

## The new Ramos family keeps prior connections

Cheryn and Nathan Ramos met while Cheryn was attending Illinois Western University in Macomb. They first set eyes on each other at a church youth group. Cheryn said they actually talked about doing foster care before they got married, but Nathan remembers the conversation happening after their marriage. Regardless, Cheryn emphasized, "We both had the same goals." Nathan added, "We both wanted to have a large family."

In 2003, they gave birth to their first child, Noah. Two years later, Alexa came along. Nathan's parents had done foster care when he was a young child, and his aunt had been a foster parent. Then, before Cheryn and Nathan began the process to be licensed, his mother decided to be licensed once again and adopted a child. Even with two children of their own, they decided to go forward with making their talk of foster parenting a reality.

Eventually that long-awaited call came, and Cheryn and Nathan anxiously prepared to welcome two young brothers. The boys had been in another foster home before they became free for adoption. Cheryn and Nathan were willing to adopt, and the boys came to

live with them. Cheryn had been concerned about how their oldest child Noah would adjust, but he accepted the new children with ease.

Because of the brothers' close relationship to their former foster parents, the transition had to be carefully managed. Cheryn and Nathan kept in close contact with the other family, allowing them to stop by to see the boys. This was beneficial to the children and to the foster parents, who were also attached to the boys.

"Nathan and Cheryn were excellent in working with the former foster parents during the transition to their home. They also made it possible for the biological father to maintain contact with the boys though a post office box for letters and photos," said licensing worker, Diana Brooks.

Cheryn was teaching second grade, and due to the flexibility in Nathan's schedule as a property manager, he was able to stay home with the children during the day. Jokingly, Cheryn said that going to her class full of second graders was her break away from the young ones at home.



*Cheryn and Nathan Ramos with their new brood of four.*

In summing up their journey into foster care to adoption, Nathan said, "You need to have an open mind. It is going to take work for you and the kids. You can't be selfish. You need to get out of your comfort zone. You have to look at the long-term outcome for the children."

Cheryn concluded, "You have to be patient and need to sacrifice your time to spend with the children. And it doesn't hurt to pray a lot to get strength."

The Ramos family is in the final stage of adopting the two foster brothers.

## From your RA

To the Central Region families, I extend a warm thank you during Foster Parent Appreciation Month. Because of your commitment, day in and day out, the young people you take care of are in a better place with a brighter future.

In 2008, the Central Region will be completing the process to be re-accredited through the Council on Accreditation. Foster parents and adoptive parents from all our sites will be interviewed. Rock Island, Peoria, Springfield and Charleston offices will host the meetings, in May through August. The Regional Advisory Council will be meeting in all of these communities to discuss the re-accreditation with caregivers.

The Region will be meeting with caregivers locally to discuss another important initiative, that being the role of caregivers as reunification partners. We recently scheduled Caregiver Reunification training and will post the roll-out plan in the Central Region insert of the next newsletter.

Central Region has more than 2,651 licensed foster homes meeting the needs of 4,403 youth with varying permanency goals and a range of special needs. With every sibling visit, school conference and birth parent that you mentor, you are improving the safety, well-being and permanency of the children in your care. Thank you.

*Robert T. Blackwell*  
Regional Administrator

## Project Success helps Vermilion County families with school issues

In Vermilion County, parents (including foster and adoptive parents) can soon benefit from a new grant that will bring more services to children. The First Call for School program is conducted by Project Success. It offers families support where youth may be at risk of school failure due to emotional or behavioral issues.

First Call for School relies on a team approach, with collaborative, strength-based planning. When a parent or caregiver calls the program, a coordinator will immediately assess whether the student and family need short-term referrals to improve school success, or if they would benefit from a more comprehensive Child and Family Team review through the "wrap around" services approach. This upfront assessment decreases the possibility of the child being placed on a waiting list with a particular agency, since agencies with the quickest access will be recommended. This streamlined process also fosters better communication across agencies and more complete documentation for follow up with schools or court.

The new program recently helped a family where four of eight children faced suspensions or expulsions. First Call For School coordinated a range of services including case management, mental health services, educational advocacy, alternative educational

opportunities, testing for reading disabilities, and tutoring for dyslexia for several of the children. Before First Call for School, these services would have been nearly impossible to coordinate, if they would have been recommended at all.

Family members who have been served report that they appreciate the quick information, referrals and access through "one stop" service planning. With information and ready resources, they can more effectively advocate for youth. For more information, contact Barb Chatman of Project Success at 217-446-3200.

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*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 families in LANs across the Central Region. They are available to all families, including foster, adoptive and guardianship families, who are concerned about students at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion. For more information about LANs, contact Greg Hixon, DCFS LAN Liaison at 217-779-2522 or e-mail at [greg.hixon@illinois.gov](mailto:greg.hixon@illinois.gov).*

## Foster Parent Appreciation Month events

Many DCFS offices have planned events to honor the families who serve in DCFS-supervised foster care programs. DCFS homes will receive invitations to the appreciation events; however, the list below can help families make plans to enjoy the events. Scheduled events may change. Go to the DCFS Web site at [www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs) for updated calendars, or call the contact listed. Families served by private agencies can contact their agency for information on foster parent appreciation events that may be planned.

### Charleston Appreciation Banquet

Thursday, May 1  
6 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
Ryan's Steakhouse  
1102 Avenue of Mid America,  
Effingham  
Contact: Susan Taylor or Kelly  
Compton at 217-348-7661

### Danville Open House

Thursday, May 1  
3 p.m. to 5 p.m.  
401 N. Franklin, Danville  
Contact: Nancy Abbott at  
217-443-3200  
Games for children and refresh-  
ments will be available

### Bloomington/Pontiac Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner

Thursday, May 8  
7 p.m.  
Eastview Christian Church  
1500 N. Airport Road, Normal  
Contact: Stan Case at  
309-828-0022

### Jacksonville/Beardstown Foster Parent Appreciation Open House

Thursday, May 8  
4 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
Jacksonville Field Office  
46 North Central Park Plaza,  
Jacksonville  
Contact: Deb Donham at  
217-854-2566

### Taylorville Foster Parent Appreciation Potluck

Thursday, May 8  
11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
1104 West Spresser Street,  
Taylorville  
Contact: Karen Thurman/Tara  
Herbord at 217-824-9649  
217-557-5548

### Foster Parent Appreciation Cookout

Thursday, May 8  
6 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
Quincy Field Office 107 N. 3rd St.,  
Quincy  
Contact: Kevin Blickhan at  
217-221-2525

### Carlinville with Jerseyville Foster Parent Appreciation Open House

Thursday, May 15  
4 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
Carlinville Field Office  
1022 N. High Street, Carlinville  
Contact: Deb Donham at  
217-854-2566

### Urbana Appreciation Picnic

Sunday, May 18  
5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.  
Hessell Park, Urbana  
Contact: Julie Cebulski at  
217-621-6347 or Lolita Dumas  
at 217-278-5400

### Peoria Appreciation Luncheon

Tuesday, May 20  
11 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
2001 NE Jefferson, Peoria  
Contact: Willa Guidi at  
309-671-7900

### Decatur Appreciation Banquet

Thursday, May 22  
5 p.m. to 7 p.m.  
St. Patrick Church  
412 N. Jackson, Decatur  
Contact: Celeste Taylor at  
217-875-6750

### Springfield Foster Parent Appreciation Picnic

Friday, May 30  
11 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Washington Park, Springfield  
Contact: LuAnn Gab at  
217-557-3988

### Rock Island/Mercer Appreciation Picnic

Saturday, June 7  
11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
Stephen's Park  
7th Street and 15th Ave., Moline

### Macomb Foster Parent Appreciation Picnic with Fire Safety Training

Tuesday, June 17  
6 p.m.  
Veterans of Foreign Wars Park  
181 E. Hail Street, Bushnell  
Contact: Diana Brooks or Sue  
Waller at 309-837-5411

## Youth Summit to prepare for adulthood

The Division of Service Intervention is sponsoring a Youth Summit for youth in Central Region. Teens and young adults who participate in the Youth Summits will obtain the educational and survival skills needed to successfully achieve self-sufficiency and independence. The Youth Summit will offer workshops covering financial planning, life skills, employment training, academics, nutrition and health. There will also be food, prizes and fun events.

Tuesday, June 17  
 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
 Cunningham Children's Home  
 1301 N. Cunningham, Urbana  
 Contact: Gail Simpson at 217-524-2425

### 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 Training Calendar

### 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.*

<b>Danville</b> <i>Community Church of God</i> June 16 & 23 (Mon) 6-9 p.m.	<b>Peoria</b> <i>Lutheran Social Services</i> June 2 & 9 (Mon) 6-9 p.m.
<b>Lincoln</b> <i>Abraham Lincoln Hospital</i> June 23 & 26 (Mon/Thu) 6-9 p.m.	<b>Quincy</b> <i>Blessing Hospital</i> July 23 & 30 (Wed) 6-9 p.m.
<b>Urbana</b> <i>Webber St. Christian Church</i> July 7 & 10 (Mon/Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.	<b>Rock Island</b> <i>Bethany for Children &amp; Families</i> June 26 & July 3 (Thu) 6-9 p.m.
<b>Peru</b> <i>Baymont Inn &amp; Suites</i> June 9 & 11 (Mon/Wed) 6-9 p.m.	<b>Springfield</b> <i>Ramada Limited North</i> July 19 & 26 (Sat) 9 a.m.-Noon

### 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.*

**Peoria** *Counseling & Family Svcs.*  
 June 19 (Thurs) 6-9 p.m.

**Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.  
 Call the DCFS Office of Training 877-800-3393 • toll free**