Central Connections

2008 • Vol. 4

News For Heart of Illinois Families

Journey in foster care leads to Alaska and back

There are 3,600 miles between Canton, Illinois and Anchorage, Alaska. Yet, in 1982 Kristine boldly embarked on the journey with her new husband Paul Plopper and the two pre-teen children who she had adopted during an earlier marriage. Paul had been a cement finisher in Alaska for 14 years before marrying Kristine. He and his new family, with his brother's family going along, decided to answer the call to return to the beautiful wilderness of Anchorage.

It was quite an adjustment to living half of the year in darkness and the other half light. While the seasonal transition happens gradually, it was easy to lose track of time.

"It was nothing to mow your lawn at midnight. An inexpensive way to block out the sunlight at night was to put aluminum foil on the windows," Kristine remembers.

Their children grew into young adults in Alaska. Kristine and Paul became grandparents and took guardianship of their daughter's child. That was the impetus for them to go through training to become licensed foster parents. The Ploppers had five children placed with them during their time in Alaska. Kristine dedicated so much time to visitation and medical concerns that she gave up her job at a brokerage house. She also got licensed as a day care provider.

After almost 10 years in Alaska, the time came to move back to central Illinois. Kristine's and Paul's mothers had both passed away, and they wanted to spend more time with their fathers. They settled in Eureka and began the Illinois licensing process soon after. Within two months, Kristine and Paul got the call asking them to take siblings ages three, eight, and 10. The transition was more than a little bumpy. Eventually, the middle child needed to move. But, after seven years, the Ploppers had the joy of adopting the other children when they were 11 and 17 years old.

The following year in 2000, their family grew to include three little girls from a sibling group of six. The girls had intense special needs, with two who were prone to major late-night roaming. Kristine and Paul would wake up in the morning to syrup spilled all over the carpet, bags of chocolate eaten, and orange juice dumped everywhere.

"It got a little crazy around here.

Paul and Kristine Plopper

One of the girls would go outside at night. We had to put loud alarms on all of the doors–and this was just the minor stuff," said Kristine.

It soon became evident that they were going to have to make some hard decisions. One sister moved to a better suited home without other children. As things settled down, all of the siblings became free for adoption. In 2002, the households "reunited" at the Peoria courthouse and the girls finalized adoptions with their new families on the same day. They all live within an hour's drive and can visit.

The Ploppers' daughters are 14 and 15, and are doing well. The entire family still loves to travel and has even been back to Alaska for visits. That state's slogan is "Beyond your dreams, within your reach." The same phrase could be applied to the family Kristine and Paul have realized.

Youth group collects blankets for other youth

Theresa Noel, youth minister, with the First United Methodist Church of East Peoria was looking for a community project. She contacted DCFS and asked if there was a need to assist foster children who were coming into care. The outcome of this inquiry was that the Junior and Senior Youth Group that Theresa heads helped with a collection campaign from their churches congregation.

Hand woven blankets were made and money was collected from the congregation to purchase more blankets which totaled close to 35 blankets at the project's end.

These blankets will be given to new children coming into the system to take with them to the foster home that they are placed in.

The young people wrote a little note attached to each blanket with sentiments such as "hope you like the blanket" or "hope you stay warm with the blanket", and other supportive words.

Theresa Noel delivers donated blankets.

Helping families help themselves in Logan, Mason, Menard and Christian counties

Rural Family Services sums up its program with the motto: "Helping Families Help Themselves." Rural Family Services provides services to the Local Area Network 15 (LAN 15) counties of Logan, Mason, Menard and Christian counties. The program seeks to stabilize and empower at-risk families and children so that they can better advocate for themselves in the future. It targets services in the school setting to stabilize students who may be at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion. Their services include:

- *One-On-One Mentoring* - both in and out of school. The advocates work with clients to assure that their needs are being addressed and to help with self-esteem and self-empowerment issues.
- *Crisis Assistance and Intervention* - referrals to mental health and respite providers are provided as needed to stabilize families in times of crisis. This includes coordination with local service providers for emergency assistance.
- *Tutoring Services* - in addition to the in-school mentoring support provided by the advocates, Rural Family Services provides both in- and out-of-school tutoring when needed. These services are provided in tight coordination with the classroom teacher.

Even outside of the school setting, Rural Family Services can help families secure needed services through providing resource referrals and, if necessary, transportation to and from those resource providers. They can assist families in finding food and clothing donations. They offer help to fill out forms for housing assistance, KidCare insurance, Medicaid and other such social services.

Rural Family Services helps families across a broad spectrum of circumstances. In addition to working with intact families, they can help caregivers with issues that arise with foster care and adoption. Recently, the agency supported a relative foster parent as she moved forward with adopting children age nine and 13. Advocates provided mentoring and tutoring support to these children during a hectic time in their lives. Even though the case has since been successfully closed with the agency, the advocates still voluntarily maintain their relationships with this family.

For more information on Rural Family Services contact Rory Stoller at 217-899-3352 or by e-mail at rstoller1@yahoo.com.

There are more educational intervention programs in LANs across the Central Region. They are open 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.

DCFS Education Advisors are on call to provide families expert school help

Caregivers and caseworkers working together can usually advocate successfully with schools for the children in their care. However, when families need additional expertise to work through school issues, they can contact the Education Advisor. Advisors can support DCFS-supervised foster families and families who adopted or took guardianship of children who were in DCFS care. Families with licenses supervised by private agencies can receive similar help from their agency's education liaison.

DCFS Education Advisors are part of the Northern Illinois University Educational Access Project. They work with families where children may have learning, discipline or behavioral concerns at school. They can take part in meetings for special education. The advisors will help caregivers and caseworkers determine the best strategies to help youth make successful transitions through school.

The Central Region Education Advisors offer the following reminders to help families prepare for the expenses that come with education:

- ALL schools provide free lunches, required textbooks and instructional materials to qualified families. Youth in foster care qualify (Free and Reduced Lunch forms must be completed with Medical Card number or other proof of income.)
- School districts have individual policies regarding the waiver of other school fees.
- School clothes are to be purchased from the clothing allowance that is part of the monthly foster care payment to caregivers.
- Private agencies have individual policies regarding routine school supplies. Foster caregivers through DCFS receive $50.00 per school age child placed in their home during the month of July on their August check.
- Transportation is free for students living more than 1-1/2 miles from school or 1 mile from public transportation, experiencing hazardous traffic conditions or receiving special education services and needing transportation. Ask the school for more details.

Contact an Education Advisor:

- Mary Chepulis
  DCFS Springfield Sub-region
  521 South 11th Street
  Springfield, IL 62703
  217-782-4000
- Ann Wells
  DCFS Champaign and Peoria Sub-regions
  4500 South 6th Street
  Springfield, IL 62703
  217-786-6830

Free family workshops in Peoria

Youth Services Network Panel (YSNP) offers free family education workshops in its series called Turning Choices into Change. These workshops occur each month at the Peoria Public Library, located at 107 N. E. Monroe, Peoria. Upcoming topics include:

August 14, 2008
Effective Parent Child Communication
Presenters: Linda Williams, Catholic Charities; and Kathleen Hanlon, Center for Prevention of Abuse

September 11, 2008
Bullying Behavior
Presenter: Jeanne Anders, Center for Prevention of Abuse

For a complete list of workshops or additional information, call Mary at 309-672-6992.

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

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. Detailed address information will be provided with registration.

Module 2 - *Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs* (9 training hours)
This workshop provides practical information 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.

Decatur ***Webster Cantrell Hall***
Sept. 8, 15 & 22 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Springfield ***DCFS***
August 5, 12 & 19 (Tue) 6-9 p.m.

Module 6 - *Working as a Professional Team Member* (9 training hours)
Foster parents learn what everyone's role is on the team, 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.

Danville ***DCFS***
August 5, 12 & 19 (Tue) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Normal ***BabyFold***
August 16 (Sat) & 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
August 23 (Sat) 9 a.m.-Noon

Urbana ***Restoration Urbana Ministries***
Sept. 6, 13, 20 (Sat) 9 a.m-12 p.m.

The Teen in Family Foster Care: Supporting Attachment (6 training hours)
This training will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand how early attachment experiences have impacted the teen's development.

Danville ***New Directions Treatment Center***
Sept. 4 & 11 (Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Jacksonville ***DCFS***
August 30 (Sat) 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Urbana ***Restoration Urbana Ministries***
August 19 & 21 (Tue/Thu) 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 ***Location TBA***
August 9 (Sat) 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Springfield ***Trinity Learning Center***
August 9 (Sat) 9 a.m.-1 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.

Champaign ***Webber Street Christian Church***
August 14 & 18 (Thu/Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Danville ***Public Library***
Sept. 13 & 20 (Sat) 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

Jacksonville ***DCFS***
Sept. 18 & 25 (Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Lincoln ***Abraham Lincoln Memorial Hospital***
Aug. 7 & 11 (Thu/Mon) 6-9 p.m.

Moline ***First Congregational Church***
Sept. 18 & 25 (Thu) 6-9 p.m.

Normal ***Family Community & Resource Center***
August 7 & 14 (Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Peoria ***Lutheran Social Services***
Sept. 15 & 22 (Mon) 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