

One friend's nice idea leads to a whole new family

As a veteran DCFS caseworker, Lisa Massa knew her good friend would need support during a pending adoption. Answering the call of friendship, Massa decided to get a foster care license so she could be a respite resource. She never expected that a gesture of friendship would have such far-reaching affects.

After earning her license, Massa found herself helping out more than her friend. She took in children with intense special needs on a short-term basis for up to six months. Her goal was to help them get stabilized for a more permanent placement. Despite her initial intent to be a stable but temporary resource, Massa took guardianship of one of the first children to come to her home, a 10-year-old little girl. Now she is an 18-year-old young woman and is still a family member.

Over time, it became a struggle to balance the difficult work with children professionally and at home, so Massa decided to refocus to do respite care for babies. The first baby she cared for was a three-month-old girl named Deanna. After a comfortable respite arrangement with Deanna's foster caregiver, circumstances changed as they so often do, and Deanna

needed to be placed in the Massa home. After a year, Deanna became a permanent family member through adoption.

Adoption was a long way from the respite foster care path where Massa had started. But there were still more surprises. Deanna's birth mother gave birth to another child, then to another, and another. Massa could not see these children growing up apart. She took each one of them home as foster children right after birth, directly out of the hospital. In time, Massa adopted Janae and Jaden at ages one and two. Kennedy's adoption finalized in 2006 when she was two.

Massa believes in keeping connections with the children's birth family. She stays in contact with the birth mother and the children's fathers. Two of the four children have adult siblings who also play an important role in their lives.

"My kids are going to grow up knowing they are adopted, so I will keep in touch with the biological family," she stated.

After caring for her brood all these years, Massa is wondering if it is time to take a break from foster care. She still works for DCFS on behalf of families as a Local Area



Network Liaison in Champaign. She sees how her experience in foster care and with adoption has helped her be a better worker, because she understands the needs of the children in the system and their caregivers.

"It ain't easy. It's got to be about the kids... to make a difference in their life. You have no control over their genes. You have to be committed and be able to deal with big issues," she stated.

Massa concedes that being a foster/adoptive parent is the hardest thing in her life, but it is also the most rewarding. She feels fortunate to have a good support system with family and friends. Initially, she thought she would be that support for someone else, until she opened the door to a whole new world for herself.

School help in Bureau, LaSalle, Marshall, Putnam, Stark counties

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 the 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 217-779-2522 or e-mail at greg.hixon@illinois.gov.

Local Area Network 27 covers Bureau, LaSalle, Marshall, Putnam, and Stark counties.

"We have a lot of really good education programs in this area," said Greg Hixon, the DCFS LAN Liaison. "When we work with parents and the schools, our approach is to be proactive and get in front of problems before they become serious issues."

There are three Family Centered Services programs for students at risk of truancy, suspension, or expulsion. Each relies on individualized case management. For example, if a student is missing school repeatedly or receiving detentions, the caregiver can call for a referral to one of the programs. The case manager will make the necessary connections between

the parents and the school to get to the underlying reasons and find ways to turn the situation around.

"The key to these programs is human contact. Everyone takes part and everyone is responsible for their part," said Hixon.

Caregivers who reside in LAN 27 and have concerns about truancy, suspension or expulsion can contact the agency that serves the student's age and/or school.

- Outreach/Truancy Initiative through Youth Service Bureau of Illinois Valley, provides case management and linkages to resources for youth ages 11 to 17. Contact Cindy Robinson at 815-433-3953 for more information about this program.
- The Truancy Prevention Initiative through Youth Service Bureau of Illinois Valley provides case management and linkages to resources for youth ages (5 thru 10), who are at risk of truancy, suspension, or expulsion that are enrolled in the Ottawa Elementary School District #141. For more information, contact Sharon Scott at 815-433-3953.
- The Counseling Initiative through Catholic Charities works with students enrolled in North Lawn Junior High and Streator High schools. The program provides in-

home and school-based case management, therapeutic services and linkages to resources for youth in grades 5 through 12. Contact Jennifer Ahlfield at 815-223-4007 for more information about this program.

Beyond the three programs listed here, LAN 27 also provides "wrap-around" services for youth. The review committee takes applications from families for case consultation, community networking, and financial support for youth across the five-county LAN who are at risk of truancy, suspension, or expulsion.

"We had one student who was also a mom. She had problems with daycare arrangements and was missing school. We used wrap-around services to help her take computer-based courses. She made up credits and graduated," said Cindy Robinson of Youth Service Bureau.

All foster, adoptive and guardianship families can apply for a "wrap plan." This community partnership meets to discuss wrap around proposals on the third Friday of every month at North Central Behavioral Health Systems office in LaSalle. For more information, contact Hasime Jashari at 815-433-3953.

On-call nurses offer help to caregivers

Caregivers and child-care providers have another resource to help manage the medical issues of children in their care. The Child Care Nurse Consultant Program was established in response to a growing need for additional support services in the area of health and safety in childcare.

The Child Care Nurse Consultant Program is responsible for providing services to foster parents and licensed and licensed-exempt childcare facilities in Bureau, Fulton, LaSalle, Marshall, Peoria, Putnam Stark, Tazewell, and Woodford counties by offering:

- Health and safety education for parents and children
- Consultations with childcare providers by telephone, email, and/or on site visits
- Child Care Staff Training

- Assistance with health and safety policy and procedure development

Examples of trainings available from the Child Care Nurse Consultants include:

- Asthma and Allergies
- Human Growth and Development
- Hygiene and Hand Washing
- Immunizations
- Communicable Diseases and Common Illnesses
- Nutrition and Exercise
- Poison Control
- Head Lice

This project is part of a joint effort between Tazewell County Health Department, the Illinois Department of Human Services, and Illinois Central College Child Care Connection to ensure a safe childcare environment for children. The Healthy Child Care America campaign is based on the principal that families, child care providers, and health professionals in partnership can promote the positive development of children in child care settings. The campaign also promotes access to preventive health services, safe physical environments, and a medical home for all children.

Foster caregivers, parents and child care staff in the counties in the service area are encouraged to use the program. To reach the Child Care Nurse Consultants, contact: Sara J. Hammond, R.N. at 309-690-7311 by phone or send an e-mail to sw224@icc.edu.

Register for Caregiver Institute

Call 877-800-3393 now to register

Enrollment is still open for the training "Trauma: Dealing with a Child's Past to Make a Better Future." The Caregiver Institute will be on Saturday, April 26 from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. at the Champaign Hawthorne Suites. The training covers:

- How trauma affects children in care
- Tips on recognizing and dealing with trauma
- How caring for these children affects caregivers
- What caregivers can do to keep themselves healthy

Participants will earn five training credit hours when they sign in and attend the entire session. Coffee, donuts and lunch will be provided for participants.

There are no accommodations for childcare, and children must not be brought to the site. There may be limited funds available through the region to reimburse DCFS-supervised caregivers for childcare or mileage to attend this training. Caregivers should follow normal procedures to check on potential reimbursement. Attendees from private agencies should contact their agencies to determine whether they can be reimbursed.

Note: caregivers who have taken the DCFS Child Trauma training will already be familiar with much of this material, but there will be added features.

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

Springfield *Trinity Learning Ctr.*
Apr. 10, 15 & 17 (Tue/Thu) 6–9 p.m.

development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.

Pontiac *Institute for Human Resources*
April 7 & 14 (Mon) 6–9 p.m.

Peoria *Bethany Baptist Church*
May 6 & 8 (Tue/Thu) 6–9 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

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

This training will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand how early attachment experiences have impacted the teen’s development.

Jacksonville *DCFS Office*
April 7 & 14 (Mon) 6–9 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.

Bloomington *St. Patrick’s Church*
April 7 & 21 (Mon) 6–9 p.m.

Galesburg *Carl Sandburg College*
May 7 & 14 (Wed) 6–9 p.m.

Urbana *Eastland Suites*
April 7 & 14 (Mon) 6:30–9:30 p.m.

Peoria *Bethany Baptist Church*
April 22 & 29 (Tue) 6–9 p.m.

Peoria *Proctor Hospital*
May 3 & 10 (Sat) 9 a.m.–Noon

Quincy *Blessing Hospital*
May 6 & 8 (Tue/Thu) 6–9 p.m.

Springfield *Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church*
May 5 & 12 (Mon) 6:30–9:30 p.m.

Reunification Training for Caregivers

This new three hour in-service training focuses specifically on the role of the foster caregiver in supporting families with a reunification goal. During the training, caregivers will learn more about what they can do to actively support the return home of children to their families, ways to support visits in a family setting, and how to participate in shared parenting activities.

Galesburg *First Lutheran Church* **Peoria** *Counseling & Family Svcs.*
April 7 (Mon) 6–9 p.m. April 17 (Thurs) 6–9 p.m.

LaSalle *Catholic Charities*
April 8 (Tue) 6–9 p.m. June 19 (Thurs) 6–9 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 *Eastland Suites* **Peoria** *Counseling & Family Svcs.*
May 10 (Sat) 9 a.m.–1 p.m. April 5 (Sat) 9 a.m.–1 p.m.

Jacksonville *Comfort Inn* **Urbana** *Eastland Suites*
May 17 (Sat) 9 a.m.–1 p.m. April 26 (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