

Award Winning Foster Parent Minnie Johnson

Minnie Johnson, from Quincy, just turned 75 and found out that you are never too old to be honored for your good deeds. She was nominated by DCFS and received the annual SAM Award from judicial officials in Adams County. The award is named for young Samantha Otte who died of complications of cystic fibrosis and liver transplant surgery. It was established to honor foster parents who provide homes for children with illnesses and other special needs.

Born in the small, mountainous mining town of Harveyton, Kentucky, Minnie started working at the age of 11. At 19 she was a cook at a tuberculosis sanitarium. She raised a family of five children, working hard all of her life. The last dozen years of her employment were spent as a site coordinator for Meals Plus for seniors.

"Retired from the daily grind of employment, but not from life," has become Minnie's motto. Life came knocking at her door in the shape of her young great-grandson. Seven-year-old Eric had come to Quincy from Ohio with an uncle. However, circumstances called for Minnie to take the boy into her home and care for him. Eric's

two sisters were in foster care back in Ohio, and he wanted to have them come live with their great-grandmother, too.

In order to get her great-granddaughters, Minnie needed to obtain a foster care license. After getting licensed in 1999, Minnie discovered after a long and diligent effort that it was not possible to reunite the siblings. Ohio would not let the girls leave the state. Nevertheless, Minnie did not let her frustration keep her from moving forward. As the century changed, she decided to change her goal from reuniting her grandchildren to helping other children in need. Since 2000, Minnie has welcomed more than 30 children into her home. In 2007, she adopted two sisters, ages nine and 10. Two years ago, she got a daycare license and cares for six children during the day.

Minnie states, "God is with me all of the time and he helps me in all that I do." She further states, "Knowing that these kids will grow up having a better future gives me peace of mind.... I can see the turn of life they are making."

Being a realist, Minnie acknowledges that there are frustrations to being a foster parent. She said, "Some



children coming into your home have had no structure and they are like a wild deer. They are such a challenge that it is like teaching a child to walk, talk and think at the age of six."

Still, Minnie says being a good foster parent means being positive, bringing out the best in children, and knowing the importance of compromise. She stresses academics, doing chores and holding children accountable. They are learning much from her lessons, and the SAM award now on prominent display is a reminder.

"It means a lot to me, and I am proud to be a foster parent, adoptive parent and to be a parent period," she said.

Age 75 is just a number, retirement is just a word, but helping a child is a special privilege as Minnie proves each day.

From your RA



As the economy falters and difficult times lie ahead for many, it is reassuring

to know that you are out there caring for our children. Without your dedication and commitment this holiday season, the children in your care would be at greater emotional risk while apart from their biological family members.

Having much contact with foster and adoptive parents, I know your intestinal fortitude and am confident that this holiday season will be special for you and your family.

There is no greater reward than to know that you are making a difference day in and day out in your children's lives. We support you and encourage you to spread the joy of this holiday season.

Robert T. Blackwell
Regional Administrator

Education help for students in Adams, Hancock and Pike counties

Families who live in Adams, Hancock and Pike counties can call on the Enrichment program to help youth who are at "risk of truancy, suspension, or expulsion." This resource aims to provide youth and their families with the necessary support and skills so they can succeed in school.

The Enrichment program helped one 17-year-old student turn things around. Paul, (name changed for privacy) of Pike County was struggling with attendance and poor academic performance. Because of his failing grades, it was unlikely that he would be able to graduate with his classmates in 2009. The Enrichment program got involved and called together all of the important adults in Paul's academic life. His family, probation officer, and school staff met as a team to identify the strengths of the family and their son. They all contributed to a plan to get him back on track, with Paul taking the lead.

Following positive conversations with the team, they decided to get Paul involved in the Spectrum Wilderness program. Spectrum Wilderness program is a 30-day wilderness stress challenge program for young people on the verge of serious trouble in school, at home, or in the community. Participants learn responsible behavior by trying new activities and coping with controlled, but psychologically stressful situations

in a supervised setting. Paul was already an outdoorsman and the team saw this as a way to bolster his self-esteem and strengthen him mentally as well as physically. He could show others his outdoor skills and learn from others in a healthy way. Paul came back after a month totally refreshed and eager to get back into school and earn additional credits. He has a positive outlook on his education and life in general. He will be graduating with his class in 2009.

Enrichment services include initial intake and assessment, intensive short-term case management, individualized case plan for the youth and their family, and referrals to community resources. Adams and Pike county families with concerns about a student at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion can contact Chris Parker of Cornerstone at 217-222-8254. Hancock County families can contact Linda Tobias of the Hancock County Youth Coalition at 217-357-3176

There are more educational intervention programs in Local Area Networks (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.

Central region advisory council opens up meetings to teleconference

In an effort to get more caregivers involved in the meetings of the regional advisory council, participants can phone in via teleconference.

"We have 50 counties in the Central region. That covers a lot of ground. This way people can still know what is going on even if they can't travel to the meeting," said Elizabeth Richmond, co-chair and a caregiver from Peoria.

The group will continue to meet in local offices so that people can be face-to-face in one room. The last meeting took place in Bloomington. However, any foster, adoptive or guardianship caregiver in Central region can call in to a scheduled meeting.

Typically the meetings will include an overview by Regional Administrator Bob Blackwell, and a discussion of policy or procedure issues that affect caregivers. The three representatives from Central region to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council attend the local meetings. They will also share news from the broader council and potentially take issues from the local region up to the statewide council.

Pat Welander, Pam Seals and Leanne Montgomery represent Central region caregivers.



Pat Welander



Pam Seals



Leanne Montgomery



Elizabeth Richmond

For a detailed schedule of meetings, call the Central Region Foster Care Helpline at 866-368-5204 or 309-794-3569.

To participate in a meeting by phone, caregivers can use the toll-free number 1-888-251-2909. After the prompt, enter the pass code 4250015#. Please remember when there is a large group on the phone, it is helpful to use either your mute button or try to be in a quiet space in your home.

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Call for DCFS help

The DCFS Central Region Foster Parent Customer Service Line is 866-368-5204. This line is toll free. It will be operational Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. excluding state holidays. The line is equipped with voice mail. The goal is to have a response time of 24 hours to all calls. If a foster parent has an emergency or urgent request, they should call the Field Office directly.

The Customer Service Line is set up for calls from foster families whose licenses are supervised by DCFS Central Region. The calls can be about issues or concerns that foster parents have not been able to resolve through normal channels. These could be business issues, respite, licensing, investigation or case management concerns. However, issues appropriate for a service appeal should be handled through that process. Additionally, foster parents who must face long-distance charges may use this line to have messages forwarded to DCFS personnel via e-mail as long as the calls are not urgent.

A pointperson in the region monitors the phone line and routes calls to the appropriate person for follow-up. The pointperson will also check on the resolution by the fifth business day.

This line was not designed to handle calls from caregivers with private agencies. Those calls should instead go directly to the agency that supervises that home's license.

Central Region Training Calendar

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers can attend PRIDE In-Service Training. Advance registration is REQUIRED. Detailed address information will be provided with registration. Information included here is accurate at the time of publication. Training dates, times and locations may change based on enrollment and other circumstances. For the most up-to-date schedule information, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center anytime at www.DCFStraining.org or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during regular business hours.

Module 5 - Supporting Relationships Between Children and their Families

(9 training hours)

This training focuses on helping foster parents learn how to help kids attach to caregivers and at the same time stay loyal to birth families. Caregivers learn about how to prepare and support children for and after visits with the birth family and how to share the parenting role with birth parents.

Quincy *Blessing Hospital*
February 23, 6-9 p.m.
March 2 and 9 (Mon)

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.

Peoria *Proctor Hospital*
March 14 (Sat) 9 a.m.-4 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.

Jacksonville *DCFS office*
January 17 & 24 (Sat) 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

Springfield *DCFS office*
March 14 & 21 (Sat) 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

Bloomington *Family Comm. Resource Ctr.*
February 2 & 9 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Rock Island *Catholic Charities*
March 2 & 9 (Mon) 6-9 p.m.

Peoria *Proctor Hospital*
February 21 (Sat) 9 a.m.-4 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 *BabyFold*
Jan. 29 & Feb. 5 (Thu) 6-9 p.m.

Champaign/Urbana *Restoration Urban Ministries*
February 5 & 10 (Tue/Thu) 6-9 p.m.

Charleston *Coles County Center for Human Services*
February 21 (Sat) and 9 a.m.-Noon
February 24 (Tue) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Danville *New Direction Treatment Center*
January 3 & 10 (Sat) 9 a.m.-Noon

Decatur *Webster Cantrell Hall*
February 3 & 10 (Tue) 6-9 p.m.

Jacksonville *DCFS*
January 20 & 27 (Tue) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Peoria *Counseling & Family Services*
January 10 & 17 (Sat) 9 a.m.-Noon

Peoria *LSSI*
March 16 & 23 (Mon) 6-9 p.m.

Quincy *Chaddock*
March 12 & 19 (Thu) 6-9 p.m.

Springfield *Faith Evangelical Lutheran*
February 9 & 16 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Taylorville *Taylorville Memorial Hosp.*
February 9 & 16 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

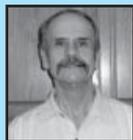
Central Connections

Sponsor

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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.

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.

Champaign/ Urbana *Restoration Urban Ministries*
Mar. 28 (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