volunteered at an animal medical center.

As a college student, she was inducted as a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society and volunteered at Habitat for Humanity. Dea is currently a second-year student at Illinois State University. She plans to continue her major in criminal justice and a minor in psychology.

*(continued)*



**Diane Blue**, from Chicago, is a graduate of Robert Lindblom Math and Science Academy. She earned a 4.16 out of four GPA. In high school she

## Scholarships (con't)



**Terry Gruns**, from Palos Hills, is a graduate of Amos Alonzo Stagg High School where he earned a 3.85 GPA on a 4.0 scale. While in high school he

was a member of National Honor Society, captain of the cross country and distance track and field teams. He received the Youth Leadership Award. Terry volunteered his time by being a high school guidance department runner, an altar-server at his church, and a supervisor at The Children's Farm. This fall Terry began his studies at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, majoring in mechanical engineering.



**Tarina Hargrays** graduated from Chicago's Whitney Young Magnet High School where she earned a 3.25 GPA on a 4.0 scale. In high school

she was a member of The National Society of High School Scholars, The Chicago Urban Scholars program, and the I Am S.H.E. women empowerment club. Tarina has also volunteered at Morris' Tax Service, Lawndale's Real Estate Property, and tutored at Michael Faraday Elementary School. Tarina is now a student at the University of Missouri at Columbia and plans to major in communications.

**Dumar Harris** is a graduate of Chicago's Urban Prep Charter Academy-Englewood. While in high school he earned a 3.35 out

of four GPA. He was awarded with Academic Distinction, with a Cum Laude designation for three years. He served as student government treasurer, and was an AIM High participant. Dumar volunteered in neighborhood clean-up events in Englewood and in Dyer, Indiana. He completed two internships with Northern Trust Bank. Now Dumar is a college student at Western Illinois University with plans to major in elementary education.



**Frederick Laroc** graduated from Morgan Park High School in Chicago. He earned a 3.02 GPA on a 4.0 scale. While in high school he

was an athlete on the varsity soccer, football and track teams. He also received an award from the National Achievement Academy for mathematics. His volunteer activities included serving at the Chicago Music Awards, ushering at the Beverly Arts Center and being a Bible study camp counselor. Frederick is now studying mechanical engineering at Northern Illinois University.



*Frederick Laroc won a TV for his dorm room at the scholarship luncheon.*



**Alexa Lawson** graduated from John M. Harlan Community Academy High School in Chicago where she earned a 4.23 GPA on a 4.0 scale. She

volunteered over one hundred service hours, including traveling with Trek for Knowledge to Jiquelite, Nicaragua to build a school and also with Metropolitan Family Services. In high school Alexa was the senior class president, the debate team captain and a member of Young Leaders in Action. This fall Alexa began her studies at Howard University and plans to major in biological science.



**Charmaine Leverson**, from Hillside, is a graduate of IC Catholic Prep where she earned a 3.84 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. In

high school she volunteered with Broadview Missionary Baptist Church, setting up clothes for homeless individuals. She was a member of the cheerleading team and the National Honor Society. Charmaine was the senior class president, peer minister for the underclassmen students, a high honor roll student, and was an academic all-conference athlete.

Charmaine is studying at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as a pre-medicine student, majoring in psychology.

## Scholarships (con't)



**Medalya Martinez**, from Central Stickney, is a graduate of Reavis High School where she earned a 3.10 GPA on a 4.0 scale.

While in high school she was on student council, academic council, the swim and dive team, and international club. She also received an award for excellent performance on the Prairie State Achievement Exam, and was MVP and MVD (Most Valuable Diver) for the swim and dive team. Medalya has also been a lifeguard and swim instructor at the Burbank Water Park, and volunteered with Boy Scouts of America. Medalya is now a student at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and plans to major in zoology.



**Dominique Matthews** is currently a student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she maintains a 3.03 GPA on a four-point

scale. While in high school she was recognized by Phi Beta Sigma National Honor Society for her academic achievement. Dominique was also a member of the Crystal Elegance Majorette Team, a Peer Leader, and a member of the Hales Franciscan cheerleading team. Her service contributions included volunteering at a nursing home and registering new students at a nearby high school. This fall Dominique is continuing her studies in community health and social work at the University of Illinois at

Urbana-Champaign.



**Helena Mattson** is a graduate of Hoffman Estates High School. She earned a 3.62 GPA on a 4.0 scale. While in high school

she was an honor roll student, a Special Olympics volunteer, and a member of the art club. Helena also volunteered with her church at soup kitchens and at the Willow Creek Care Center, packing food for families in need. Helena now attends the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and plans to major in architecture.



**Chelsea Mehegan**, currently of Campbellsville, KY, graduated from Taylor County High School where she earned a 4.09

GPA on a 4.0 scale. In high school, she was selected as a member of the 2014 Kentucky all-state band. She attended multiple National Leadership Academies, and was student of the year in 2013. Chelsea was also field commander of the marching band, overseeing 80 members. She volunteered at the Crisis Pregnancy Center, served as a mentor and tutor for elementary students and was a member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Chelsea is studying sociology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**Chaqueatta Neal** of Matteson graduated from Rich South High School where she earned a 3.88 out of 4.0 GPA. She was a member of her high school's student council, National Honor Society, dance team, and softball team. Chaqueatta was a Golden Apple recipient, a math tutor for elementary students, and named Youth of the Year as a Sunday school teacher.

Chaqueatta is now a student at the University of Illinois at Springfield. She plans to major in early childhood education.



**DaShae Rodriguez-Harris**, from Broadview, is a graduate of Trinity High School where she earned a 3.91 GPA on a 4.0 scale. While

in high school she was on the honor roll, speech team, and track and field team. She has volunteered her time at Bocce Ball Tournaments for individuals with special needs. She raised money for autism through Misericordia, tutored her peers before school, and has worked at Donora Realty. Now DaShae is a student at Illinois State University, majoring in psychology.



**Demetrius Ruffin** is a graduate of Urban Prep Charter Academy-West Campus in Chicago where he earned a 3.88 GPA on a four-point scale. In high school he was a

member of National Honor Society, was a Principal's Scholar, an All-Conference  
*(continued)*

## Scholarships (con't.)

First Team varsity football running back and an MVP track and field athlete. He was also voted vice president of his class and an editor of the Lion's Roar newspaper. He contributed volunteer time to the Church of Christ where he painted and repaired light fixtures. Demetrius is now at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, majoring in kinesiology.



**La'Rie Suttle** graduated from UIC College Prep in Chicago, where she earned a 3.48 out of 4.0 GPA. While in high school she was a winner of the Young Author's Writing Contest for her book, *I Have Asthma*. She was also accepted as a student ambassador for the Dwight D. Eisenhower Scholar Foundation

that provides community service in underprivileged countries. La'Rie also volunteered at the Chicago Marathon, Anger Management Workshops and with the Illinois Caucus on Adolescent Health. La'Rie is a student at Illinois State University and plans to major in International Studies.



**Thelma Trujillo** is a graduate of Farragut Career Academy in Chicago where she earned a 3.63 GPA on a 4.0 scale. She had the second highest ACT score in the school, was on the Sabre Team that marched in various parades, and was in drama club. Thelma served as a Spanish interpreter at the Chicago Auto

Show, and as a judge of election in the 2014 Primary Elections for the Mikva Challenge, which advocates democracy among youth. Now Thelma is studying at Illinois State University and plans to major in English.



## Cook advisory group meetings

The Cook County regional administration offers several options for foster families to get involved at the local level. The advisory councils and support group give foster families a platform to learn about DCFS policies and to discuss issues. In addition to the information that is shared at each meeting, this fall caregivers can contribute to the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan. Be sure to attend an upcoming meeting.



**Cook North** Regional Foster Parent Advisory Council meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 10:00 a.m. in the DCFS office at 1911 S. Indiana.



**Cook Central** Regional Foster Parent Advisory Council is open to all caregivers in the Cook Central Area. Families with the DCFS foster care program and homes served by private agencies are welcome to attend. The group meets the fourth Tuesday of the month at 9:30 a.m. at the DCFS Maywood office, located at 1701 First Ave. Contact Denise Spires for more information at 708-338-6739.



**South Suburban Support Group** Caregivers can benefit from the network of fellow foster parents who attend the South Suburban Support Group sponsored by the DCFS Harvey Office. This group meets every other month for education and encouragement. Typically the discussion topic will be eligible for training credit hours. The group meets the fourth Thursday of odd numbered months at 9 a.m. to Noon in the DCFS Office, 15115 Dixie Highway, Harvey.



**Cook South** Regional Foster Care Advisory Council meets on the third Tuesday of the month at 10:00 a.m. All caregivers from the Cook South area are invited to learn about new policies and to discuss issues and enhancements to the foster care program. The foster parent advisory council for Cook South meets at the 6201 S. Emerald office in Chicago.

## Cook County children and families covered in holiday cheer

The families served by the DCFS foster care program in Cook County once again brought in the holiday in high style. However this year, the venue for the annual party changed to the Northeastern Illinois University campus. Nearly 1,000 children and their foster families had a very warm welcome to the campus on Saturday, December 13. To assist with transportation, DCFS arranged buses to leave from local offices. This allowed families in the Cook County regional foster care program to take part in the festivities that included food, games, songs and gifts.

The holiday party is the culmination of many months of planning and countless hours of volunteered time. The DCFS Office of Communications coordinates the effort. Caseworkers and the foster parent support specialists gather wish lists from children, match wishes to donations and triple check to make sure every thing and every one is accounted for. When the party day finally arrived, Santa was on hand to greet children and pass along the presents. It takes

a battalion of elves to make everything work during the event. Blue Cross/ Blue Shield had employees volunteer their day to lead games, serve pizza and hand out health information. The long list of individual donors

and organizations included: Northwestern Medical Faculty Foundation, Harlem-Irving Furniture, the Orthodox Church Clergy Association, St. John's Lutheran Church of Country Club Hills, McDonald's, Lake Shore Harley Owners Group (HOG), United Airlines, First Communications and the Walter and Connie Payton Foundation.

Foster families served by the Deerfield and Waukegan offices also had a special celebration. An additional party was sponsored for



DCFS staff served as Santa's helpers at the Cook County Holiday Party.

families in the northern portion of the region with help from Baxter Corporation.

Holiday cheer also made its way to children who are not yet with foster families. The Homeland Security Unit in Illinois sponsored two parties for youth staying at the Emergency Resource Centers. Older youth enjoyed an outing at Dave & Busters game center. Younger children had fun with refreshments and gifts brought to them.

## Partnering with Parents Council Holiday Party



The holidays were brighter with the festivities the Partnering with Parents program planned for birth parents.

The department sponsors a set of very active local councils for parents involved with DCFS. The Partnering with Parents Council in Cook County had a holiday gathering for birth parents and their families. The families received gifts for their children and enjoyed the company of others.

The parent councils are made up of parents with open DCFS cases and those who have had their children returned. They come together to discuss ways to support each other and to explore ways to improve outcomes for their families and others.

## Cook County Region Training

DCFS has scheduled sessions of in-service training modules and other courses in locations across the region.

To get specific dates and locations, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center (VTC) anytime at [www.DCFstraining.org](http://www.DCFstraining.org). Click on any of the links under Training Schedule to access course descriptions, in-service training and Educational Advocacy Training or call the DCFS Registration Line at 877-800-3393 during business hours.

The Virtual Training Center (VTC) is your tool to:

- See training news and general information
- Check available trainings
- View/Print your training transcript
- Register for courses
- Download course materials to use in class or to access after training
- Take online courses including all PRIDE in-service modules for licensed caregivers.

### DIGITAL TRAINING MATERIALS AVAILABLE



DCFS has made many PRIDE materials easily available on the home page of the Virtual Training Center at [www.DCFstraining.org](http://www.DCFstraining.org).

Anyone may print the materials or download them onto almost any electronic device and bring their device to training class. Trainees who have no digital access should speak with their trainers when they arrive in class, so we can accommodate everyone.

## Who do you call when...?

**...A child in your home is having a psychiatric crisis that may require hospitalization?** Call the CARES line at 800-345-9049. However, if a child is a danger to himself or others, call 911 first. The CARES line is available 24 hours a day, everyday.

**...You want information on becoming a foster parent or on adoption?** The Adoption Information Center of Illinois (AICI) can answer your questions and connect you with a licensing agency. The toll-free number is 800-572-2390. AICI also maintains information about the children who are featured in the newsletter.

**...You have questions about your board check?** Call the DCFS Central Payment Unit at 800-525-0499 if your check comes from DCFS. If your check comes from a private agency, contact the agency.

**...You need to report a child missing or have information about a youth who has run away?** To report information on missing youth call 866-503-0184. The toll-free number is available 24 hours a day every day of the week. If you feel the child is in danger, call 911 first.

**...Your adoption or guardianship is final but you have questions about the subsidy?** Call the subsidy worker assigned to the case or the Adoption

Support Line at 866-538-8892 or 312-808-5250 so you can be connected to the right individual for help.

**...You feel you aren't being treated fairly by DCFS or a private agency?** If you've already tried to resolve the issue by going up the chain of command with the caseworker and supervisors, then call the Advocacy Office at 800-232-3798.

**...You have questions about your child's medical card?** Call 800-228-6533.

**...You need to find a phone number for a caseworker?** Call the main switchboard in Chicago at 312-814-6800 or the State Operator at 312-793-3500.

**...You are having family problems with an adopted child?** Contact the Adoption/Subsidized Guardianship Preservation Program that serves your area. Call the Adoption Support Line at 866-538-8892 or 312-808-5250.

**...You are having a hard time getting services for your child at school?** Most private agencies have an Education Liaison, and each DCFS region has Education Advisors who can help. Call your agency or nearest DCFS office to be connected to the right educational resource for your area.

## A family for me: Call 1-800-572-2390 for more information



### Ethan

Ethan, 13, is friendly, outgoing, and eager to join a forever family. He is determined to be the best he can be, and is motivated by the various goals he sets for himself (as well

as the goals other people set for him). He can become frustrated at times, but responds well to structure and support from loving, trusted adults. Ethan's hobbies include playing video games, tossing around the football, and taking care of dogs.

Ethan's worker says he is a well-mannered child who would thrive in a home that gives him the resources he needs to succeed, and also encourages him to maintain contact with members of his birth family.

To be the right match for Ethan, you can make sure he has plenty of structure in his life, and suggest goals for him to strive toward. You can also help him maintain a relationship with his brother, including regular visits. Ethan would like to join a family with "a mom, a dad, and older brothers." Other children in the home should indeed be older than Ethan. [8199]



### James

This young man brings new meaning to the phrase "multi-tasking!" James, 12, likes to keep himself busy at all times by playing, laughing, talking, and interacting with

others. He becomes distracted easily, but usually responds well to redirection. James prefers to play inside, and is especially partial to toys, including Transformers and LEGO pieces. He has been diagnosed with autism, and can become overwhelmed when confronted

with loud noises or other excessive stimulation.

James' worker says he is an outgoing child who is both friendly and well-mannered. He has a wonderful imagination, and can entertain himself for hours on end.

James needs a loving, caring home environment. A potential parent, you can monitor his behavior and provide redirection to help him stay on task. You can also learn about autism, so you can become an effective advocate for him, both educationally and emotionally. The ideal family would include children who are roughly the same age as James, and would also help him maintain relationships with his siblings, including regular visits. [8015]



### Joyanna

This outgoing young lady loves spending time with people. Whether she's singing, dancing, or playing with her siblings, Joyanna, 10, likes to be in the middle of the

action. Her enthusiasm extends to school as well, where she does well academically and regularly volunteers to answer questions in class. During her quieter moments, she enjoys playing cards (especially Uno) and video games (especially Wii Sports).

Joyanna's worker says she is a caring child who enjoys helping others, and goes out of her way to assist younger children. The right parents for Joyanna will be able to remain patient as she adjusts to her new, permanent family. You can also help her maintain relationships with her siblings, including regular visits. Joyanna would like to join a family that is "nice" and "likes to have fun." Other children in the home should be older than Joyanna. [7743]



### Sharena and Jamesetta

These young ladies are ready to join a forever family. Older sister Sharena, 14, is an intelligent child who does not need to be reminded to complete her homework or focus on her schoolwork. She is also a creative child who enjoys reading, writing, dancing, and playing with small dogs. Jamesetta, age 13, is a sweet child who gets along well with others. Her hobbies include singing and playing with her tablet computer.

The girls' teachers say they are good students who like to help out in the classroom. Their foster parent says they are generally well behaved and helpful at home.

The forever family for these sisters can provide a loving, nurturing home environment. You can support them as they adjust to their new, permanent family. You can also help them maintain relationships with their brother, including regular visits. Sharena and Jamesetta both state that they would like to join a family that will "love us and treat us nice." Other children in the home should be older than Sharena and Jamesetta. [8117-18]

**If you are interested in adopting one of the youth featured here or want to learn more about other children who are waiting to be adopted, please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390 or visit the AICI website at [www.adoptinfo-il.org](http://www.adoptinfo-il.org).**



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## Illinois Families Now and Forever®

Bruce Rauner, Governor

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**Address Changes:** Families must notify their licensing representative, who will notify DCFS. Agencies should change office addresses or request staff copies through the Editor.

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