Illinois Families Now & Forever®

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship

Tax Benefits for Caregivers

The decision to support children through foster care and adoption can bring benefits as tax time nears. Be sure to explore these topics more at IRS.gov or with a professional tax advisor.

Child Tax Credit

Caregivers may qualify for up to $1,000 credit per child, depending on the household income, if the child:

- is your son, daughter, stepchild, foster child, brother, sister, step-brother, 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;
- was under age 17 at the end of 2015;
- did not provide over half of his or her own support for 2015;
- lived with you for more than half of 2015;
- is claimed as a dependent on your return;
- does not file a joint return for the year (or files it only as a claim for refund); and
- was a U.S. citizen, a U.S. national or a U.S. resident alien.

See IRS Pub. 972 Child Tax Credit.

Adoption Tax Credit

A family adopting from foster care in 2015 can claim up to the maximum amount allowed under the credit $13,190. Families with incomes under $197,880 are eligible for the full credit, which diminishes gradually at higher incomes. The credit can only be used to offset tax liability. People who do not owe taxes will not get the credit. Caregivers can complete an online course at www.adoptionlearningpartners.org

Earned Income Tax Credit

The federal credit for low-income, working families can be as much as $503 to $6,242, depending on the number of qualified children.
To qualify:

- the household income must be under $14,820 - $53,267, 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.

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)* or head of household filing status for unmarried parents *(IRS Pub. 501).*

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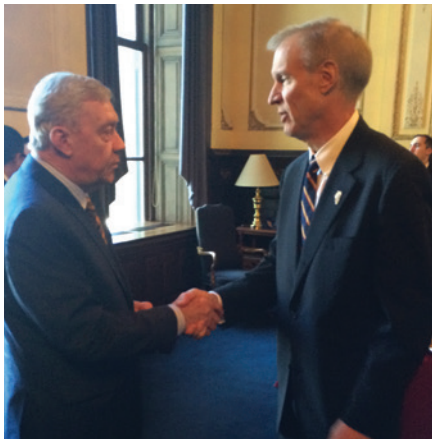
The Center for Economic Progress provides free tax preparation services for families with income under $50,000. To find a location in Springfield or the Chicago metropolitan area, go to: www.economicprogress.org. or call 312-252-0280. ♡

Illinois Senate Confirms George H. Sheldon as DCFS Director



Governor Bruce Rauner (right) congratulates Director George Sheldon in Springfield

The Illinois Senate unanimously confirmed George Sheldon's appointment on January 13.

"My goal today is the same as it was when I arrived – to turn this department around by improving the lives of the children and families we serve and make it a national leader that focuses on protection and prevention, for which the people of the state of Illinois can be proud," said Sheldon. ♡

Message from the DCFS Director

February marks my one year anniversary in Illinois. I arrived from Florida, welcomed by a snow storm, but eager to help make a difference for children and families in my new state. Now, as I take stock of the progress and look at what's to come, I think we have a lot to be excited about.

The department's new strategic plan is focused on what will help us improve our work and outcomes for children. We are currently testing out a mobile application so investigators and caseworkers can take photos and upload case notes immediately, directly from their phones or tablets. They will be able to access information while they are with you, without going back to the office.

We're also excited about the rollout of three therapeutic foster care pilot programs. This new model will help us develop a strong base of foster parents who have the heart plus the supports they need to create a family home option instead of a high-end residential placement.

Some of you will welcome new children into your home in 2016, and for others the children who have been in your care may move on. Permanency is more than a "placement type", it is a perspective that honors and upholds the lasting impact you have on a child.

So thank you for all you do and I look forward to working with all of you to ensure that 2016 is a success.

George H. Sheldon
Director

College financial aid options for youth who have been in DCFS care

Students planning to attend college will likely apply for financial aid. The first step to qualify for financial aid is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid form (FAFSA). All assistance based on financial need requires filling out the FAFSA. After completing and returning the application, the student will receive the Student Aid Report (SAR) that lists the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The EFC is what the family is expected to pay, based on their family income, on top of any financial aid that is awarded.

For students who have been in the child welfare system, the major factor for financial aid is the student's status as "dependent" or "independent." As an independent student, the parent's (parent by birth or foster parent) income will not be included in the financial need formula. That typically results in eligibility for more financial aid. The FAFSA student section asks the question "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 in foster care or subsidized guardianship can answer yes and would automatically qualify as independent student. Similarly, youth who left DCFS care through adoption **after age 13** can also answer "yes" and the adoptive parents' income would not factor in the aid decision. Students should talk to their guidance counselors and college financial aid advisors for more specific details.

It is important that each youth complete and mail or email their applications as soon as possible after January 1 in order to secure the maximum benefits. Students can access the application at the website www.fafsa.ed.gov. The DCFS/NIU Education Advisors and the Transition Managers can also help families make plans for college. For more information contact DCFS at 312-814-5959. ♡

RESOURCES

www.fafsa.ed.gov
Free Application for Federal Student Aid Commission
www.fastweb.com Fastweb scholarship search
www.fc2success.org College fund for foster youth
www.uncf.org United Negro College Fund
CollegeBoard.com SAT prep and resources to pay for college
www.collegezone.org Illinois Student Assistance Commission
Look for free college workshops across the state

DCFS Scholarship application period open through March 31

The DCFS Scholarship Program will award 53 academic scholarships for the upcoming school year. These are open to young people who are currently in or were in DCFS care, 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.

Director Sheldon with 2015 Scholarship winners.

The scholarship selection committee regularly receives hundreds of applications for the competitive scholarship. It involves a lengthy and thorough review process to select the finalists, based on their academic achievements, community involvement and personal successes.

Applications are Available Now and 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.

The application process includes a form, SAT/ACT test reports, documentation of legal relationship with DCFS, three letters of recommendation from non-relatives and high school (college) transcripts or GED.

Applications are available:

on the department website at www.dcfs.illinois.gov *(under DCFS Features on the home page, Form CFS 438)*

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

"Countdown to 21" prepares youth for life after DCFS

As youth count the days until adulthood, DCFS is providing the "Countdown to 21" program to make sure that a young person leaving DCFS care has a firm foundation for the future. The goals for Countdown to 21 are to enable young adults to:

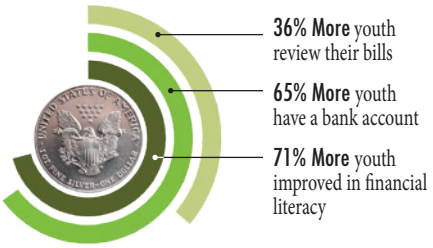
- have connections to family, community and social supports
- live in a safe, affordable and sustainable housing situation
- be employable, (and/or in college full-time)
- manage money effectively
- be registered for health care

At age 19, and again three months before discharge, every youth in a foster care or residential 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.

An important component of the Countdown to 21 plan is the requirement that at age 19 the young adult participates in a department-approved course on financial literacy. "Get Real: Financial Decisions in the Real World" teaches 11 key financial management skills including: depositing checks, creating a budget and avoiding credit card debt. The program completed a first year roll-out to all eligible youth age 19 to 21 in the fiscal year that ended in July. Analysis showed that 97 percent of the participants felt they would be able to apply what they learned toward the goal of independence. One young person stated, "I feel like I am leaving this class more independent and ready for the future."

Young people 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. Case managers or the Office of Education and Transition Services (312-814-5959) can provide further information. ♡

Results After "Get Real" Course



Education and transition programs prep youth for adulthood

There are several education and employment programs offered by the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services. These are primarily for youth still in DCFS care. Youth who achieved permanency through adoption or guardianship typically are not eligible. However, they can apply for the DCFS Scholarship Program and the Education and Training Voucher is available to youth adopted after age 16.

To clarify eligibility or for further information, DCFS has Transition Managers assigned to each region. These individuals can help youth and their families explore different educational and employment resources from DCFS and in the community. Contact them at the nearest regional office or call 312-814-5959.

Youth In College/Vocational Training Program

Students may choose to attend an accredited vocational school, four-year college or community college. Students may choose to attend an accredited vocational school, four-year college or community college. They receive a monthly grant in the amount of $511 for room and board expenses, reimbursement for books not covered by financial aid, and a one-time start payment of $200 to be used for initial living expenses. Students are expected to maintain full time status and earn at least a 2.0 GPA each term. Youth who are enrolled in the YIC program at age 21 are eligible to remain through the semester the youth turns 23 if necessary to complete their academic program.

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

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 and a medical card until age 21.) 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:

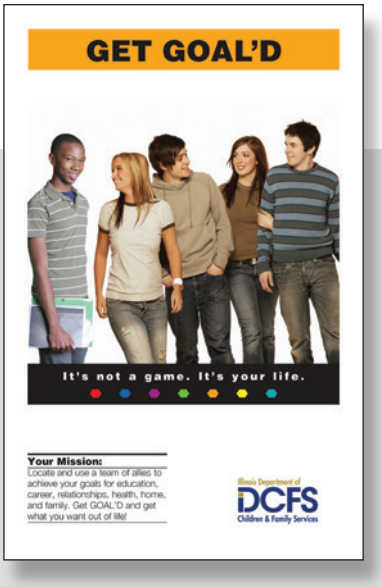
- Be 17 years of age and not yet 21
- Have a high school diploma or a GED certificate
- Be under court-ordered responsibility of DCFS
- Complete the Casey Life Skills Assessment
- Be involved in job training through a certified job skills training program or be employed for at least one month prior to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

Education and Training Vouchers

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program assists youth with post-secondary education-related expenses not covered by financial aid grants. Qualifying students can receive payment of up to $5,000 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 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. ♡



Get Goal'd: *"Your mission is to locate and use a team of allies to achieve your goals for education, relationships, health, home and family."*

This brochure describes DCFS services to help youth move towards adulthood.

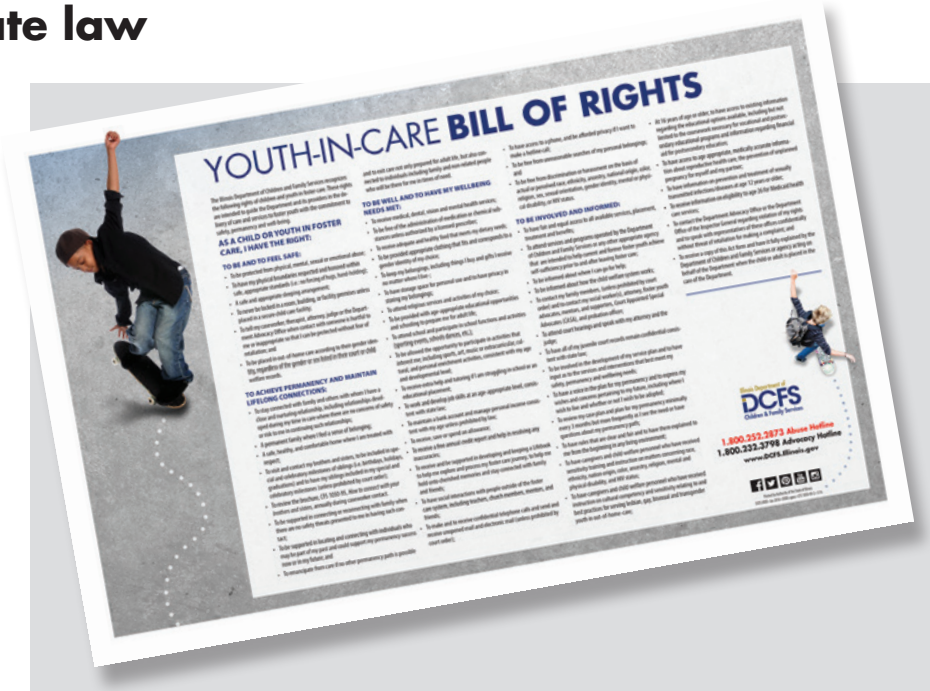
NEW Youth-in-Care Bill of Rights at the heart of state law

Children and young adults in the care of DCFS, like all individuals, have the right to be treated with dignity, honesty and respect. Legislation passed in 2015 turns those concepts into law with specific requirements and expectations for how DCFS and all providers deliver care.

The law underscores the basic principles for meeting children's needs and clarifies specific, recurring concerns. The list of rights does come with the understanding that youth also have the responsibility to be in school and to follow their part of the Service Plan. They also should tell a caseworker or caregiver when things are not going right or if they are in danger of abuse or neglect, with protection from retaliation.

"If foster parents sit with the youth and talk about the Bill of Rights, it could make the relationship much better. It would build a sense of trust. That would make me feel like they are actually looking out for me," said Carlos Rodriguez, chair of the Cook County Youth Advisory Board.

Youth will receive handouts of the Bill of Rights at each Administrative Case Review. The full text is at www.dcfs.illinois.gov under the Promoting Brighter Futures tab. ♡


YOUTH-IN-CARE BILL OF RIGHTS

AS A CHILD OR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE, I HAVE THE RIGHT:

TO BE AND TO FEEL SAFE:

TO ACHIEVE PERMANENCY AND MAINTAIN LIFELONG CONNECTIONS:

TO BE WELL AND TO HAVE MY WELLBEING NEEDS MET:

TO BE INVOLVED AND INFORMED:

DCFS

1.800.25.3873 Abuse Hotline
1.800.323.3798 Advocacy Hotline
www.DCFS.illinois.gov

Here is an excerpt from the Youth-in-Care Bill of Rights

Youth in care have the right to be and feel safe...

- Protected from physical, emotional and sexual abuse and/or neglect
- Have my physical boundaries respected and honored
- Never to be locked in a room, building or facility premises unless placed in a secure child care facility
- Be placed in care according to my gender identity

Youth in care have a right to achieve permanency and maintain lifelong connections...

- Have a permanent family where I feel a sense of belonging
- Be placed with my brothers and sisters if it is possible and if DCFS believes it is in my best interests
- Stay connected with family and others with whom I have a close relationship, where there are no concerns of safety or risk

Youth in care have a right to be involved and informed...

- Be informed about how the child welfare system works
- Have a voice in the plan for my permanency and to express my wishes and concerns
- Have rules that are clear and fair and have them explained to me from the beginning
- Able to attend court hearings and speak with my attorney and the judge
- Have access to age-appropriate, medically accurate information about reproductive health care

Youth in care have a right to be well and to have wellbeing needs met...

- Get the medical attention I need, this includes regular medical, dental and eye exams
- Be provided age-appropriate educational opportunities and schooling
- Receive enough to eat and enough clothing, as well as a monthly allowance for my personal expenses
- Appropriate clothing that fits and corresponds to a gender identity of my choice
- Have access to a phone and privacy if I want to make a hotline call
- Opportunity to work and develop job skills at an age-appropriate level
- Receive and have support in keeping a Lifebook

Permanency Refreshed: Every child deserves a forever family

Greishen Rodriguez

The new year brings a new focus on what is at the heart of child welfare: the child. "Every child deserves a forever family" will be the driving force to reform practices and even the culture across the department and among agency partners.

While the concept is not new, DCFS will be putting new resources in place to better define permanency and to re-shape how staff and caregivers approach permanency. That will lead to better outcomes with children in safe, nurturing homes with lifelong connections.

Throughout December and January, DCFS informed staff of the redesign of Procedures 315 that is the basis for permanency planning over the life of a case. The campaign started with a video describing "permanency" in the words and voices of children.

"Permanency means I can go home someday…or if I can't go home, I will have a family…I will be a part of something forever…don't make me wait too long," they explain.

Comprehensive permanency planning that is centered on the child and takes a child's sense of time into account will address:

- initial placement and family finding
- assessment
- service plan development
- evaluation and decision making
- permanency hearings and reports
- achieving permanency
- supervision for permanency

Planning will incorporate the tools needed to work effectively with families, such as child and family team meetings, visitation, developing life books with children and concurrent plans in the event that reunification is not possible.

The renewed approach to permanency will have a special emphasis on building lasting connections with siblings, parents, caregivers and other individuals who are important in the child's life. A video featuring Greishen describes her time in foster care and her perspective now as an adult. Greishen was not adopted formally, but she does have an important connection with her last foster parent, who she calls Mama.

"She's the only person that never gave up on me. She will always be my mom…Permanency means being able to rely on one person. I can go back to this person. She'll have my back," Greishen said.

Yet, Greishen admits that aging out of care without adoption or guardianship was hard.

"I wanted to be like, 'Hey, you know what? You're adopted!' But I always felt at home at my last foster home," she said.

Aging out, or independence, is not a permanency goal. So, for every child in DCFS care, ensuring a safe home with lifelong, family connections is going to be the priority. ♡

DCFS Policy Updates

All DCFS policy guides, rules and procedures are available on the DCFS website at **www.dcfs.illinois.gov** in the *About Us* section.

Here is a list of recent policy changes that may affect foster families. For more information, link to the specific policy or contact the DCFS Office of Child and Family Policy at **cfpolicy@idcfs.state.il.us**

2016.01 - Grandparent Visitation, Revises Procedures 301.240, *January 2016*

States the department's obligation by law and the timeframes for reviewing rules on granting visitation privileges to a grandparent when the child is in DCFS care and not living with the grandparent. DCFS will review the rule before February 11, 2016 and every five years.

2015.24 - Revised P 302.360 Health Care Services, *October 2015*

Informs caseworkers about the expansion of Medicaid coverage to eligible youth exiting foster care up to age 26.

2015.25 - Home Safety Checklist, *October 2015*

Revises the checklist for proper storage of methadone, prescription drugs and substances that are harmful if consumed by children. Includes a brochure.

Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Update

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council convened its January meeting in Normal, hosted by The Baby Fold.

Quality Parenting Initiative

Carole Shauffer of Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) described a pilot underway with DCFS. The goal is to improve the outcomes of the child welfare system by changing the expectations of supports for foster parents. She explained that the typical focus on finding placements or "beds" takes away from the need to determine the best, most suitable home for a child who must be away from home temporarily.

QPI provides a framework for clearly stating the expectations for good parenting and ensuring that policies and practices support that parenting effort. The assessment phase creates open forums where caregivers can voice issues affecting the children in their homes and how the system is treating children and their families. When the parents, administrators and community partners come together, they set priorities. The agency can then

Carole Shauffer, Quality Parenting Initiative

change or realign the system to meet the new goals. For example, one expectation of quality parenting could be that a foster parent takes the child to doctor's appointments. The case managers would then have to commit to getting input on scheduling from the foster parent before making an appointment, or provide resources to help with transportation.

The QPI program began in Florida's child welfare system. The model spread to seven other states and municipalities. In Illinois, the QPI pilot is in the assessment phase in East St. Louis, Rockford and cases in Cook County.

Implementation Plans

The council members have been scoring the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans. Results will be announced in March. This spring they will be conducting on-site reviews of 20 agencies.

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

NEXT MEETING

The council holds open meetings at least six times a year in locations around the state. The next meeting of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council is **March 18** in Alton at 9 am.

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

Spread the message about Child Abuse Prevention by wearing a blue t-shirt in April

Each April DCFS supports the campaign to prevent child abuse. To encourage everyone to wear the blue ribbon, the DCFS communications office designed shirts in men's, women's and children's sizes. The premium shirt is 100 percent cotton and features the Prevent Child Abuse ribbon.

A portion of proceeds from each order placed on the DCFS online store will go the Children's Benefit Fund. ♡

www.dcfs.spreadshirt.com

Our Kids

News for Southern Region Families

2016 • Vol. 1

DCFS Director calls for more youth advisory board support

Director Sheldon with youth at the Southern Youth Summit

Youth who are most affected by DCFS policies do have a voice. In 2014, the Statewide Youth Advisory Board was commissioned as a state board that reports to the Illinois General Assembly. It is charged with advising DCFS and the General Assembly with respect to all matters involving or affecting youth in DCFS care. The Statewide Youth Advisory Board responsibilities include:

- Providing the youth perspective to DCFS and the General Assembly
- Identifying and recommending solutions for issues around adoption, guardianship or youth in care
- Reviewing and making recommendations on DCFS policy and practices
- Advising the department on proposed or pending legislation
- Engaging in positive youth development activities

The Southern Region sponsors a local Youth Advisory Board with connections to the statewide board. The Youth Advisory Board is open to members aged 14 to 21 who are currently in DCFS care or who were involved in the child welfare system. The YAB meets monthly to discuss issues and give advice to the Director's Office.

"It is important that youth have information, access and transportation so they can actively participate and advocate," DCFS Director Sheldon recently wrote to the leaders of foster care and residential programs. Foster parents can also provide support and encouragement so the teens in their homes can participate.

Since the region covers a large geographic area, the Southern Region Youth Advisory Board meets in two locations. The group meets in Marion on the first Monday of the month and in East St. Louis on the first Tuesday of the month. Transportation is available with advance notice. Contact Primed for Life at 217-789-2980 for more details. ♡

Foster Families speak up at local Foster Care Advisory Council meeting

The Southern Region Foster Care Advisory Council met on January 26, reporting increased attendance in person and on teleconference.

Advisory council meetings are open to all caregivers from the DCFS and private agency-supervised foster care programs. The advisory council is an important platform for caregivers to stay informed and to have a say in new policies and procedures to discuss issues related to the foster care program. If an issue has the potential to impact foster care homes across the state, the regional representatives can elevate it to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council. Administrators from the region participate in the meetings and assist in resolving caregiver concerns.

The next meeting will be April 26. Caregivers are invited to come to the DCFS office in Belleville, Cairo, Marion, Mt. Vernon and Wood River. Participants at each site will be connected by teleconference. To participate by teleconference, dial 888-494-4032 with access code **6721264383#** Note: this is a new passcode as of January.

Meetings start in person at 6 p.m. with a supervisor on hand to answer caregivers' questions or discuss concerns. The teleconference opens at 6:30 p.m.

DCFS Transition Managers link youth to programs and prep for adult life

Transition Manager Donna Wilson

Donna Wilson is the Southern Region DCFS transition manager. She is responsible for providing information to Southern Region youth as they transition out of care onto the path to adulthood. She also shares information with caseworkers, foster caregivers and others. Transition managers are the point people for various programs for education, employment and independence available through the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services. In addition to these programs, Wilson can help youth in foster care with school matters, the DCFS scholarship program and employment opportunities.

She can be reached by phone at 618-993-7100 in the Marion office or by email at donna.wilson2@illinois.gov. Many of the transition services are described on page 2 of this issue. ♡

Mobile technology pilot launches in Southern Region

In January, a new project began in-the-field testing with a segment of DCFS and private agency staff. DCFS has for many months worked with a technology partner to create a mobile "app" that will allow caseworkers and investigators to use mobile phones or tablets while they are in the field. With the new platform staff will be able to enter case notes right away, take photos and quickly find information for clients and caregivers.

The department is anticipating that the app will meet staff needs, bring about more timely and accurate data entry, provide better service and more effective decision-making. ♡

Get listed in the 2016 foster care association and support group directory

If you lead a support group or association for foster or adoptive families, you can be included in the directory of resources. We include groups convened for DCFS-supervised and private agency homes, as well as unaffiliated organizations. Please send the following information by March 15.

New listings and updates should be sent in writing by email or post to: vanessa.james@illinois.gov (there is a dot after "james")

Vanessa James, DCFS
100 W. Randolph, 6th fl.
Chicago, IL 60601

Be sure to include:

Name of group

Meeting schedule (e.g. 2nd Tuesday monthly at 10 a.m.) Meeting location

Membership/participant details (e.g. foster parents in Madison county or foster families with LSSI)

Contact: name, phone number/e-mail Other notes (e.g. potluck dinner, child care provided, RSVP required, etc.) ♡

GET DIGITAL DELIVERY

Many caregivers have decided to skip the paper and request electronic versions of the newsletter, *Illinois Families Now and Forever*®. When you move to the online version, you still receive all the same valuable information with more benefits. It comes faster, is in full color, saves money and protects the environment.

To make the switch, send an email to vanessa.james@illinois.gov (there is a dot before "james") Be sure to include your name and mailing address. We will stop the hard copies and send you an email each time a new issue is ready to read online.

Southern 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*. 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 and print your training transcript
- Register and take on-line courses

DIGITAL TRAINING NOW AVAILABLE

DCFS Training has made many PRIDE materials available online at:

www.dcfstraining.org

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, seven days a week.

...You want information on becoming a foster parent or on adoption? The Illinois Center for Adoption & Permanency (ICAP) can answer your questions and connect you with a licensing agency. The toll-free number is 800-572-2390. ICAP 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 need to seek expense reimbursement for property damage or bodily harm caused by a child in foster care? Let your caseworker know you intend to submit a claim to the Foster Child Damage Reimbursement Program. Refer to DCFS form CFS851 or contact the office at 312-814-7294.

...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.

...You have an idea for an article in the newsletter? Email vanessa.james@illinois.gov at the DCFS Office of Communications.

A Family for Me: Call 1-800-572-2390 for more information

Hanna, 15, is an affectionate child who gets along well with others. She makes friends easily, loves playing with dogs and cats and is respectful toward adults. Her hobbies include playing outside, coloring and watching her favorite television shows. She is eager to be adopted and is excited about the prospect of joining a forever family.

Hanna's caseworker says she is an intelligent child who listens to her teachers, enjoys doing her homework and receives good grades in school.

The right family for Hanna will provide a loving, supportive home environment. You can also make sure she has plenty of positive outlets for her boundless energy. You will be able to work with professionals who can help you understand and meet her emotional and developmental needs. Hanna says, "I want to have fun and be part of a family!" Other children in the home should be older than Hanna. [8147]

Isiah, 13, is a natural athlete who loves playing football and basketball. He also enjoys video games, computers and hanging out with his friends. Isiah is a self-starter and loves to help out around the house. His worker says he does well with younger siblings and is said to be a great "big brother." It has also been said that Isiah does a great job of communicating how he feels and talks openly with his foster parent when things bother him.

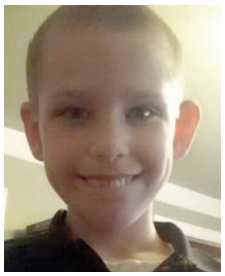
Isiah's foster parent says he is polite, interacts well with adults and respects the rules of the home. Isiah's teachers say he does well academically in school.

Isiah's forever family is one that can provide a supportive, family-oriented home environment for him. You can set realistic expectations for him and encourage him to maintain relationships with his siblings. The ideal family would be active, love vacationing and schedule lots of group activities. Isiah is open to joining any type of family, as long as they love, accept and support him. [8270]

Joyanna, 11, is an outgoing young lady who loves spending time with people. Whether she's singing, dancing or playing with her siblings, Joyanna 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.

Potential parents will provide a stable, loving home for Joyanna. You can 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.



Samaul (Sam), age 12, is a warm and engaging young man. He is very inquisitive and loves to ask questions. In his spare time, he enjoys watching "Sponge Bob Square Pants" and engaging in arts and craft projects. He is a very caring and protective big brother, and is always aware of those around him.

Sam's foster parents say he is a helpful child who is always willing to pitch in around the house. Sam's teachers say he thrives when given positive reinforcement. He is currently helping care for the class chinchillas, a reward he earned for positive behavior and completing his assignments.

The right parents for Sam will be able to provide a loving and stable home and assure him that he is a permanent part of your family. You can also be patient with him as he adjusts to your home. Sam's forever family must understand that he will require ongoing therapy to process the loss of his family unit as he continues to struggle with no longer seeing his parents and being separated from his siblings. He will continue to need special education services. He will need your help to reinforce appropriate social skills. Finally, the family must have experience with autistic children and children with mental retardation. [8319]

Tyrone (or "TJ") enjoys reading, especially historical books and the "Harry Potter" series of novels. He also likes to play video games; one of his favorites is "Minecraft." TJ, 11, is an active child who enjoys playing basketball and absolutely loves to swim. He is also interested in playing the trombone and the tuba. In school, he enjoys history and his greatest strength is in reading. TJ is helpful and always strives to please his foster parents.

TJ's future family should have experience with, or be willing to learn about, children who have had a traumatic childhood and display the behavior that can come along with that history. His adoptive family should be outgoing, understanding and caring. They should also be active, inquisitive and willing to spend a lot of one-on-one time with him. This family can work with professionals to address his educational and emotional needs. TJ would like a family that will "allow for me to still see my sister." [8322] ♡

ILLINOIS CENTER FOR ADOPTION & PERMANENCY

Please call the Illinois Center for Adoption & Permanency at 1-800-572-2390, or visit the iCAP website at www.illinoiscap.org if you are interested in adopting one of these children or learning about other children who are waiting to be adopted.

Illinois Families Now & Forever®

Bruce Rauner, Governor

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