

# Illinois Families Now and Forever®

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship

## College funds are out there for youth in care

Students planning to attend college will likely apply for financial aid. The first step to qualify for financial aid is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid form (FAFSA). All assistance based on financial need requires filling out the FAFSA. After completing and returning the application, the student will receive the Student Aid Report (SAR) that lists the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The EFC is what the family is expected to pay, based on their family income, on top of any financial aid that is awarded.

For students who have been in the child welfare system, the major factor for financial aid is the student's status as "dependent" or "independent." As an independent student, the parent's (parent by birth or foster caregiver) income will not be included in the financial need formula. That typically results in eligibility for more financial aid. The FAFSA student section asks the question "At any

time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?" A youth in foster care or subsidized guardianship can answer yes and would automatically qualify as an independent student. Similarly, youth who left DCFS care through adoption after age 13 can also answer yes and the adoptive parents' income would not factor in the aid decision. Students should talk to their guidance counselors and college financial aid advisors for more specific details.

It is important that each youth complete and mail or e-mail their applications early in the calendar year, in order to secure the maximum benefits. Students can access the application at the website [www.fafsa.edu.gov](http://www.fafsa.edu.gov). The DCFS Education Advisors and Transition Managers can also help families make plans for college. For more information, contact DCFS at 312-814-5959.

### Illinois Student Assistance Commission

[www.collegezone.org](http://www.collegezone.org)

Look for free workshops across the state

### Free Application for Federal Student Aid Commission

[www.fafsa.edu.gov](http://www.fafsa.edu.gov)

### Minority Scholarships

[www.free-4u.com/minority.htm](http://www.free-4u.com/minority.htm)

### Orphan Foundation of America

[www.orphan.org](http://www.orphan.org)

### United Negro College Fund

[www.uncf.org](http://www.uncf.org)

These sites are a good jumping off point for students and families to research the college application process and funding sources. Be wary of any online resource that requires an up front fee for scholarship search.

### College Board

[collegeboard.com](http://collegeboard.com)

The same organization that runs the SAT exam helps students prepare for and explore ways to pay for college.

### Fastweb scholarship search

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

## *Arthur Bishop back as DCFS director*

This year marks the Department of Children and Family Services' 50th anniversary as a state agency. DCFS will go forward in 2014 under new leadership. Governor Pat Quinn announced in January that Arthur Bishop will be the new DCFS director. His appointment follows the November resignation of former director Richard Calica, who passed away in December.



Arthur Bishop's name is one that may be familiar. He started his career as a caseworker in 1995. He rose to become deputy director of Field Operations, which entailed overseeing the DCFS regional foster care programs across the state. In 2010, he was tapped to head the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. His experience with youth in foster care helped to transform that department into one that was more trauma-informed and focused on connecting youth to nurturing community living rather than residing in state facilities.

"I appreciate this new undertaking at DCFS. Every child deserves a safe environment and there is no greater responsibility than keeping our children out of harm's way," Bishop said.

The Governor also thanked acting director Denise Gonzales for stepping up to ensure a smooth transition during the two-month interim period.

## DCFS Scholarship packets due 3/31

*Open to youth currently and formerly in care*

DCFS annually provides 48 college scholarships to youth who are currently under guardianship of the Department or who left DCFS guardianship through adoption or private guardianship arrangements. Scholarship recipients receive up to four consecutive years of tuition and academic fee waivers to be used at participating Illinois state colleges or universities, a \$491 monthly stipend and a medical card.

Applicants must have a high school diploma or GED by the end of the current school year. Applications must

be postmarked by March 31. A review committee will evaluate the applications and make selections based on academic accomplishments, community service and a personal statement.

The application for the Youth in Scholarship program (CFS 438) is on the DCFS youth website [www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov) under the Education tab. Contact the youth's caseworker or call DCFS at 312-814-5959 for more information.



*Jordanne Beaulieu left last year's scholarship luncheon and headed to college with a DCFS Scholarship.*

## MOVIN' ON UP: Resources for youth moving to adulthood

There are several education and employment programs for older youth who are still in DCFS care, offered by the DCFS Youth and Family Development Office. Youth who achieved permanency through adoption or guardianship typically fall outside of eligibility. However, they can apply for the DCFS Scholarship program (above) and the Education and Training Voucher is available to youth adopted after 16.

To clarify eligibility or for further information, DCFS has Transition Coordinators assigned to each region. These individuals can help youth and their families explore different educational and employment resources from DCFS and in the community. Contact them at the nearest regional office or call 312-814-5959 or visit [www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov).

### Youth In College/Vocational Training Program

Students may choose to attend an accredited vocational school, four-year college or community college. They receive a monthly grant in the amount of \$491 provided each month for up to four (4) years. Medical cards are provided to Illinois students until the participant reaches the age of 21. Reimbursement is available for books not

covered by financial aid. Benefits are available until the earlier of four (4) years, or the semester of the 23rd birthday.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Be at least 16, and not yet, 21
- Be under court-ordered, legal responsibility of DCFS
- Maintain at least a "C" average each semester
- Maintain full time status and submit a class schedule and grades each term

### The Employment Incentive Program (EIP)

The Employment Incentive Program is designed to provide financial and supplemental services to help adolescent youth gain marketable skills through on-the-job work experience or through job training programs. Participants receive a monthly stipend in the amount of \$150.00 for a maximum of 12 months and a medical card until age 21. They may also be eligible for start-up funding of work-related items (e.g., tools, work clothing, etc.). Funding is need-based and limited to a one-time disbursement of up to \$200.00.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Be 17 years of age, and not yet 21
- Have a high school diploma or a GED certificate
- Be under court-ordered responsibility of DCFS

- Complete Casey Living Skills assessment
- Be involved in job training through a certified job skills training program or be employed for at least one month prior to applying for the EIP and working a minimum of 20 hours per week

### Education & Training Vouchers

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program assists youth with post-secondary education related expenses not covered by financial aid grants. Qualifying students can receive payment of up to \$5000 annually for education related expenses such as tuition, fees, books, supplies, uniforms, equipment, and/or transportation not covered by other grants or scholarships. Funding is available until age 21. However, if the student is enrolled in a post-secondary program before age 21 and is making satisfactory progress toward completing the program, funding is available until age 23.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Youth for whom DCFS is legally responsible or who aged out of care at age 18 or older OR
- Achieved permanency at age 16 or older through either subsidized guardianship or adoption

## From the Editor

Vanessa James



For the first issue of the year I like to take a moment to address our readers more as a parent than an editor. For a publication like ours, both roles are important. I wonder if you have ever had that “potential child” who is long on talent but short on production. Recently I learned an important lesson from that kiddo. After a lackluster basketball game, husband and I had a car talk with our daughter. Just like it says in the books, words that come out of the back of a driving parent’s head amazingly seem to stick. For the

next game, she was a new player, passing, shooting and scoring points. What happened? She said she stopped being nervous. She finally believed that she had the skills (the skills we had paid for in three summer camps and hours practicing with her in the park!). Then she relaxed and just had fun.

That scenario is one we often face with the kids who come to our homes. They are unsure of their worth and are too worried to enjoy life. We invest time and resources to build them up. We keep trying to find the words to convince them that they can do it. We stay to the final buzzer to hug them even when the ball didn’t bounce their way. Hopefully, we get to cheer that

moment when they discover what we saw in them all along.

This lesson isn’t just for kids. In this extreme parenting called foster care, we too can doubt our own skills. We get worried and forget to have fun. We have to remember that we have been trained; we have the skills to do this. We have read the articles; we’ve been “coached.” Believe it. Now take a breath, have fun and let’s give it our best shot.

Thank you for another year of sharing my parenting journey with you. There is a full team committed to writing and producing this valuable publication that makes your path a bit smoother.

## *Reimbursement program helps avoid going broke when things get broken*



Whether completely accidental or diabolically intentional, where there are children there can be damages. The foster parent often has to pick up the pieces along with the costs. The Foster Child Damage Reimbursement Program provides secondary insurance coverage for property damage and bodily injury caused by a child while the child is “in the care, custody and control” of the foster caregiver.

DCFS automatically provides this coverage at no cost to all foster families and relative caregivers. This is over and above any other valid and collectable insurance the foster families have. Foster caregivers will have to provide documentation and proof as required. Details are found in Administrative Procedure #13.

### What is covered?

- Physical damage to the prop-

erty of the foster family

- Damage caused by a child to other people’s property while the child is in foster care.
- Bodily injury to members of the foster family or to others

### Limits of Coverage

Claims are limited to \$5,000 per fiscal year. For damage to property, payments will be made based on an “actual cash value” basis, which is the amount it would cost to repair or replace the damaged property with material/s of like kind and quality, minus allowable deductions for normal physical deterioration and depreciation based on the age, condition and normal life expectancy of the property.

### Filing a claim

Immediately notify the child’s caseworker that a claim needs to be filed. The caseworker will view the damage and request that a claim form is sent directly to the caregiver. After completing the claim

form, have the child’s caseworker sign it, attach all pertinent receipts and other supporting documents, and make a copy of everything for the caregiver before the caseworker mails it to:

Foster Child Damage Reimbursement Program Coordinator  
DCFS  
James R. Thompson Center  
100 W. Randolph, 6th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60601  
Phone: 312-814-7294

The Program Coordinator will review the claim to ensure that all necessary information is present and will forward it to the Review Committee. Once a decision for payment is approved or denied, the caregiver will be contacted by mail. If payment for the claim is approved, the foster parent will receive reimbursement within 8 to 12 weeks.

## *Foster caregivers and adoptive parents have many tax benefits to explore*

The decision to support children through foster care and adoption can bring benefits as tax time nears.

### **Child Tax Credit**

Caregivers may qualify for up to \$1000 credit per child, depending on the household income, if the child:

- is your son, daughter, stepchild, foster child, brother, sister, stepbrother, stepsister, or a descendant of any of them (for example, your grandchild, niece, or nephew). An adopted child is always treated as your own child;
- was under age 17 at the end of 2013;
- did not provide over half of his or her own support for 2013;
- lived with you for more than half of 2013;
- is claimed as a dependent on your return;
- does not file a joint return for the year (or files it only as a claim for refund); and
- was a U.S. citizen, a U.S. national, or a U.S. resident alien.

See IRS Pub. 972 Child Tax Credit for more details.

### **Charitable Deductions**

If you itemize deductions, you may be able to deduct unreimbursed out-of-pocket expenses to care for a child in foster care.

### **Adoption Tax Credit**

Legislation in 2012 made the Adoption Tax Credit permanent. A family adopting from foster care can claim up to \$12,970, the maximum amount allowed under the credit. Families with incomes under \$194,580 are eligible for the full credit, which diminishes gradually

at higher incomes. Beginning with 2012 tax filings, the credit was no longer refundable. So people who do not owe taxes will not get the credit, which can only be used to offset tax liability.

### **Earned Income Tax Credit**

The federal credit for low-income, working families can be as much as \$496 to \$6,143, depending on the number of qualified children. To qualify:

- the household income must be under \$14,590 - \$52,427, depending on family size and filing status.
- you must have earned income –usually wages or self-employment. In some cases taxable disability benefits qualify as earned income.

See IRS Publication 596 for details.

### **Dependency Exemption**

The exemption for dependents could lower your income tax, and lead to benefits in these areas:

*child care credit* – for working parents (IRS pub. 503)  
*education credits* – based on out-of-pocket college expenses (IRS Pub. 970)  
*head of household filing status for unmarried parents* (IRS Pub. 501)

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These tips can get you started, but are no substitute for expert advice. Be sure to explore these topics more at [IRS.gov](http://IRS.gov) or with a professional tax advisor. Additionally, the Center for Economic Progress provides free tax preparation services for families with income under \$50,000. To find a location in Springfield or the Chicago area, go to: [www.economicprogress.org](http://www.economicprogress.org).

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## *Online course updated to include new adoption tax credit rules*



Adoption Learning Partners offers a broad catalog of online courses for current and prospective adoptive families.

In January the organization updated the Adoption Tax Credit Course to reflect changes for tax year 2013.

The adoption tax credit is one way the federal government promotes and supports adoption. Though the adoption tax credit provides a very valuable benefit to adoptive families, it is also among one of the most complicated tax law provisions.

The Adoption Tax Credit Course will help adoptive families:

- Determine their eligibility for the adoption tax credit
- See how the adoption tax credit works with different types of adoptions and financial situations
- Create a system for tracking and documenting expenses
- Prepare for year-end tax planning and work with a tax professional

This course is available for free. Caregivers can register at [www.adoptionlearningpartners.org](http://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org).

## In-service PRIDE training modules now offered online

The PRIDE in-service curriculum, developed for those who already are licensed, offers nine modules that address specific child development and parenting needs. Now those PRIDE in-service modules are available online, in addition to the traditional classroom format.

### Benefits to online In-service PRIDE for licensed caregivers

- Training needs can be met anytime of the day and anywhere with a computer and Internet access
- Caregivers can easily complete missed sessions, in-service hours, or corrective action training hours to maintain licensure.
- Caregivers can take a refresher course when dealing with a child's changing needs or difficult behavior.

### Registration process

Caregivers can access the online PRIDE modules on the Virtual Training Center (VTC) at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org). Caregivers must have an account for the Virtual Training Center. From the home page of the VTC select the link for PRIDE Online.

To request a VTC account or to ask questions, call the DCFS Registration Line toll-free at 877-800-3393 (TTY: 217-524-2070) or send an email to [dcfstraining@illinois.gov](mailto:dcfstraining@illinois.gov). Be prepared to update your address, phone number and e-mail address.

In order to receive credit for the course, trainees must listen to all videos and complete all activities. A certificate to print will be available after completing an entire PRIDE

module. A report will automatically be submitted to the DCFS Training Office. After review and within seven to 10 business days it will appear on your VTC transcript.

### In-service modules now online

*Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs*  
*Addressing Developmental Issues Related to Sexuality*  
*Responding to Signs and Symptoms of Child Sexual Abuse*  
*Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families*  
*Working as a Professional Team Member Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity*  
*Promoting Permanency Outcomes*  
*Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family*

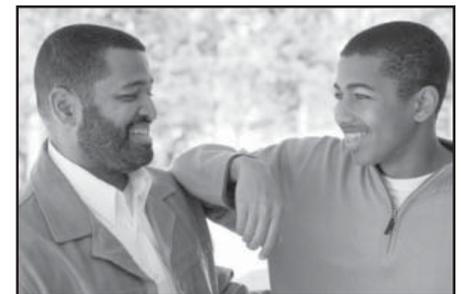
## New training provides grown-up skills to talk to youth about their sexual health

Caregivers can take a new training on the sexual health of children. So often adults avoid this important topic because it can be difficult to find the right words and accurate information.

This new training will make sure that caregivers, parents and staff get trained together on the factors that can affect a child's sexual health. They will learn how to talk with children about what is at stake and how to put children on a path toward long-term well being. Participants will be able to support youth as they make appropriate personal decisions. They will also learn behaviors and attitudes that adults can model so youth in care

can develop healthy sexual values and behaviors. The training will also provide developmentally appropriate information on relationship choices to delay or prevent teen pregnancy and decrease instances of sexually transmitted infections.

Promoting Sexual Health is a six-hour course presented in two sessions. It uses the co-trainer model, where the instructors will be a DCFS staff trainer with a foster parent/trainer. The sessions will be open to staff and parents who will learn together. To design the curriculum, young people from the Youth Advisory Board, members of the Statewide Foster Care Council



and staff who work with youth offered ideas about what the course should cover.

The training calendar has been updated with sessions for the first half of 2014. It is available online on the Virtual Training Center at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org). Caregivers can select the time and location that works best, then call the DCFS Training registration toll-free line at 877-800-3393.



# Illinois Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Bulletin

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council kicked off the new year with the January meeting in Joliet.

## Implementation Plans

The council recapped the progress on scoring all of the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans that were due November 30. Notifications will soon be going to the foster care programs. Next the council members will move into the onsite review phase where they visit agencies and interview staff and caregivers about the implementation plan. This oversight of the implementation plans is mandated by the Foster Parent Law and is a critical endeavor for the council each year.

## PRIDE Training Review

The council had an opportunity to weigh in on revisions underway for

the updated PRIDE, pre-service training. DCFS training staff presented the new concept and proposed format. The training committee and other members were invited to take a close look at drafts and provide comments from their experienced perspectives.

## Membership news

Southern Region has a new caregiver representing it on the council. Mark McDaniel, of McLeansboro, has been licensed for foster care for five years through Lutheran Social Services of Illinois. He adopted two children from foster care. Currently he is caring for a sibling group of five.



The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council was founded in conjunction with the Illinois Foster Parent Law. Membership consists of caregivers, agency representatives and other experts in child welfare, who are appointed by the DCFS director. The mandated positions for caregivers are spread among the DCFS regions.

The council holds open meetings at least six times a year, and more as needed, in locations around the state.

**The next meeting of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council will be on February 21 in Bloomington at 9 a.m. Call DCFS Training, Caregiver and Parent Support at 217-524-2422 for details.**

## DCFS sets up digital resources on the Internet

For a fast way to stay connected on child welfare information, turn to the Internet and social networks with these new DCFS digital resources.

### DCFS on the Internet

The DCFS website has a new, simplified URL; now it can be found at [www.DCFS.illinois.gov](http://www.DCFS.illinois.gov). On the refreshed site are links to publications; DCFS policy, rules and procedures; news on the various advisory councils and back issues of the newsletter, along with many other resources.

### DCFS on Facebook

Caregivers can “like” the new DCFS Facebook page to get a feed

of DCFS and child welfare-related news. The page is listed on Facebook as Illinois DCFS.

### DCFS on Twitter

Caregivers can now follow DCFS on Twitter @IllinoisDCFS. Look for tweets regarding upcoming events and links to online articles and resources for families.

### DCFS Virtual Training Center

The VTC is the one stop for training registration and information. Caregivers can also download materials for courses, track credit hours, and link to online courses at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org)

## Get digital delivery

Many caregivers have decided to skip the paper and request electronic versions of the newsletter, *Illinois Families Now and Forever*®.

When you move to the online version, you still receive all the same valuable information with more benefits. It comes faster, is easier to file, saves money and protects the environment.

To make the switch, send an email to [vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov) (there is a dot before “james”). Be sure to include your name and mailing address. We will stop the hard copies and send you an e-mail each time a new issue is ready to read online.

## DCFS transition coordinator connects youth to resources for move to adulthood

Gail Simpson, a Central Region DCFS transition coordinator, is responsible for providing information to Central Region



youth as they transition out of care onto the path to adulthood. She also shares information with caseworkers, foster caregivers and others. Transition coordinators are the point people for various programs for education, employment and independence available through the DCFS Office of Youth and Family Development. In addition to these programs Simpson can help youth in foster care with school matters, the DCFS scholarship program and employment opportunities. She can be reached at 217-524-2525 or [gail.simpson@illinois.gov](mailto:gail.simpson@illinois.gov). Many of the transition services are described on page 2 of this issue.

### Life Skills Training

Several important youth programs have recently been enhanced. The Life Skills Program was revamped to ensure that older youth have practical information to prepare for adulthood. Youth at age 14 should begin the process by taking the Casey Life Skills Assessment. Their caseworker will submit a referral packet for life skills. Youth are then connected with Southern Illinois Collegiate Common Market (SICCM), who assigns life skills instructors. Each program addresses the following eight life

skills categories identified by DCFS and the Casey Foundation as key areas of need:

- Daily living
- Career and education planning
- Work and study skills
- Housing and money management
- Relationships and communication skills
- Self care
- Looking forward
- Permanency

Youth with open DCFS foster care cases will learn financial planning, health and personal care, educational success and career planning in preparation for their life after DCFS care.

### Youth Advisory Board

For additional growth and leadership development, all youth between 14 and 21 can participate in a Youth Advisory Board. The Central Region Youth Advisory Boards, which host monthly meetings, promote youth empowerment, self-advocacy and information exchange. Contact LeShonda Rogers of Primed for Life at 217-789-2980 to learn more.

More information on transition resources for older youth is at the DCFS-sponsored website [www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov).

## *Be listed in the 2014 directory for foster parent associations and support groups*

If you lead a support group or association for foster or adoptive families, you can be included in the directory of support groups, published in May in the Foster Parent Appreciation Month issue.

Please send the following information by March 30. New listings and updates should be sent in writing by email or post to:

Vanessa James, DCFS  
100 W. Randolph, 6th fl.  
Chicago, IL 60601  
[vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov) (there is a dot before "james")

Be sure to include:

- Name of group
- Meeting schedule (e.g. second Tuesday of the month at 10 a.m.)
- Meeting location
- Contact name with phone number/ email
- Any other notes (e.g. potluck dinner, child care provided, RSVP required, etc.)

## Holiday festivities spread fun to families across Central Region

*There was plenty of holiday fun happening across the Central Region as staff from many DCFS offices celebrated with the families they support. What follows is a sampling of the spirit of giving.*

On December 17, the Urbana field office hosted their annual Christmas party with games, refreshments, and gifts for children served by the office. The employees of Champaign County graciously donated gifts and CASA of Champaign County volunteered



their time and donated homemade Christmas cookies. Children also were the recipients of Barnes & Noble's book donation program.

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A snowstorm didn't hold back the families and workers of the Galesburg/Canton field offices. They celebrated with a Christmas party at the newly remodeled Discovery Depot on December 13. The event included private agency and DCFS foster parents and was sponsored by Chris and Heather Kanakares. Guests enjoyed pizza and brought side dishes to share.

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On Friday, December 13, the Springfield field office held a Christmas party. Despite the poor weather that night, almost all families were able to make the event, with over 50 people in attendance. Children received gifts donated through an Angel

tree. Jean Chiles, a foster parent support specialist, planned the party and ensured that all children received a gift.

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On December 19, foster parents served by Lutheran Social Services of Champaign County celebrated Christmas with a party hosted by First Christian Church of Champaign. Volunteers from First Christian church provided lots of enjoyable activities for children and their families. There was face painting, an indoor playground, indoor soccer, musical chairs and arts and crafts. Health Alliance employees donated gift baskets for foster parents. Gifts for children were also donated by St. John's Lutheran School and church, Little Hearts Daycare, and Lutheran Churches in the community.

### Customer Service Line

**The number for the DCFS Central Region Foster Parent Customer Service Line is 866-368-5204.**

**The Customer Service Line is designed for calls from foster families whose licenses are supervised by DCFS Central Region. Agency-supervised homes should work directly with the agency that monitors their license.**

**This toll-free line is staffed Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., excluding state holidays. The line is equipped with voicemail.**

**The calls can be about issues or concerns that caregivers have not been able to resolve through normal channels. The goal is to have a response time of 24 to 48 hours for all calls. This is not set up to be an emergency response line. If a caregiver has an urgent request, it is best to call the field office or the after-hours number.**

### Facebook for Champaign County foster homes

Champaign County foster parents can now stay informed with social media. DCFS Foster Parent Support Specialist Julie Cebulski manages a Facebook page committed to helping foster parents from all agencies stay on top of current issues regarding children and foster care. Personal information on specific families or children will not be posted. The page will also feature upcoming training events available to foster parents.

It can be found on Facebook as Foster Family Resources of Champaign County. Like the page and stay informed.

## Local advisory council structure keeps caregivers involved

Central Region's DCFS foster care program promotes better communication between staff and foster caregivers through quarterly local advisory council meetings. Meetings are held in local offices with staff present to help address concerns or questions foster parents may have. Often caregivers can earn training credit hours because of the valuable information that is shared.

Each of the six Central Region areas convenes a local advisory council. To take part in a local advisory council meeting, find the schedule or review the minutes, call the nearest area office or the Central Region Foster Parent Help Line at 866-368-5204.

Following is an update on the recent activities of some of the area councils.

### Rock Island

Rock Island foster parents have a voice through their local foster care advisory council meetings. During a recent meeting foster parents expressed some concerns about communication with the

contracted agency that transports and supervises children at family visits. In response, a meeting was convened for the transporters and the families. All individuals that work for the transportation agency were in attendance. Positive feedback was given and foster parents were able to voice their concerns. A positive outcome of the meeting is that a form was created for communication between the transporters and foster parents. The form gives opportunity to communicate what activities the child did during a visit, what they may have eaten, and the child's demeanor during the visit.

### Urbana/Danville

Urbana and Danville field offices continue to meet regularly for their local advisory council meetings. At each meeting representatives from the local office are present and give an opportunity for foster parents to voice their concerns. The foster parent support specialist provides information about the region's foster parent law implementation plan. Each meeting will also have a training topic.

### Urbana Field Office

January 16  
Car Seat Safety

April 10  
Bullying

July 10  
Juvenile Court and Legal Matters  
in Child Protection

October 10  
Discipline and the Foster Child

### Danville Field Office

February 7  
Car Seat Safety

May 1  
Bullying

August 7  
Juvenile Court and Legal Matters  
in Child Protection

November 6  
Discipline and the Foster Child

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## Bloomington families find strength in numbers with support group

Bloomington-area foster parents can receive training and support through the Foster/Adopt Parent Support Group. The support group provides an opportunity to talk to fellow foster families and receive training on various topics related to parenting and foster care. Maria Levengood, foster parent support specialist in Bloomington, coordinates the Foster/Adopt Parent Support Group in Normal. She has led the group for the last 14 years. The group offers support to foster and adoptive families by simply providing a meeting place for families who have a common factor: they all have foster or adopted children.

During the past year the support group meetings have held trainings on Individualized Education Plans, how to advocate for your child, and CPR training. It is also planning a Parent Café, which will introduce the six protective factors that can help foster parents build stronger families.

Meetings are held the third Tuesday of each month at Grace Church, 1311 Hovey in Normal. To join their mailing list, contact Marie Levengood at: [jeffnmaria6@gmail.com](mailto:jeffnmaria6@gmail.com) or find them on Facebook: Foster/Adopt Parent Support Group in Normal.

## Central Region Training

The DCFS Office of Training has scheduled sessions of in-service training modules and other courses in locations across the region. To get specific dates and locations, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center at [www.DCFstraining.org](http://www.DCFstraining.org). Click on any of the links under Training Schedule to access course descriptions, in-service training and Educational Advocacy Training or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during business hours.

The Virtual Training Center (VTC) is your tool to:

- Get training news and information;
- Check available trainings;
- View/print your training transcript;
- Register and take on-line courses;
- Download course materials to use in class or to access after training; and
- Get alerts for changes in course schedules.

### DIGITAL TRAINING MATERIALS NOW AVAILABLE

As we move into the digital age and aim to use fewer printed resources, DCFS Training has made many PRIDE materials easily available on the home page of the Virtual Training Center at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org).

Anyone may print the materials or download them onto almost any electronic device and bring their device to training class. Trainees who have no digital access should speak with their trainers when they arrive in class, so we can accommodate everyone.

## Who do you call when....?

### **...A child in your home is having a psychiatric crisis that may require hospitalization?**

Call the CARES line at 800-345-9049. However, if a child is a danger to himself or others, call 911 first. The CARES line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### **...You want information on becoming a foster parent or on adoption?**

The Adoption Information Center of Illinois (AICI) can answer your questions and connect you with a licensing agency. The toll-free number is 800-572-2390. AICI also maintains information about the children who are featured in the newsletter.

### **...You have questions about your board check?**

Call the DCFS Central Payment Unit at 800-525-0499 if your check comes from DCFS. If your check comes from a private agency, contact the agency.

### **...You need to report a child missing or have information about a youth who has run away?**

To report information on missing youth call 866-503-0184. The toll-free number is available 24 hours a day every day of the week. If you feel the child is in danger, call 911 first.

### **...Your adoption or guardianship is final but you have questions about the subsidy?**

Call the subsidy worker assigned to the case or the Adoption Support Line at 888-96-ADOPT so you can be connected to the right individual for help.

### **...You are having family problems with your adopted child?**

Contact the Adoption/Subsidized Guardianship Preservation Program that serves your area. Call the Adoption Support Line at 888-96-ADOPT.

### **...You have questions about your child's medical card?**

Call 800-228-6533.

### **...You need to find a phone number for a caseworker?**

Call the main switchboard in Chicago at 312-814-6800 or the State of Illinois Operator at 312-793-3500.

### **...You feel you aren't being treated fairly by DCFS or a private agency?**

If you've already tried to resolve the issue with the caseworker and his or her supervisor and are not sure where to turn, call the Advocacy Office at 800-232-3798.

### **...You are having a hard time getting services for your child at school?**

Most private agencies have an education liaison, and each DCFS region has education advisors who can help. Call your agency or nearest DCFS office to be connected to the right educational resource for your area.

### **...You have questions about programs for youth approaching adulthood?**

Contact the transition coordinator that serves your area, by calling the nearest DCFS regional office. The transition coordinator can advise on programs such as life skills training, preparation for higher education and employment assistance. Details on these programs can also be found at the Get Goal'd website [www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov).

### **...You have an idea for an article in the newsletter?**

Each region has reporters to help gather local news. The names and contact information are listed on the back page of each edition. You can contact the Editor, Vanessa James, at 312-814-6800 or send an e-mail message to [vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov).

## A family for me: Call 1-800-572-2390 for more information



Crystal (C8062)

**Crystal [8062]** Crystal, 13, is a sensitive young lady who is aware of herself and her surroundings, and who strives to make and maintain connections with people. She is able to identify her feelings, but would benefit from continued guidance on how to best process and express those feelings. Crystal enjoys writing and listening to music, and also enjoys being active. She is particularly fond of dancing, jumping on trampolines, and participating in gymnastics.

Crystal's worker says she is a diligent student who puts forth a lot of effort in school. She enjoys having conversations with adults and peers alike, and is eager to form positive, trusting relationships.

The right parents for Crystal can provide a loving, structured home for her. You can encourage her as she learns to express her feelings appropriately. You can also establish and enforce boundaries with respect to personal space and appropriate topics of conversation. Crystal would like to have a "mom that cares." She would also like to join a family with other children, particularly girls who are close to her in age. Other children in the home should be older than Crystal.



Dallas (C8092)

thoughts and feelings of others, and does his best to make others happy. When he is not engaged in conversation, he enjoys reading fantasy books, playing sports, and collecting Pokémon and Bakugan cards.

Dallas' worker says he is an expressive child who is able to clearly communicate his wants, needs, and emotions.

Dallas would benefit from parents who can establish clear boundaries and enforce the rules of your home in a fair, consistent manner. You can also encourage Dallas as he works to establish relationships that are based on mutual respect. Dallas would like to connect with a family that includes a mom, a dad, and, possibly, older siblings.

**Kevin [8104]** If there's a professional wrestling show on TV, Kevin, 13, will want to sit down and watch. If there's a professional wrestling event coming to town, Kevin will want to attend. If there's a professional wrestling aisle at the store, Kevin will want to spend a lot of time browsing. This young man is a huge fan of the wrestler John Cena and has decorated his room with dozens of WWE posters, magazines, and action figures. Kevin is developmentally delayed, and while he sometimes struggles to remain on task, he is generally friendly, capable, and independent. He maintains regular contact with his birth mother and older sister, a practice that should continue as he transitions to a new family.

Kevin's teachers say he has made significant strides over the past two years in terms of his focus, his behavior, his social

skills, and his ability to work independently.

The forever family for Kevin can help him stay organized and on task by giving him prompts, reminders, and time limits, and by stressing the importance of his daily routine. You can provide plenty of opportunities for him to play with children his own age. You can also work with various professionals who can help you understand, and meet his educational, social, and academic needs. The ideal family would consist of two parents living in a rural community.

**Marcus [8055]** "I could really use a hand." With Marcus at your side, get used to saying that less and less. This young man loves to be helpful, and he is often eager to pitch in around the house. He enjoys spending time with adults, playing with other children, and taking care of animals. Marcus, 14, also has a lot of creative energy, which he channels into singing, dancing, and various art projects. Whenever he has downtime, he enjoys reading, playing board games, and playing video games.

Marcus' worker says he is an affectionate child who loves his sisters and would benefit from ongoing contact with them, including regular visits.

Permanent parents for Marcus should be able to encourage him to give voice to his feelings, and to embrace the changes in his life. You can also work with various professionals who can help you understand and meet his emotional and academic needs. The ideal family would include a female head of household. Other children in the home should be older than Marcus.



Kevin (C8104)



Marcus (C8055)

Please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390, or see the AICI Web site – [www.adoptinfo-il.org](http://www.adoptinfo-il.org) if you are interested in adopting one of these children or learning about other children waiting to be adopted.





## Illinois Families Now and Forever®

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Purpose: To help busy families more effectively parent children currently or formerly in DCFS care. To bring them the best information from the most knowledgeable sources. To promote statewide teamwork in finding permanency for children.

Address Changes: Families must notify their licensing representative, who will notify DCFS. Agencies should change office addresses or request staff copies through the Editor.

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Children and Supporting Families*



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Current and back issues of *Illinois Families Now and Forever®*  
are available online in English and Spanish at [www.DCFS.illinois.gov](http://www.DCFS.illinois.gov)