

## Road to foster care started with 1 relative and keeps on going

**L**isa and Mark Watson of Springfield started in foster care unexpectedly by taking in related children. They were at a family function where relatives asked if they could care for their child. After agreeing to do so, it did not take long for them to realize that they had a new calling, and helping young people through foster care was the answer. Having cared for close to two dozen children, some for as long as two years, the Watsons hate to see kids go without, which keeps them motivated to continue taking children into their home.

Mark is a self-employed roofer and Lisa works for the Triangle Center as a criminal justice specialist. Lisa's primary duties focus on alcohol and drug counseling. With her position, she has encountered some of the parents of children in foster care, but she never works directly with them out of respect for their roles. However, what she sees at work and at home has taught a lot of life lessons. Fostering has actually been a learning experience for the entire family, which includes three children by birth, one by adoption and numerous children through foster care. The Watsons believe that fostering has even influenced their adult children who are building careers in criminal justice and education.

While they had to make decisions about how and when to add to their family, the Watsons don't put limits on the "type" of child they welcome

into their home. They are licensed for age zero to 18. They have also been open to various permanency goals. Reunification foster care has unique challenges, but they find that there are also special rewards from the experience.

"S o m e t i m e s you have a good feeling about the kids going home," Lisa said.

She feels fortunate to know that kids have done well after returning home. About eight years ago, a little girl left them to return home. After all this time she still stays in contact with the Watson family. She says that her foster care experience was very positive and that Lisa and Mark taught her things that have helped in her life. Still, one time reunification nearly crushed Mark. They had cared for a baby from just five weeks old to past the second birthday. They felt like they did a good job, but they knew it was the right decision for the child to go home and supported the decision.

Lisa says that she has learned a lot being a foster parent. She believes



**Mark and Lisa Watson (back row) move from relative care to caring for more than two dozen children.**

that even negative experiences with children can be understood in light of the trauma in their past and present. She does not hold it against a child even when they have stolen from them.

"When a child steals from you it can be upsetting, but I know it is a survival instinct. You can't be angry because this is all that some of these kids know."

If they could offer any advice, Lisa and Mark want to remind new foster parents that children have had different experiences than they may have, and that patience is a necessity.

## Families can find support among fellow caregivers in a nearby group

One of the responsibilities in the Foster Parent Law is to “Be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent associations.” DCFS, private agencies and community organizations sponsor many support groups and associations to assist foster and adoptive parents. The following list can help identify a group that may suit your family. This list will be updated annually. Please contact the Editor Vanessa James at [vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov) with any corrections or additions for next year.

### Circle of Support

Contact: Elizabeth Richmond at 309-671-7919 or by e-mail to [elizabeth.richmond@illinois.gov](mailto:elizabeth.richmond@illinois.gov)

Meets monthly. Call for schedule and location.

Serves Peoria-area foster, adoptive, guardianship and relative caregiver families.

Approved training credits. Call to register.

### DCFS Central Region Foster Care Advisory Council

Meets quarterly in various offices throughout the region. Call the Central Region Foster Parent Information Line for details at 866-368-5204.

### H.A.P.P.Y. FF Hancock-Adams-Pike Parent and Youth Foster Families

Call for schedule.

Contact: Ron Eitel at (217) 885-3224 or by e-mail to [Rontammy1@earthlink.net](mailto:Rontammy1@earthlink.net)

### Keeping the Promise - The Baby Fold Adoption Preservation Program

Contact: Stacy Parton at 309-454-1770 or by e-mail to [sparton@thebabyfold.org](mailto:sparton@thebabyfold.org)

Serves families receiving adoption preservation services with Keeping the Promise.

### Land of Lincoln FAPA

Contact: Cindy Backstein at 217-498-8774 or by e-mail to [backstein@mchsi.com](mailto:backstein@mchsi.com)

Call for more details.

Serves Sangamon County

### Lutheran Social Services of IL - Adoptive Families Together

Contact: Susan Goble at 309-786-6400 x228

Meets third Thursday from 6 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Also meets on Saturdays in Galesburg. Call for details. Childcare is available with reservations. Snacks provided.

### Recruitment Development and Support (RDS)

Contact: Joyce Loy at 309-794-3575

Meets third Tuesday at 9 a.m.

DCFS Office, 500 42nd Street, Rock Island

### South Central Illinois Adoptive Parents Association (SCIAPA)

Contact: Karen deCastro at 217-793-9646, [www.sciapa.org](http://www.sciapa.org)  
5004 Manhattan Dr., Springfield

Serves families in Sangamon, Christian, Macon, Montgomery, Morgan and Menard counties.

## Central Connections

Sponsor  
Robert Blackwell,  
DCFS Central Region Administrator



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Fax: 309-671-7923

E-mail [Samuel.Saladino@illinois.gov](mailto:Samuel.Saladino@illinois.gov)

Anyone can call the regional reporter with story suggestions about:

- news and schedules from foster parent associations
- local training notices
- features on foster families and community members working for children
- photos
- ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

**JUNE 9**  
**Save the date to...**

**CELEBRATE!**



All Central Region graduates from high school, college and vocational programs are invited to the Ewing Cultural Center in Bloomington from 11 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Graduates can bring two guests, as well as their worker. Contact Kevin Blickhan of DCFS for further information, at 217-221-2582.



## Foster Parent Appreciation Month: *From the DCFS Regional Administrator*



“Thank you” is a very important word that expresses appreciation for a job well done. Foster Parent Appreciation Month in Illinois gives us another opportunity to express our gratitude to our foster caregivers who have made commitments to and sacrifices for children. Staff may not always immediately acknowledge the diligence and hard work caregivers consistently display as they strive to meet the challenges that children present daily. However, we do recognize that you are an integral part of our team, helping to keep children safe. You plant a seed of self-worth, responsibility and discipline within them that develops with your nurture, allowing each child to reach their full potential.

As we say “thank you” to our caregivers this month, I am reminded of the book *The Measure of Our Success* by Marian Wright Edelman. Edelman is an author and mother who shares a powerful message of hope and purpose for caregivers as they use their extraordinary skills to ensure our children are a success. Following are a few of her “25 Lessons for Life” that could be beneficial to you as a caregiver:

- 1) **Set goals and work quietly and systematically toward them.** Set realistic goals for the children in your care based on their individual abilities, working consistently with the child to attain those goals.
- 2) **Take parenting and family life seriously and insist that those you work for and who represent you do too.** Be proactive in advocating for the needs and rights of the children placed in your care.
- 3) **Forming families is serious business.** Having an additional child come to share your home takes thought and planning. Be mindful of the trauma the child may have already experienced and how your family can assist the child in moving forward.
- 4) **Don't ever stop learning and improving your mind.** Take advantage of the trainings available to caregivers.
- 5) **Listen for “the sound of the genuine” within yourself and others.** Take time to care for yourself so that you remain physically, mentally and emotionally healthy.
- 6) **Always remember that you are never alone.** Seek support and assistance from your caseworker, remembering you are an important part of the team.
- 7) **Be confident that you can make a difference.** Remember it is not the quantity of time you share but the quality.

Thank you for your continued hard work, partnering with us as we support and strengthen the children and families we serve.

– Robert Blackwell, DCFS Regional Administrator

## *SPEAK OUT: When do you feel appreciated for doing foster care...?*



“...When we have a close bond with the case worker and good communication. I would like to brag about Lisa Sands. She is always there for everything we need – even the little questions that

may seem silly to some.

It's important to have someone like her that you can really trust and know that, no matter what, you can call and she will be there to answer and help with everything. She helps to build relationships that last a lifetime, like the one she has helped to create between our foster son's birth mom and our family. I think it helps us all to be on the same page and provide the best care for all the little angels.”

– Joseph and Sarah Curto

“...When the children we foster have a smile in their eyes, give a hug around your knees, and they say ‘I love you!’”

– Rev. Linda and Ryan Hunsaker



“...We feel appreciated when we receive comments like this one...‘when I get my child back, you can still see her because you have done so much for her’”

– Kevin Collins-Brown



## Central Region Caregiver Training

DCFS Office of Training has scheduled sessions of in-service training modules and other courses in locations across the Central Region. The listing below can help caregivers plan for their training needs. To get specific dates and locations, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center (VTC) anytime at [www.DCFStraining.org](http://www.DCFStraining.org) or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during regular business hours. In addition to classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of videos, books and online training.

<u>Central Region (Peoria Area)</u>		<u>Central Region (Champaign &amp; Springfield Areas)</u>	
<b>May</b>		<b>May</b>	
Module 9	LaSalle	Module 9	Decatur
Reunification	Moline, Peoria	Educational Advocacy	Bloomington, Decatur, Jacksonville, Taylorville
Child Trauma	Quincy		
Educational Advocacy	Galesburg, LaSalle, Peoria	<b>June</b>	
		Module 9	Bloomington
<b>June</b>		Educational Advocacy	Urbana, Danville, Mattoon, Springfield
Educational Advocacy	Macomb, Moline, Peoria, Quincy		

### In-service Training modules (scheduled periodically in classroom sessions or available on DVD)

**Module 1 - Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk (12 hours)** The focus of this module is how to build self-esteem in children; how kids act when they need recognition, power, freedom, enjoyment and to belong; and how to listen to what kids say and not what we think they say.

**Module 2 - Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs (9 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; how to catch kids being "good" and what to do to encourage positive behavior.

**Module 4 - The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (9 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.

**Module 5 – Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families (9 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 before and after visits with the birth family and how to share the parenting role with birth parents.

**Module 6 - Working as a Professional Team Member (9 hours)** Foster parents learn everyone's role 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.

**Module 7 – Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity (6 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.

**Module 8 – Promoting Permanency Outcomes (9 hours)** The focus of this training is on families who have children in care and supporting reunification of the children and parents.

**Module 9 – Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family (6 hours)** In this training caregivers learn how fostering children can affect family relationships, how to minimize stresses that can result and how to find available supports.

**Module 10 – Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children and Families (15 hours)** Foster parents will study the risk factors for chemical use, abuse, and dependency. They will understand relapse and recovery and be able to acquire skills necessary to be an active member of the team to support parents' recovery.

**Module 12 - Understanding & Promoting Pre-Teen and Teen Development (6 hours)**

This 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 module will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use as fostering teenagers in the day-to-day life of the foster family.