

Nippe family nips foster care challenges in the bud

As owners of Little Nippers Kennel, Travis and Christy Nippe care for dogs, but for the past 10 years, they have devoted their lives to children. The family lives in Toledo, about 20 miles from Effingham. Their 14-year-old son was only two when they started foster care. So far they have had seven children call their house home. Most of the placements have been long term, with four adoptions.

Christy said their motivation to do foster care was a calling from God. They felt reassured in their faith when, on the very day they received their license, they got a call about three children. Hours later, boy and girl twins and their little brother came to the Nippe's door, and haven't left in ten years.

"The rewards of fostering are seeing the kids change and grow from love, care and structure, which will affect them for life even if they return home."

—Christy Nippe

Patience is the word the Nippes emphasize when it comes to the qualities needed to succeed as a foster caregiver. Having a big heart and love are also needed. However, the most important aspect in a two-parent home of fostering is making certain that both parents are on board to do it, since it is a team effort. They believe if one parent does not want to do it, then they should not do it.

The teamwork that serves Travis and Christy well in their business has also seen them through tough times. They think back on the challenges they worked through while caring for a child with autism. Yet, perhaps the most difficult hurdle came with their son by birth. Just last year at age 12, he was diagnosed with cancer. He received his last chemotherapy treatment in August. His cancer is in remission, and his prognosis is very good.

The future is also looking bright for the three year old who is currently placed with them for foster care. He came to the Nippes six weeks after birth and has been with them since, with the goal to return home. This is their second round of long-term care until reunification. Another child who had been in the family



Travis and Christy Nippe

for five years returned home. Christy says letting go is one of the hardest aspects of foster care, but it's worth all it takes.

"The rewards of fostering are seeing the kids change and grow from love, care and structure, which will affect them for life even if they return home," said Christy.

Visits with family, therapy, doctor appointments and homeschooling for their birth children can all add up. Still, despite the normal challenges that come with fostering, the Nippes see all the hard work that goes into fostering as minor compared to the benefits that they receive.

Spectrum Wilderness camp helps teens find new confidence in outdoor challenges

For some foster children staying at camp can open up a new world. However, for youth with emotional or behavioral issues, camp can present new challenges. But when camp is done well, it can be an opportunity to meet new friends and learn new skills.

Since 1976, teens have attended a special camp called Spectrum Wilderness. Spectrum Wilderness is a unique 30-day outdoor experience for teens on the verge of serious trouble in school, at home or in the community. They learn more responsible behavior by trying new activities and coping with psychologically stressful situations in nature. They backpack, canoe, rappel, rock climb and sleep outdoors. Spectrum is offered six times a year to teens ages 13 to 18. Five of the camps are for boys and one camp is for girls. The Spectrum home office is located

in the Shawnee National Forest near Carbondale, IL but the teens spend half of their 30 days in Texas, Arkansas or other areas of the Shawnee National Forest.

Most teens come to Spectrum feeling badly about themselves and the world, but they leave with confidence and hope for the future. This happens because they have mastered challenges, learned skills and experienced what it is like to be a valuable member of a group that needs them. Over the years, many teens have had their lives changed for the better and forever. A former camper confessed how drastically his life had changed as the result of attending a 30-day wilderness camp. He said the program exposed him to another way of living. He was not referring to the nature part, but to how camp taught him how to resolve conflict without his fists.

Counselors at Spectrum used to working with youth in foster care. They are trained in counseling techniques and have the skills required to assist teens in resolving conflict in a healthy way. They are also trained to deal with the other emotional issues that may arise.

Spectrum Wilderness has a contract with DCFS to provide camp at no charge to qualified youth who are still in DCFS care. Teens who were adopted or moved to guardianship can attend, but will not receive funding.

Caregivers can get more information the Web site at www.ton.siu.edu. The child's caseworker can assist with the referral. The Spectrum contact is Geoff Schropp at 618-453-1122, ext 239.

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
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.

Caregiver Institute training comes to Danville

The 2010 Caregiver Training Institute: Fostering Success by Strengthening and Supporting Families will be coming to the Northern Region. This year, the popular session will be held March 27 in Danville.

The institutes are open to all foster, adoptive and guardianship caregivers. This year's institute focuses on teamwork. By working as an active member of the child welfare team, caregivers can find support and get what they need for children.

The agenda will include:

- Panel discussion with former youth in care

- State of the region address by the Regional Administrator
- DCFS vision for better outcomes through teamwork
- Training on Child and Family Team meetings, practical tips for team-building, accessing resources through Local Area Networks

Participants will earn five training credit hours to meet licensing requirements when they sign in on time and participate in the entire session.

Saturday, March 27

9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Danville Area Community College



Developmental screenings at 0 to 5 are important to a child's future

Some people wonder why there is a need for a young child to get developmental screenings. Some say the child looks fine to them. Others may sense there is something wrong, but think maybe the child will grow out of it, so why bother with the screen now? Some think that children don't need to be screened until they're near school age or that an infant is too young to be screened. The list can go on. Candice Hogden, DCFS Early Childhood Coordinator for the Central Region, says, "The fact is, kids win every time by getting a screen done."

If children are screened and doing well for their age, the foster caregiver can be assured the child is meeting their developmental milestones at that time. If a child shows signs of delay, the caregiver can be assured that the delay has been identified and that further evaluation will determine the services needed to get the child back on target or to improve the child's ability. There are other good reasons for doing screens. If a child gets regular screens and services as needed, this will help him or her succeed in school. He will do better with peers. The child's emotions will likely be more balanced, and less stressed. She will be less frustrated in life and will be easier to teach and guide in the home.

Early Childhood Developmental Screenings cover the following areas: physical (including hearing and vision), fine motor, language, cognitive, personal/social, and self-help skills. Some screens take 15 to 20 minutes to complete. If children ages zero to three score a 30% or more delay in one or more of the

areas, they are referred to Early Intervention (EI) for a thorough evaluation to determine what specific services are needed to help the child. Early Intervention is a state program that serves the zero to three population. A child will also qualify for EI services if they have a medical diagnosis such as Autism, Down Syndrome, or learning disabilities.

EI programs include:

- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Speech/language therapy
- Nutrition services
- Psychological services
- Social work services

Early Intervention providers also help with transitioning the child from their program to early childhood programs that serve the three to five age group. At this age, children start receiving services through the school system. The schools perform developmental screenings before a child enters their program. They basically carry on the needed services for the child, where early intervention stopped. This may include regular screenings and recommendations.

Young children coming into care will automatically receive developmental screenings. However, if caregivers have concerns about the child's development at any point, they can also ask for an EI evaluation through the child's caseworker.

Candice Hogden works with nine Child and Family Connection providers throughout the state. In addition to the screenings, they can connect caregivers to resources and they also have free trainings. Their Web site is www.illinoiseitraining.org.

Child and Family Connections

Access Services of Northern Illinois/
Loves Park
815-654-6170

Regional Office of Education #26/
Monmouth
309-734-3336

Peoria County Board for the Care
and Treatment of Persons with a
developmental Disability c/o Allied
Agencies/Peoria
309-672-6360

Services of Will, Grundy & Kankakee
Counties, Inc. (La Salle County-
Central Region)/Joliet
815-730-2617

Crosspoint Human Services/
Danville
217-442-8097

ROE of Adams Pike counties/
Quincy
217-222-9592

Sangamon County Health Dept/
Springfield
217-793-3990

Macon County community Mental
Health Board/Decatur
217-423-6199

ARC community Support Systems/
Effingham
217-347-5601

Caseworkers will work with caregivers in referring to the Child & Family Connection programs. Candice Hogden M.S. LCPC, LCSW can be reached at 309-671-7977.



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.