

## The Cooks blend backgrounds to make a special family

Every foster family has a story behind what drew the parents to foster care. Paul and Clara Cook of Arthur turn many of the typical stories on end. For one, it was Paul who was the driving force to look at foster care. The couple had three daughters and wanted a son. Paul's sister in Iowa was a foster parent for years, and Paul always was intrigued by how the different children affected her life.

Clara's background was centered around community and service. She had a solid upbringing in an Amish community near Kokomo, Indiana, despite having no modern conveniences or electricity. Because she went to public school, she had some limited exposure to such things, but never felt she was missing out. Amish children only go to school through 8th grade, and after graduating Clara immediately went to work caring for people recovering from strokes and other illnesses in their homes after their discharge from the hospital. With this experience, Clara got her GED so she could work in nursing homes where she got her CNA. From there she became a house parent for handicapped adults and ended up working in a home in Sullivan, Illinois.

Paul was doing maintenance work where Clara worked. They met and

married. She left the workforce to focus on raising their children. Now she follows the Mennonite faith so the children know life with electricity and modern transportation. However, Clara believes that her upbringing led to more imagination and fun growing up.

They are finding many other ways to have fun as a family now focused on foster care. In five years, they have provided care for 14 children. They are in the process of adopting the son of their original intentions. There are also three children at home with them in foster care. Two are twin infant girls who were diagnosed with failure to thrive. The girls are doing great in the Cook home. Kelly Compton, their DCFS licensing worker said, "This couple is into fostering for the right reasons. When we asked them about taking the twins, Clara told me, 'even the fish get fat here.'"

The Cooks believe that what you put into foster care is what you get out of it. Clara said she never knows what



**The Cooks thought they would adopt a son, and have gone on to foster 14 children.**

to expect from the kids that come into their home. In fact, she said this experience was an eye opener when they started. After the "honeymoon period," she was surprised that the kids would rather have been with their parents and that they did not seem grateful for what the family was doing for them. Clara admits that since she doesn't have those false expectations anymore things go much more smoothly.

"Some kids when they come here are so down and out. All they need is a little love and you can see a positive change. They long to know that someone cares," she said.

## From the DCFS Central Region Administrator



**Robert  
Blackwell**

My message to caregivers during the holiday season is a simple one, “take care.” This is a reminder that each of us are deeply affected by the circumstances that impact the children that we care for everyday. We too, are affected by our own circumstances. Our financial, emotional and physical health can either help us support children in our care or prevent us from being able to be as helpful to these children as we would need to be.

The fact is, we often grow weary doing all those things that are necessary to help a child feel that your home is now their home. We have to con-

vince them that in some significant way this home will feel different and better than the home they were just taken from, walked away from, or just locked out of. It takes tremendous physical and emotional energy to convince a desperate, confused and angry child that you will care for and protect him or her as if they were your own.

You too, have trauma in your personal lives. Family members get sick... bills have to be paid... state budgets are threatened... and a gallon of milk costs more today than yesterday. Even the prospect of a change in caseworkers can send a family into a crisis. Threatened layoffs last year and now this year have been great cause for concern for many of you and us in the Department.

We have to acknowledge that these things happen to us everyday. While we cannot control them, we can control how we respond. We must find ways to cope for ourselves. Take the time to address the stresses in your life purposefully. Spend a little more time soaking in a hot bath, walking in the park, spending more time with your grandchildren or just doing more of the things that bring you peace and joy. Maybe it's time to have that annual physical that you keep putting off because you are too busy saving someone else's child.

The point to all of this is to remind you to take care of yourself, now. Remember, the well-being of children in your care rests on you being well. Take care.

## Recruitment council aims for more caregivers

Under the statewide recruitment initiative, the Central Region Recruitment Council targeted 13 areas that are “high-need” for more foster homes. The list includes: Peoria, Pekin, Hennepin/Ottawa, Petersburg, Carlinville-Benld-Litchfield, Bloomington, Cissna Park, Rantoul, Colfax, Danville East, Danville-Tilton, Decatur and Urbana.

Additionally, the recruitment council will seek more Spanish-speaking homes in the Quad-Cities. To help that effort, the initiative created Esperanza/Latino Community Service Network, which comprises many community agencies/individuals within and outside of the Latino communities.

The recruitment effort involves staff from many functions working together to develop an outreach strategy. However, caregivers often make the best ambassadors and are vital to the success of the recruitment effort. Experienced foster parents who want to share ideas and put them into action so children can be served within their home communities can contact Greg Hixon at 217-779-2522.

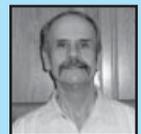
### Central Connections

#### Sponsor

Robert Blackwell, DCFS  
Central Regional Administrator

#### Regional Reporter

Sam Saladino  
Peoria Field Office  
2001 NE Jefferson  
Peoria IL 61603  
E-mail [Samuel.Saladino@illinois.gov](mailto:Samuel.Saladino@illinois.gov)  
Phone: 309-671-7921  
Fax: 309-671-7923



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.



## Get involved in the Central Region Advisory Council

*Come-in or dial-in options make meetings more convenient for caregivers*

The Central Region Foster Parent Advisory Council announced its meeting schedule for the upcoming year. The council will hold quarterly in-person meetings in centralized locations among the 50 counties in the region. Additionally, there will be monthly teleconference calls to give more caregivers an opportunity to participate without having to travel.

For the evening in-person meeting, DCFS and private agency homes in that area where the meeting will be held will receive postcard reminders with the location details. The focus of these meetings is to have discussion with local area foster parents; identify strengths of the foster care system;

and make suggestions on how to overcome the weaknesses. These meetings are designed to discuss issues within the system as a whole and not to deal with individual case specific problems. Registration information will be available on the postcards.

To participate in any or all of the teleconference calls, please call the Central Region Foster Care Help Line at 866-368-5204. Caregivers will be given a toll-free call in number and pass code. Agendas will be available before each call. The goal of the calls is to give foster parents an opportunity to hear about DCFS programs, upcoming events and changes in policies and procedures.

### Upcoming Council Meetings

January 21: Teleconference  
10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

March 18: In-person meeting  
Location TBA, 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

April 15: In-person meeting  
Location TBA, 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

May 20: Teleconference  
10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

June 17: In-person meeting  
Location TBA, 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

July 15: Teleconference  
10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Call the Central Region Foster Care Help Line at 866-368-5204 with questions.

## LAN 27 helps Bureau, LaSalle Marshall, Putnam and Stark county students manage school truancy, suspension and expulsion issues

Youth who experience academic difficulties that could place them “at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion” have available services and supports for their individual needs. Families in Local Area Network (LAN) 27, which includes Bureau, LaSalle, Marshall, Putnam and Stark counties, can look to three programs for help. While the target populations may vary, all three provide case management, assistance in finding community services and help in working with school personnel to get the student back on track.

Youth Services Bureau spearheads two programs. Front End Education

works specifically with youth ages 5 to 10 attending schools in Ottawa. Front End Intervention works with students up through senior high school throughout LAN 27 who face serious school issues. Contact Reggi Riley for the younger students or Cindy Robinson at 815-433-3953 for more information.

Catholic Charities runs The Counseling Program, an intervention service focused on at-risk students at Streeter Junior High. That program aims to get to the cause of negative school behaviors and avoid more serious problems. Kim Mercer at 815-223-4007 can provide more details.

*There are similar programs for students in the other LANs in Central Region. For more information, contact one of the DCFS LAN Liaisons. These services are open to all families, including foster, adoptive and guardianship families.*

*Champaign area:  
Lisa Massa, 217-278-5400  
email: lisa.massa@illinois.gov*

*Springfield area:  
Kip Smith, 217-854-2566  
email: kip.smith@illinois.gov*

*Peoria and Quincy areas:  
Greg Hixon, 217-779-2522  
email: greg.hixon@illinois.gov*



# Central Region Caregiver Training

## Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Training. The descriptions below will allow you to decide which classes fit your family's needs or circumstances. Advance registration is required for all classes. In addition to the slate of classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of Digital Pride modules on CD and the full offering of Lending Library materials.

**For the most up-to-date and complete schedule information for classes offered in your area, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center anytime at [www.DCFStraining.org](http://www.DCFStraining.org) or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during regular business hours.**

### **Module 1 - Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk** (12 training hours)

This module focuses on building self-esteem in children. It covers how kids act when they need recognition, power, freedom, enjoyment, and a feeling of belonging. Caregivers will learn how to listen to what kids say and not what we think they say.

### **Module 2 - Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs** (9 training hours)

This workshop provides practical information to foster parents about how to use effective discipline techniques such as I-messages, natural and logical consequences, time out and how to catch kids being "good" and what to do to encourage positive behavior.

### **Module 3 & 4 - The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse** (9 training hours)

Participants learn to differentiate normal from problematic sexual behaviors in children and youth, signs and symptoms of sexual abuse and ways to help sexually abused children recover.

### **Module 5 - Supporting Relationships between Children and Their Families** (9 training hours)

This training focuses on helping foster parents learn how to help kids attach to caregivers and at the same time stay loyal to birth families. Caregivers learn about how to prepare and support children for and after visits with the birth family and how to share the parenting role with birth parents.

### **Module 6 - Working as a Professional Team Member** (9 training hours)

Foster parents learn team members' roles, when and how to be an advocate for children, what conflict is and their own

personal style for managing it, and how conflict can be a "win - win" situation for everyone involved.

### **Module 7 - Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity** (6 training hours)

Culture includes traditions, values, customs and history. What "culture" means to a child's self-esteem, how to manage cultural diversity in a foster home, how to discuss sensitive issues with children and how to help a child record his or her history are topics covered in this module.

### **Module 8 - Promoting Permanency Outcomes** (9 training hours)

The focus of this training is on families who have children in care and supporting reunification of the children and parents.

### **Module 9 - Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family** (6 training hours)

In this training, caregivers learn how fostering children can affect family relationships and how to minimize stresses that can result. They also learn about the supports that are available.

### **Module 10 - Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children and Families** (15 training hours)

Foster parents study the risk factors for chemical use, abuse, and dependency and understand relapse and recovery and be able to acquire skills necessary to be an active member of the team to support recovery in birth parents.

### **Module 12 - Understanding and Promoting Preteen and Teen Development** (6 training hours)

This new course assists caregivers to identify developmentally appropriate ways to best

promote healthy development for preteens and teens who have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma. This six-hour module will help foster/adopt caregivers understand teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use when fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.

### **The Teen in Foster Care: Supporting Attachment** (6 training hours)

Attachment and the Teen in Family Foster Care will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand how early attachment experiences have impacted the teen's development. The training covers the teen's perspective on how the accumulation of loss, separation and trauma impacts his or her beliefs, feelings, behaviors and relationships. Participants will learn specific tips for helping manage behaviors that develop over time from the teen's adaptive responses to trauma, grief and loss.

## **Educational Advocacy** 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.