

Grys family answers call for 250 children

Caring for more than 250 children during a 25-year period is an accomplishment that is difficult to put in just one word. For Steve and Jeannie Grys of Pekin they just call it their calling.

"We feel that we were put on this earth to help people. It definitely is not for the money," Jeannie said with a touch of irony.

This calling for the Gryses led Steve, a special education teacher, and Jeannie, a special education assistant, to start on the path of traditional foster care and then take care of children with behavioral disorders. Next, they were encouraged to look after children with medical needs. Premature babies, infants who were cocaine-exposed and more medically-complex children over time became the norm for the Grys foster home.

Steve and Jeannie cared for twin girls with fetal alcohol syndrome and neurofibromatosis while they prepared to transition to an adoptive home. When that prospective home did not work out, the twins returned and the Gryses had to make a decision.

Jeannie stated, "We were not into this to adopt. Most people are

into adopting healthy children. Our adopted children are a lifetime obligation. They are not going to grow up and be on their own."

Understanding the reality, they didn't let it deter them. They adopted the twins. Later, in 2000, Jake came to the family. He was 10 days old and was considered a hospice placement, as he was not expected to live due to Osteogenesis Imperfecta – more commonly known as brittle bone disorder. Jake's doctors believe that almost every bone in his body was broken when he was born.

"He had to be held on a pillow for the first four months, and he screamed 23 hours a day. Jeannie remembers, "I slept in a recliner with Jake on my chest so the kids and hubby could get some sleep for school the next day."

Besides Jake having had hundreds of bone breaks, he also suffers from dwarfism. At the age of two, Jake was able to scoot and roll through out the house. Although he is unable to walk, now at eight, he does dress and feed himself. Due to his dwarfism, Jake is unable to reach most things in the home and relies on help from all family members. A fall trying to reach



Steve Grys (l) and Jean Grys (r.rear) are surrounded by family by birth, adoption and marriage.

something could mean another broken bone.

He receives therapy through Easter Seals, and four years ago became an ambassador with his picture on billboards and the website. He has a way of touching hearts with his winsome smile. His Easter Seals therapist suggested to the family that they apply to be on the television show, "Extreme Makeover Home Edition," to help Jake be more independent, to improve his life and his life expectancy.

While they await that decision, the Gryses carry on as they always do. They continue to answer their calling to take a child in and treat them like a member of the family until they can go home or on to an adoptive placement. They love to see children blossom in their home and will take them as far as they can go.

Central Region students earn DCFS college scholarships

These students, whose cases were served by programs in the Central Region, headed to college with the honor of receiving one of 48 DCFS Scholarships. The scholarship includes paid tuition and academic fees at any of the participating Illinois universities and junior colleges, a monthly stipend of \$458 and a medical card for up to four years. The recipients of the 2008 DCFS Scholarship were selected from more than 200 applicants, based on their record of academic achievement, community involvement and personal successes.

Next year's scholarship application process begins in January and ends in March. Contact the youth's case-worker or the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services at 312-814-5959 for more information.



Heather Eckart

Heather, of Decatur, is a 2008 graduate of Argenta-Oreana High School where she earned a 4.88 grade point average and scored 24 on her ACT. In high school, she earned a perfect attendance award. She was a member of the National Honor Society and was recognized as the most improved member of her track team. Her volunteer experience included tutoring and working in her church's daycare on Wednesday nights. Heather now attends Richland Community College, where she studies elementary education.



Renee Fix

Renee is from Springfield. She graduated in 2006 from Calvary Academy, where she earned a 3.27 grade point average and ranked 6th in a class of 22. Her school-related activities included choir, Yearbook Committee, Spanish Club, volleyball, and Fellowship of Christian Athletes. She volunteered her time as a camp counselor and also spent time in the Rockford Master's Commission which is an intense, hands-on, ministry training program. Renee is a student at Lincoln Land Community College where she is studying social work/sociology.

Lindsey Flowers

Lindsey, of Perry, is a 2008 graduate of Griggsville-Perry High School, where she earned a 2.89 grade point average. She has been involved in Student Council, Environmental Club, Drama Club, Students Against Destructive Decisions, cheerleading and 4-H. She is also

the 2007-2008 Griggsville Apple Festival Queen. Her volunteer work included assisting the elderly disabled in Perry. Lindsey attends Western Illinois University to major in pre-law and criminal justice.



Jason Lopez

Jason, of Granville, graduated with a 4.6 grade point average and ranked 12th among 79 Putnam County High School seniors. His high school activities included student council, science club, media club, basketball, cross-country, track, thespians and school mascot. His numerous honors and awards include Prairie State Scholar and honor roll. Jason now attends Illinois Valley Community College where he will study engineering.



Joshua Rademaker

Joshua, of Mapleton, is a 2008 graduate of Illini-Bluffs High School, where he earned a 3.13 grade point average. His volunteer activities included participating in a blood drive, picking up trash along the highway and being a Teacher's Assistant. His awards and accomplishments include Student of the Month, Boys State participant, Bradley Leadership Alums Program, captain of the Pekin Hockey team, National Honor Society and Student Advisory Representative. Joshua is now studying fire science at Western Illinois University.



Kimberly Tracewski

Kimberly, from Bloomington, graduated with a 4.86 grade point average and was ranked 30th among 332 seniors at Bloomington High School. She was selected as a member of the National Honor Society and was named an Illinois State Scholar. Her high school activities included French Honor Society, student council, and French Club. Kimberly now attends the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she plans to major in English.



Shantaye Wonzer

Shantaye, of Peoria, graduated in 2006 from Curie Metro High School, where she earned a 3.73 grade point average. She is currently attending Bradley University. She is involved in the Bradley University Social Service Group and is a representative to the Bradley Association of Residence Hall's board. Her awards and honors have included being named the Senator of the Year for the Bradley Student Senate last year. She spent this past summer working as a mentor through Children's Home in Peoria. She continues her academic career at Bradley studying organizational communications.



Desiree Woodson

Desiree is from Champaign. She is a 2008 graduate of Champaign Centennial High School where she earned a 4.0 grade point average and scored 22 on her ACT. Her high school activities included the Minority Enrichment Program, Principal's Scholar's Program, and Advancement Via Individual Determination. Desiree was on the honor roll and was a recipient of the Rising Star Award. She attends Eastern Illinois University, where she is studying career and technical education.

LAN 13 teen group improves school attendance

Local Area Network 13 serves families in Calhoun, Greene, Jerseyville, Macoupin and Montgomery counties. After seeing a surge in truancies in 2007, the executive committee decided to develop a program to address attendance problems. They formed a support group for teens at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion.

One clear academic issue that the students had in common was a need to improve reading skills. When the group met, the youth had time for reading. They read together and even read out aloud. Tutoring was also provided. Students with school attendance issues also can have emotional issues. The counselor provided group lessons to help them cope with their emotional issues, especially learning how to manage their anger and realizing their own unique value.

The group originally was to have been a summer 2007 project to prepare them for last year's academic year. However, they made progress and made friends. The group stayed together, and 85 percent of the students did not have a truancy problem.

The LAN continues to fund the Teen Program for this school year. Caregivers who live in one of the LAN 13 counties and who have truancy concerns can contact Kip Smith, DCFS LAN Liaison at 217-556-5506. Local Area Network community programs are open to all families including foster care, adoption and guardianship families.

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. Detailed address information will be provided with registration.

Module 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.

LaSalle **Public Housing Authority**
Oct. 21 & 28, Nov. 4 (Tue) 6-9 p.m.

Module 12 - *Understanding & 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 fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.

Galesburg **Lutheran Social Services**
Oct. 29 & Nov. 5 (Wed) 6-9 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.

Decatur **Civic Center**
Oct. 23 & 30 (Thu) 6-9 p.m.

Galesburg **Lutheran Social Services**
Nov. 12 & 19 (Wed) 6-9 p.m.

Peoria **Proctor Hospital**
Oct. 16 (Thu) 6-8 p.m.
and 23 (Thu) 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

Rock Island **Catholic Charities**
Oct. 21 & 28 (Tue) 6-9 p.m.

Springfield **Trinity Learning Center**
Nov. 18 & 20 (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.

Bloomington **St. Patrick's Church**
Nov. 17 & 24 (Mon) 6-9 p.m.

Charleston **Coles County Center for Human Services**
Oct. 30 & Nov. 6 (Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Decatur **Webster Cantrell Hall**
Oct. 14 & 21 (Tue) 6-9 p.m.

Galesburg **Carl Sandburg College**
Nov. 6 & 13 (Thu) 6-9 p.m.

Moline **Bethany for Children & Fam.**
Nov. 4 & 11 (Tue) 6-9 p.m.

Normal **BabyFold**
Oct. 23 & 30 (Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Peoria **Bethany Baptist Church**
Nov. 18 & 25 (Tue) 6-9 p.m.

Springfield **Faith Evangelical Lutheran**
Nov. 3 & 10 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

St. Joseph **Illini Christian Ministries**
Oct. 20 & 27 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Urbana **Cunningham Children's Home**
Nov. 18 & 25 (Tue) 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.

Danville **New Directions Center** **Quincy** **Blessing Hospital**
Oct. 18 (Sat) 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Oct. 14 & 16 (Tue/Thu) 6-8 p.m.

Macomb **Holiday Inn Express**
Nov. 8 (Sat) 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

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