

A message from the Regional Administrator

The past year has seen many changes within the agency that I know have impacted most of you in some way. The Chinese have an ancient symbol representing "Chaos." This symbol doesn't describe the negative sense of the word, but rather the necessity of chaos. When a seed is planted it must struggle to grow. It breaks through the earth to survive and to ultimately become what it is, a flower, a vegetable, a weed, even a majestic tree.

Like the proverbial seed, children too must endure. Yet without help, they are vulnerable. This why it is so important to acknowledge those loving hands that you, as foster and adoptive parents, so selflessly extend. In the midst of chaos you have nurtured a life. The children in our care are struggling to become who they are meant to be. Your protection, love and guidance helps them grow.

It is with great admiration that I wish to recognize Foster Parent Appreciation Month. Thank you for all you do, and know that in the midst of change, and even chaos, you are always appreciated.

Debbie Palmer-Thomas

Extra push from relative foster care leads to success in college

Crystal entered foster care at the age of 12. Her paternal aunt, Carolyn Myers, was not prepared for raising a pre-teen. Still, she said she believed in a greater plan that superceded her own desires. Now Crystal is a 20-year-old sophomore at Monmouth College. She is a student athlete and earned a volleyball scholarship. While the sport led her to Monmouth, she is quick to point out that it was her grade point average that clinched the scholarship.

Crystal is a young woman who also has a plan for herself. The art major will soon be spending a semester in Chicago as an intern for a graphic and interior design agency. Her business minor is the extra insurance to jumpstart her career. She clearly has a driven spirit that seems to run in the family.

"Because of my Aunt's determination, college has been a breeze for me. She pushed me to be responsible for myself," said Crystal.

That pushing took the form of homework help, lessons about personal finances and all the



Crystal Myers

instruction that takes a child from youth to maturity.

"When I didn't want to take on more responsibilities, she pushed me again. She told me that I had to push myself to make it so I would have a purpose," Crystal said.

What she learned from her aunt, she shares with other foster parents. "Push, push and push the kids. Stay informed about education. Talk to them, let them know what their options are and what's out there, don't assume someone else will do it."

As hard as some children resist the push from adults, some like Crystal come to appreciate the assistance.

Caregivers get preview of reunification

The 2007 Caregiver Institutes this year focused on *Building Families: Connecting Caregivers, Parents and Youth*. The DCFS Clinical Division's Office of Foster Parent Support Services presented the daylong training that previewed the Department's new emphasis on reunification.

Caregivers attended Institutes in Rockford and Kankakee. The morning opened with several young people and a foster parent sharing what it was like to maintain connections to families of origin while in foster care. After their moving personal testimonials, Regional Administrator Debbie Palmer-Thomas gave an overview of recent changes at the Department and how they affect foster families.

For the remainder of the day, caregivers had an opportunity to learn how they can interact with parents, collaborate with case-workers and support children's emotional needs when the goal is to return home. A video presentation of parents whose children had been in DCFS care dramatically described what it was like while they were apart from their children and how they worked to reunite their family.

"It was a wonderful chance to have caregivers, staff, and youth in the same room learning how to work together to achieve the best outcome for children," said Ray



Regional Administrator Debbie Palmer-Thomas (center) met with caregivers at during the lunch break at the institute in Rockford.

Gates, Administrator for the Office of Foster Parent Support Services.

DCFS held nine institutes in locations throughout the state, from February through April. Many DCFS staff representing several Department divisions and agencies assisted with planning the event and they traveled to present workshops at the institutes.

"Each year, we sponsor these institutes so our caregivers can have first hand information about DCFS initiatives that will help them care for children more effectively," said Deputy Director Velma Williams. "I am pleased that the feedback from caregivers was so positive."

Youth board open for new members

The Northern Region Youth Advisory Board (YAB) President Amy Jachna would like to invite foster and adopted youth to attend the YAB meet-



Amy Jachna

ings. The Youth Advisory Board is comprised of youth ages 14 to 21 years who are currently or were once served by the foster care system.

The advisory board provides opportunities for youth to give input regarding DCFS programs. It is also an avenue to meet and work with other youth who share similar experiences and interests. The Youth Advisory Board promotes teamwork and provides structured and fun experiences for youth who get involved. It is a good forum for them to be heard and to learn about resources that are available for older youth.

Currently, the YAB is working with a professional Life Coach, Johnny Banks, who attends each meeting and talks to youth about setting goals, the value of material things, what to expect later on in life, and related topics.

The YAB meets on the third Tuesday of each month beginning at 6 p.m. A light dinner is provided. For details on the location, contact The Chicago Area Project YAB Coordinator for the Northern Region, Cryssida Green at 888-472-0990 x 241.

Foster parent advisory council

The Northern Region Foster Care Advisory Council is actively exploring DCFS policies and discussing issues that affect northern region families. The council holds meetings each month, in locations rotating among offices in the region.

The meetings allow time for parents to network with others, keep abreast of DCFS policy and creatively problem-solve with DCFS staff. They often include a topic that is eligible for training credit.

The council is for families with the DCFS foster care program and those served by private agencies. The Foster Care Advisory Council meets the third Wednesday of each month from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. For more details, and location information, contact Robyn Harvey at 888-533-2874.

Northern News

Regional Reporter

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

Groups and associations offer advice and assistance statewide

DCFS, private agencies and community organizations sponsor many support groups and associations to assist foster and adoptive parents. The following lists can help identify a group that may suit your family. This list is a beginning and will be updated. Please contact the Editor at 312-814-6824 with any corrections or information on other groups that should be listed.

ADOPTIVE FAMILIES TODAY

Contact: Kathy Casey
847-382-0858
P.O. Box 1726, Barrington
www.adoptivefamiliestoday.org
Serves families in Cook, DuPage, Lake, McHenry and Kane counties

ADOPTIVE FAMILIES TOGETHER

Contact: Stacy Rapach
815-969-8836, ext. 4115 or
stacy.rapach@lssi.org
Meets first Monday from 6 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
321 W. State St., 4th Floor
Rockford
Open to all types of adoption and pre-adoptive families. Child care and snacks provided

ADOPTION NETWORK

Contact: Michelle Mattes
847-515-3921
5070 Highwood Ln., Lake in the Hills

CHILDREN'S HOME + AID SPECIALIZED FOSTER PARENTS EDUCATIONAL/SUPPORT GROUP

Contact: Barb Buchavekas
815-962-1043
Meets third Tuesday from 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.
Children's Home + Aid Northern Region
910 2nd Ave., Rockford

CHILDREN'S HOME + AID SUPPORT GROUP FOR ADOPTIVE AND GUARDIANSHIP PARENTS

Contact: Carma Blackburn
815-962-1043
Meets second Tuesday from 5:45 p.m. - 7:45 p.m.
Children's Home + Aid Northern Region
910 2nd Ave., Rockford
Child care is provided

DEKALB AREA ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Contact: Diane DeMers
815-756-3874
Email: Ballentine@aol.com
246 Rolfe Rd., DeKalb
Serves families in DeKalb and neighboring counties

FOX VALLEY ADOPTION GROUP

Contact: Maureen Van Scoit
630-844-9385
968 Wellington Circle, Aurora, IL
Serves families in DuPage, Kane and Kendall counties

LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF ILLINOIS FOSTER PARENT GROUP

Contact: Sharon Franklin
815-284-7796 ext. 2108
Meets the fourth Monday from 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.
1261 Illinois Route 38, Nachusa

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Support groups, con't.

NORTHERN REGION DCFS FOSTER CARE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Contact: Robyn Harvey
888-533-2874
Meets third Wednesday from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.
Meetings rotate among DCFS offices. Call for schedule.
A light dinner is served at 6 p.m.

OLDER ADOPTED CHILDREN SUPPORT GROUP

Contact: Deb Rosengren
630-530-7917 or
akclub@sbcglobal.net
Meets monthly. Call for schedule.
Focuses on families who adopted children age five and older

REACHOUT OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS

Contact: Debbie Perez
847-566-4316
Meets first Monday at 6:15 p.m.
Warren Township Library
224 N. O'Plain Road, Gurnee
Serves families in Lake and McHenry counties (No meetings in August or December)

ROCKFORD AREA FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION

Contact: Grace Hanley
815-624-0186 or
g.hanley@insightbb.com
Meets first Monday from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. (no meetings December, June, July or August)
Rockford Memorial Hospital
Inglewood Building

Northern Region Training Calendar

Transition to centralized training to finish in June

Starting July 1, the DCFS Office of Training & Professional Development will oversee and deliver all courses for caregivers. The transition from the local Pride colleges and universities that were performing this function in the past will be completed June 30.

Bringing it all under the roof at DCFS will allow the state to increase the amount of Pre-service and the variety of In-service training classes offered to meet the needs of caregivers.

Going into the new fiscal year, the DCFS Training Office is prepared to continue training offerings as caregivers have been accustomed, with some improvements. There is now one main number to call for customer services including registration, transcript requests and training-related questions. That number is 877-800-3393. The course schedule for pre-service and in-service training is on the DCFS Web site at www.state.il.us/dcfs. It is updated frequently and subject to change, so caregivers should always call first to register.

The Lending Library continues, but request forms should be faxed to Springfield at 217-557-4349 or 217-782-9301. Caregivers with training credit approval forms should mail them to:

DCFS Office of Training
ATTN: Jean Maher
406 E. Monroe Station 122
Springfield IL 62701

Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hrs.

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/ Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

College of DuPage Area 630-942-2903

Aurora	<i>Comfort Suites City Ctr.</i>
June 2 (Sat)	9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Glen Ellyn	<i>College of DuPage</i>
June 9 (Sat)	9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Romeoville	<i>Comfort Inn</i>
June 9 (Sat)	9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Waukegan	<i>Ramada Inn</i>
June 16 (Sat)	9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Rock Valley College Area 915-921-2010

Rockford	<i>Stenstrom Center</i>
May 19 (Sat)	9 a.m.-4 p.m.