Central Connections

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News for Central Region Families

# Turning 30 years of foster care into weekend successes

Jim and Marlene Plattner of Princeville received their foster care license over 30 years ago. In the late 70's they responded to an article in the newspaper pleading for more foster parents. They were touched by the story of a girl who was not able to experience Christmas at home. Since then, the Plattners have taken in their share of children, with some staying as long as nearly seven years.

*After 30 years of foster care Jim and Marlene Plattner focus on respite care so they can still devote time to their grandchildren.*

Jim and Marlene's goal has simply been to bring the foster children into their family so they can have a normal upbringing. They strive to show all the children love. With patience and perserverence, they continute to try to help them through the difficulties.

When faced with the inevitable frustrations of being a foster parent, the Plattners accept them as a part of life. They say that sometimes it might not seem like you are making much progress, but you never know what effect you may have on a child down the road, even after they have left your care.

After 30 years of fostering, the Plattners decided to do respite care, as they have their hands full with 14 grandchildren. One recent respite time turned out to be especially memorable for everyone involved. The day Marlene agreed to the respite weekend for a young man, caseworker Vicky Hoffman checked the caregiver's file and saw that it was Marlene's birthday that same day. She stopped and picked up flowers and a card on the way to meet the family.

Hoffman remembers it clearly. "We met the family at the steakhouse that Friday for the respite placement. They are such nice people. They made this young man feel very welcome the weekend he was with them."

That welcome meant a lot, because he had been nervous on the ride to the restaurant. He asked if they knew all about him and things he had done. Hoffman told him that they did, but they stated that it was not their place to judge anyone.

"When I picked him up after the weekend, he gave nothing but praises about his stay and he had the most self-esteem I had ever seen in him," she said

"The bottom line is, the Plattners gave this young man a positive memory that he will take with him forever. They even sent him a card later letting him know they enjoyed having him in their home. We need more families like them."

A thoughtful gesture from a caseworker and a warm welcome for a child made it a birthday for everyone to remember.

# *DCFS Transition Manager Gail Simpson links youth to adulthood prep programs*

Gail Simpson, one of five DCFS Transition Managers, is responsible for providing information to youth as they transition out of care onto the path to adulthood. She also shares information with workers, foster caregivers and others, regarding the various programs available through the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services. She does this primarily through presentations. She also monitors two contracts that provide specific services to youth in the Springfield area. The Springfield Urban League administers both WASSuP (Work-Attitude-School-Study-Youth Program) and GAP (Girls Awakening Power) youth programs.

WASSuP focuses on skill building, academic performance, career development and individual case management. Services are provided through self-directed learning options, structured mentoring sessions, individual tutoring, job shadowing, and on-the-job work experience. Participants must be 14-20 years old, under court supervision of DCFS, and complete the Ansell-Casey life skills assessment.

The Seven Habits of Effective Teens is used in the coursework curriculum and provides the participant with an opportunity to learn and use skills and habits shared in the book. WASSuP youth also participate in the Youth Technology Program, which helps students to develop and to use higher-level reasoning, problem solving, and math skills for a career in technology.

Simpson also monitors GAP. This program is girls ages 9-16. The single gender environment seems to provide girls a certain comfort level that helps them develop greater self-confidence and broader interests. Girls are provided computer lab and homework tutoring. They can meet women CEOs and develop mentoring/job shadowing opportunities with women leaders within the community. The program also fosters social and emotional learning through staff guided group discussions, which explore relationships with more support and less peer pressure. Girls learn to expand their view of the range of life options available to women. They are guided in building a healthier and more appropriate view of their bodies, minds and their potential. Additionally, the girls also study non-traditional subjects such as computer science, welding, and engineering. They also take business etiquette classes.

For information on these programs or other transition services, Gail Simpson can be reached at 217-524-2525.

# Free training for caregivers in Peoria area

Caregivers who live near Peoria can take advantage of the monthly courses offered by the Youth Services Network Panel.

**February 11**
*Dating and Your Teen: Staying Connected to Prevent Violence*
Presented by Andrew Ganucheau & Jeanne Anders,
Prevention Educators of the The Center for Prevention of Abuse

**March 11**
*Risk Factors for Juveniles Becoming Involved in the Juvenile Justice System*
Presented by Steve Kossman, Director of Probation and Court Services, Peoria County

**April 8**
*Signs and Symptoms of Substance Abuse in Youth*
Cathee Gray, Youth and Community Services-White Oaks

Free workshops will be held from 6:30 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. at Crittenton Center, 442 West John Gwynn Jr. Avenue, Peoria. Contact Elizabeth Richmond at 309-671-7919 with questions or to register.

## Central Connections

Sponsor
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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 com-munity members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

# *Big Brothers Big Sisters connects with DCFS youth in Charleston region*

Mid-Illinois Big Brothers Big Sisters collaborates closely with the DCFS Charleston Field Office to provide mentoring services to children living in intact families, children in foster, pre-adoptive and post-adoptive homes, as well as children living in local group homes. While many of the 18 Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies across the state do similar work, Mid-Illinois Big Brothers Big Sisters has developed a specialized support system called the Early Intervention Program. This service has been operating since 1979 and has served over 2,100 children.

The Charleston Field Office refers children and their families and/or caregivers to the local BBBS office. Parents and caregivers, along with the children, are interviewed for the program. Once accepted into the program, children receive specialized monthly home visits, access to group recreational and educational activities, membership in the local YMCA, enrollment in the mentoring program and other connections to services. Agency staff provide transportation to activities.

When a child is matched with a Big Brother or Big Sister, they develop goals for the child with input from the child, parent/caregiver and BBBS staff. The goals are evaluated six months into the match and again on each match anniversary. In the Charleston program, all children who were matched developed positive social skills and 93% of the children matched had 10 or more monthly contact hours with their Big Brother or Big Sister.

The following story is representative of the ongoing relationships developed through this specialized program:

*Little Sister Sarah and Big Sister Susan were matched in May 2007. Sarah did not have a stable home. She lived with her grandparents sometimes and her parents at other times. Throughout many moves Big Sister Susan continued to meet with Sarah when she could. Although Sarah's grandparents had less time with their granddaughter, they encouraged Susan to come and meet with Sarah on weekends. Sarah's grandparents knew the importance of her relationship with her Big Sister.*

*In 2009, Sarah's father passed away. Although this was a very sad time, Sarah was able to rely on her friend and Big Sister Susan. Susan graduated from Eastern Illinois University in May of 2009. Because Susan accepted a position at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, she had to close her match with Sarah. Susan said, "I've had such a great time being in the program. I've grown much closer to my "Little" and her family than I ever expected. My relationship with them is something that will be very meaningful to me throughout my life.*

*Susan, Sarah and her grandma have remained in touch. The family went to visit Susan at Disney World last July. They were able to catch up and spend time together while enjoying the theme park. Susan also came home for a visit later in the summer. She scheduled her time so that she could see Sarah and her family. Sarah's grandma says that Susan is a wonderful, sweet, and kind person and they were lucky to have her as a Big Sister and are grateful to still call her a friend.*

Many of the mentors are able to remain matched with their Little as the Little moves from their intact family to foster care and back or from one foster family to another. The mentor provides a stable person during a time of transition.

This program serves Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Clark, Edgar and Effingham counties.

Contact:
Mid-Illinois Big Brothers
Big Sisters
825 18th St., Charleston, IL
217-348-8741

**There are similar programs for youth living in the other LANs in Central Region. For more information on local resources 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 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.