

As caregiver and staff she sees foster care from two sides

Abraham Lincoln said, "... it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years." At just 20 years old, Jenni Brooks decided to take life to a new level during her young adult years. She decided to become a foster parent and started PRIDE training classes. At the time Jenni was also working as a temporary employee in the Peoria Field Office. That job ended, and obstacles prevented her from becoming a foster parent right away. Later, she returned as a permanent employee and the dream of foster care took off again. Now, for 11 years Jenni has taken Abe's advice by making the life in her years count for children. She has seen foster care from both sides of the coin as a caregiver and working inside "the system." She said she was first motivated by seeing all the kids that came into the office needing a foster home.

"My own mom would have said I've always enjoyed kids and have always wanted to save the world," said Jenni.

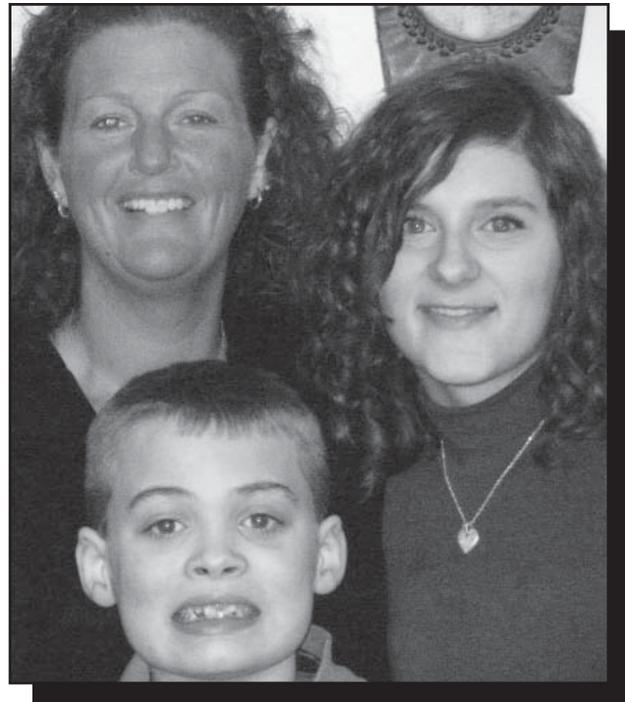
As a single foster parent, she has cared for five children, including a three-day-old boy, whom she adopted. He is nine now. Jenni also has guardianship of a 17-year-old girl and is providing foster care for one more child.

There are times when home and work at DCFS can collide. She sees the pressures that can constrain staff as well as the pressures that come from parenting. While she is sometimes shaken emotionally, she also draws strength from her work to keep going.

"I plan on sticking it out with my kids," Jenni said. "They need love and support."

She sees her children as success stories. Her son was very sick when he was young, and despite problems, has come a long way. She says her daughter is a good student and is getting ready to attend Illinois State University.

For new foster/adoptive parents, Jenni stresses the need to be strong "because the kids will not be perfect and will have issues." When she took her infant son home, she didn't know what issues she would have to deal with later. She says caregivers have to be in it for the long haul because kids that are bounced around in the system do not have a chance. Jenni believes



Jenni Brooks with her family built from foster care.

a caregiver needs a big heart and more of the same things that you need as a biological parent. It is also important to understand how the school, counseling and foster care systems work.

"Remember you are working with a bureaucracy," she says.

Lastly, she advises caregivers to try to have a strong support system around them. Thanks to family members she had backup when health problems sidelined her for a few months. Even when it isn't a crisis, it helps to have someone who can take up the slack.

Message from the DCFS Regional Administrator for Central Region

Best wishes to all our families during Foster Parent Appreciation Month.

The youth in your care, our care, carry with them our hopes for love, long-living and full recovery from the traumas that brought them into care. Your homes and our child welfare system are intended to be "safe passage" to their uncertain futures.

If we commit ourselves to our "best efforts," these youth have a chance to realize the promise of a good life. Let us take a moment to stop and to think about this sacred task that we have taken on, the care of somebody else's child, and recommit ourselves to doing our very best for them.

May peace and favor reign over your households, during Foster Parent Appreciation Month and beyond.



Bob Blackwell
Regional
Administrator

PASS helps Decatur families with school issues

PASS is a community-based program from Webster-Cantrell Hall in Decatur. PASS, which stands for Pursuing Academic Stability and Success, works with any youth in Local Area Network (LAN) 22 who is struggling academically, behaviorally or socially at school. Parents, caregivers, caseworkers, counselors, and teachers can make referrals to seek assistance for Decatur students.

Staff from PASS will meet with the child, the parents, the school personnel and others to ensure the child's needs are being met so they can succeed in school. The caseworkers attend school meetings, sit in on classes, or transport parents to meetings with school personnel. They can request special education evaluations and try to help with anything that could be impeding the child's success and stability at school.

PASS also uses mentors and tutors to provide one-on-one instruction to the youth in the program. These mentors and tutors have been instrumental in improving grades and decreasing negative behaviors. The children benefit from having positive role models who provide guidance that has improved students' social skills and self esteem. The students also can earn incentives when they improve their grades and decrease their detrimental behaviors. The case managers develop behavior plans for the children at school and at home. When the children meet their goals, they earn prizes from the case managers' treasure chests. The prizes include small

toys, school supplies, McDonald's certificates and passes to the zoo, museums and movie theaters.

The program reports that children respond well to earning their prizes and have improved their behaviors and academics. The children, parents and schools have been pleased overall with the PASS program.

This program is available to all Decatur families with students at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion, including foster, adoptive and guardianship homes. Contact Amy Still at Webster-Cantrell Hall at 217-423-6961 for details.

School help in other areas of Central Region

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
E-mail: lisa.massa@illinois.gov

Springfield area:

Kip Smith
217-854-2566
E-mail: kip.smith@illinois.gov

Peoria and Quincy areas:

Greg Hixon
217-779-2522
E-mail: greg.hixon@illinois.gov



Families can find support among fellow caregivers in a nearby group

One of the responsibilities in the Foster Parent Law is to “Be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent associations.” DCFS, private agencies and community organizations sponsor many support groups and associations to assist foster and adoptive parents. The following list can help identify a group that may suit your family. This list will be updated annually. Please contact the Editor at 312-814-6824 with any corrections or additions for next year.

All-Dopt

Contact: Susan Koniak at 618-667-2493
654 Bauer Road, Troy
Includes all types of adoptions. Serves Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair counties.

Circle of Support

Contact: Elizabeth Richmond at 309-671-7919
elizabeth.richmond@illinois.gov
Meets second Thursday from 6:30 p.m. - 8 p.m. (September to April)
Crisis Nursery and Crittenton Centers
442 W. John Gwynn Jr Ave, Peoria
Serves Peoria-area foster, adoptive, guardianship and relative caregiver families.
Approved training credits. Call to register.

DCFS Central Region Foster Care Advisory Council

Meets quarterly in various offices throughout the region. Call the Central Region Foster Parent Information Line for details at 866-368-5204.

H.A.P.P.Y. FF Hancock-Adams-Pike Parent and Youth Foster Families

Meets on Tuesdays. Call for schedule.
Contact: Ron Eitel at 217-885-3224 or by e-mail to Rontammy1@earthlink.com

Keeping the Promise—The Baby Fold Adoption Preservation Program

Contact: Stacy Parton at 309-454-1770
sparton@thebabyfold.org
Serves Champaign, Coles, Clark, Cumberland, DeWitt, Douglas, Edgar, Ford, Livingston, Logan, Macon, McLean, Moultrie, Piatt and Shelby counties.

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois—Adoptive Families Together

Contact: Susan Goble at 309-786-6400
Meets third Thursday from 6 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
Childcare is available with reservations. Snacks provided.

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois—Parent to Parent

Contact: Bea Voris at 309-557-1066
Meets third Thursday at 7 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 9th and Cleveland, Charleston
Serves families in Cumberland, Clark, Coles, Edgar, Moultrie and Shelby counties.

Recruitment Development and Support (RDS)

Contact: Joyce Loy at 309-794-3575
Meets third Tuesday at 9 a.m.
DCFS Office, 500 42nd Street, Rock Island

South Central Illinois Adoptive Parents Association (SCIAPA)

Contact: Karen deCastro at 217-793-9646
www.sciapa.org
5004 Manhattan Dr., Springfield
Serves families in Sangamon, Christian, Macon, Montgomery, Morgan and Menard counties.

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.



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.