

Despite tragedy, Cotton family holds on tightly

By 1995, Julius and Antonia Cotton had raised three children in Peoria. They had a home, but no one to share it with, and they determined that foster care was for them. Sharing was nothing new for Antonia – she had come from a family of 14 siblings. However, for the Cotton's grown children, sharing was another matter. They encountered some bumps in the beginning as the foster children took time away from the grown children's needs. Eventually, they came around and accepted this new family concept.

Foster care had been the only objective when Julius and Antonia began opening their home to children, until 1997. At that point, three siblings in their home became free for adoption. There were two young girls and a boy. The boy was only two weeks old when the group arrived at their home. Antonia says that she worked with the case staff trying to prepare the children to return home and worked with their mother to get her children back, but in the end it was not to happen. Adoption was the only course for the kids, and the Cottons excitedly pursued that goal.

Then, unexpectedly and tragically, Julius had a heart attack and

passed away. Despite the hardship of being a single foster parent, Antonia kept looking ahead. She adopted Paulina who is 15 years old now, Carrie, 14 and Thomas, now 11.

To complicate matters, one of the major issues that Antonia had to deal with was lead poisoning. The home the children had grown up in was older and had been painted with lead paint. Each child had an elevated blood lead content. Through hard work, Antonia got the lead levels down with environmental changes and by having the children change their diets.

Yet, it takes more than proper meals to make a good foster caregiver. Antonia has taken care of 10 foster children and many still keep in touch. Her goal for them is to be able to go out into the world and to succeed at what they want to do. One way she ensures their success is to stay involved in the children's school activities and make sure they stay on track with their academic accomplishments. Beyond the focus on school, Antonia knows there is no magic bullet.

"There is no short answer in how to deal with these children



The Cotton family

because they have been through so much," she said.

When asked what makes a good foster parent Antonia replied, "To be a good foster parent you need to have patience and time. If you don't, it is not going to work."

If her foster and adopted children were not enough to sap her patience and time, Antonia also spends most days running a licensed day care center in her home. She can handle up to seven children who will come and go at different times of the day. In those rare spare moments, she enjoys sitting back with a good book or listening to mellow jazz music to get her ready for the next challenge.

Bloomington church brightens holiday

The Evangelical Free Church in Bloomington has been a supporter of foster children for the past six years by sponsoring a Christmas party. This year's party, "A Time for Giving" was held on December 3, and included a brunch, a puppet show, board games and photos with Santa. The church shoulders the total cost for the party, and its members volunteer to serve during the day.

Every foster, adopted and birth child that came to the festivities received a gift.

Once again, A Time for Giving was a success, bringing smiles to all who participated in the yearly celebration.



Santa Claus was a huge hit with families at the Evangelical Free Church Christmas Party.

Cass County Boys and Girls Club offers many school programs to help families

In recent years, the contracts between DCFS and the Child and Adolescent Local Area Networks (LAN) service providers focused on creating programs to stabilize children in their current educational settings.

These programs are available to all families, including foster, adoptive and guardianship families concerned about students at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion. In each issue, we will focus on programs in one of the Central Region LANs. For more information about LANs, contact Greg Hixon, DCFS LAN Liaison at 800-602-6033 or e-mail at greg.hixon@illinois.gov.

Local Area Network 16 covers Brown, Morgan, Schuyler and Cass counties. As the population of Cass County has grown, so has the need for programs to assist students with their educational needs. In addition, families often need after-school programs to accommodate varying work schedules.

Boys and Girls Club of Cass County is providing several programs in the Beardstown School District to meet these needs. They currently provide:

- Before and after school programming at Grand Avenue School
- Half-day programming for Kindergarten students at Grand Avenue School

- After-school, early-dismissal and full-day programming on school holidays for students at Gard and Brick schools
- Before and after-school tutoring for Beardstown Middle School
- After-school programs at their junior high facility
- One-on-one and small group tutoring at the club, provided by certified teachers.

Boys and Girls Club of Cass County serves students from pre-K through 12th grade. Their purpose is to be "the positive place where students can get their homework done, chill with friends, eat healthy snacks, participate in amazing prevention programs, play sports and games and work to make a positive impact in the world." This is a huge goal but the Boys and Girls Club of Cass County is well on its way to achieving it.

The funding for these programs is provided in part by: Illinois State Board of Education, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Illinois Commission on Volunteerism, Americorps, U.S. Department of Education, and Carol M. White Physical Education Program.

Caregivers can apply for any of the programs by contacting Karen Pherigo, Cass County Coordinator, at 217-883-7577.

Licensing visits go smoothly with preparation

Foster caregivers can sometimes feel like it would be easier to replace your front door with one that revolves. The children that come in and out can be outnumbered by the child welfare staff that come for regular visits. Sometimes it's welcomed, other times it can be at the very least inconvenient. Monitoring visits required for licensing can go smoothly with a bit of preparation.

DCFS regulations require that twice a year, a licensing representative, family development specialist or worker by another name (depending on your licensing agency) will come to your home for a monitoring visit. The purpose is to confirm that the home continues to meet licensing standards for safety. The licensing worker must do a physical check of the home, completing a list of safety items and compliance with agency rules. These items need to be checked and documented. Newly licensed homes will have the first monitoring visit at 60 days. After that, everyone gets a visit every six months as long as they keep their license open. This can seem redundant, particularly for long-term caregivers who have done countless monitoring visits. Yet, there is more to the licensing visit than a checklist.

"I would like to see staff work more closely with the people who are currently fostering our youth and be more of a support to them," said Steven Minter, DCFS Licensing Administrator.

Licensing staff help make sure that caregivers can meet children's needs. When the physical aspects of the home are settled, they can help support the family through other licensing aspects such as training and placement issues. Since DCFS moved to a placement model to match youth to homes nearest their schools, open foster homes go into a foster home availability database. Foster caregivers should have discussions with their licensing representative about their capacity for potential placements.

To work through the necessary items more efficiently, caregivers can prepare for an upcoming monitoring visit with the following simple steps:

- Have driver's license and proof of auto insurance available
- Confirm that your home has working smoke detectors and a carbon monoxide detector
- Check that there are no flammable materials near the furnace and hot water heater areas
- Make sure that you still have dangerous household chemicals, cleaning products and medications stored appropriately in areas inaccessible to young children
- For pets, have proof of up to date inoculations available
- If possible, re-check your hot water temperature before the visit. Licensing standards

require hot water to be no higher than 115 degrees

- If you have foster children in your home, have updated records available such as personal allowance and clothing logs and receipts, medication and behavior logs.

Completing these activities prior to your bi-annual monitoring visit will not only make things go more quickly, but will prevent your licensing worker from having to re-visit your home to ensure compliance at a later date. If your home is out of compliance with licensing standards during the monitoring visit, you will be placed on involuntary hold. Your licensing worker will explain what you need to do to meet the regulations and have the hold removed.

Central Connections

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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.

Central Region Training Calendar

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Training. Advance registration is required. Training dates, times and locations are subject to change.

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 1-messages, natural and logical consequences, time out and how to catch kids being "good" and what to do to encourage positive behavior.

Normal	BabyFold
Feb. 5 (Tue) & Feb. 9 (Sat)	6-9 p.m. 9 a.m.-Noon

Attachment and the Teen in Family Foster Care (6 training hours)

Danville	Comm. Church of God
March 11	6:30-9:30 p.m.

Normal	BabyFold
Feb. 23 (Sat)	9 a.m.-Noon

Quincy	Blessing Hospital
Feb. 9 & 16 (Sat)	9 a.m.-Noon

Springfield	Ramada Limited North
Feb. 2 (Sat)	9 a.m.-Noon

Urbana	Webber St. Christian Church
Feb. 19 & 21 (Tue/Thu)	6:30-9:30 p.m.

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.

LaSalle	LaSalle Housing Authority
Feb. 23 (Sat)	9 a.m.-4 p.m.

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

This new course will assist 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 to understand the teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use while fostering teenagers.

Galesburg	First Lutheran Church
Feb. 4 & 11 (Mon)	6-9 p.m.

Rock Island	Catholic Charities
Feb. 18 & 25 (Mon)	6-9 p.m.

Urbana	Webber St. Christian Church
Feb. 5 & 7 (Tue/Thu)	6:30-9:30 p.m.

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.

Charleston	Coles County Ctr. for Human Services
Mar. 4 & 8 (Tue & Sat)	6:30-9:30 p.m.

Decatur	Webster Cantrell Hall
March 11 & 18 (Tue)	6-9 p.m.

Jacksonville	DCFS Office
March 18 & 25 (Tue)	6-9 p.m.

Moline	Holiday Inn
March 20 & 27	6-9 p.m.

Peoria	Counseling & Family Services
March 13 & 20 (Thurs)	6-9 p.m.

Quincy	Chaddock
March 17 & 24 (Mon)	6:30-9:30 p.m.

Springfield	Faith Lutheran Church
March 11 & 13 (Mon)	6:30-9:30 p.m.

Taylorville	St. Vincent Hospital
March 10 & 17 (Mon)	6:30-9:30 p.m.

Child Trauma

4 training hrs.

This four-hour course helps caregivers recognize the signs of trauma and understand how to work with children who have experienced trauma.

Bloomington	Doubletree Hotel	Peoria	Counseling & Family Svcs.
March 8 (Sat)	9 a.m.-1 p.m.	April 5 (Sat)	9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.

Call the DCFS Office of Training

877-800-3393

toll free