Cook County Advocate

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News for Chicago Metro Area Families

Free arts and recreation programs ready for new year

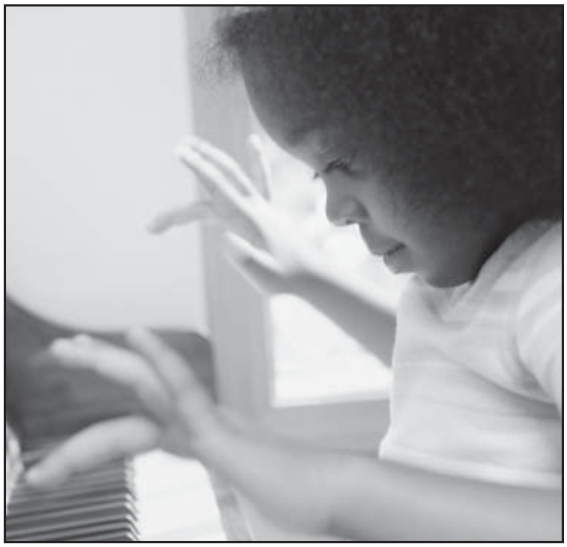
Youth flourish when art, music and recreation are in their lives. Those endeavors are invaluable, but can come with a high price tag. However, young people in foster care or those receiving adoption or guardianship subsidies can explore a variety of free cultural and recreational activities that will enhance their lives.

Project S.O.A.R. (Statewide Opportunities for Art and Recreation) is sponsored by DCFS to bring free classes to youth throughout the three Cook County regions. Classes include music, art, media, dance and drama, and are conducted weekly to coincide with the school calendar.

Youth ages 3 to 18 who are currently under DCFS care or who left through adoption or guardianship arrangements can enroll in one course each session from the many offerings.

"Our children should have the same chance to experience art and recreation, just as any other child would. Being in care is, by its very nature, tough. This is one way caregivers can help normalize the situation and bring some good out of it," said DCFS Director Erwin McEwen.

DCFS believes in the proven power of the arts to transform children's lives. Over several years, the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services has forged relationships with art, cultural and recreational programs to bring families educational opportunities through S.O.A.R. Top-notch instructors from respected arts organizations present a wide range of engaging programs to build excitement for the arts.



"It is vitally important that we offer our youth these outlets for creative learning and fun. The programs offered through S.O.A.R. can bring out hidden talents and give a child a positive boost that could change his or her outlook on life," said Daniel Fitzgerald, deputy director for the Division of Service Intervention.

A new session begins the week of January 25 and runs until May for most courses. Registration is by phone only (no voice mail) at 312-814-4145, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. The registration period begins in December and continues until classes are full. Transportation is provided based on need, availability, class location and transportation guidelines. Upon registering, caregivers can ask for details.

Project S.O.A.R. course offerings

- After-School in the Arts
- Ballet
- Percussion
- Black Ensemble/ New Directions
- Photography
- Clarinet
- Piano
- Children's Choir
- Chorus
- Drum Classes
- Dance
- Teen Program
- Clarinet
- Dance Forms
- Violin
- Discover Music/Discover Life
- Visual Art
- Arts = Smarts Program
- New Way Learning Center Youth After School Program

Alternative School Networks helps students "drop back in" to schools

School for some teens is an unwelcoming place that holds little incentive to get them to attend or to stay until graduation. Unfortunately, when young people drop out of high school, they may be free of the "hassle" of school, but they hamper their chances to live independently in the long-term. After they leave school they may come to feel differently, but realize their options are limited. DCFS is focusing resources to make sure those students who want to return to school can have another chance. The Alternative Schools Network reaches out to youth who have dropped out of school, been expelled or are at risk of missing out on their diploma. The schools in the program will work with older students to get them back on track for a diploma and provide practical life skills.

In the Chicago area, the Alternative Schools Network maintains 17 neighborhood schools. Youth who have been adopted or moved to guardianship can apply to schools in the network. However, for youth who still have open DCFS cases, the Alternative Schools Network offers the Youth Scholars, Skills and Service (YS3) program. This program is open to young people ages 16 to 21 who are in DCFS foster care, group home or independent living programs. The YS3 program combines in-class instruction with after school courses in life skills, leadership, financial literacy and social/cultural development. On top of the instruction are added layers of support through mentoring, tutoring and counseling.

As students work their way to their diploma, they can also earn money to continue their education. For each computer-assisted course a young person completes in the after school program, they receive $250, of which $200 goes into a scholarship account. Students also earn $2 per hour for the time they spend in the after school programs, which also gets deposited into their account. After the student graduates and enrolls in college or some other type of vocational training, they can draw down from the funds accumulated in their scholarship account plus an additional $600 award.

Because of the many moves these young people made, they often have deficiencies. But when they finally have stability and incentive, they can do well.

Typically, the schools in the Network are small schools in neighborhood settings that operate like their own mini-communities. Students attend classes during the school day and participate in the after school activities. Adult mentors are available to assist youth. The mentors go beyond role models and accompany youth to court, or go to doctor's appointments and help with schoolwork. There are also services for students who are parents.

Alternative Schools Networks have nearly 250 openings for DCFS youth. A caseworker must complete the referral for the DCFS programs, however caregivers, counselors and others can start the process. Enrollment is on a rolling basis so there is no need to wait. Call 773-728-4030 for more information.

Alternative Schools Network

Ada S. McKinley
2929 S. Wabash

Antonia Pantoja (Aspira)
3119 N. Pulaski

ASA Academy
4651 W. Madison

Bronzeville
4622 S. King Dr.

CCA Academy
1231 S. Pulaski

Charles Hamilton Houston
9035 S. Langley

Community Youth
Development Institute
7836 S. Union

Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos
2739 W. Division

Howard Leadership Academy
7647 N. Paulina

Jobs For Youth
50 E. Washington #400

Latino Youth
2200 S. Marshall

Olive Harvey
10001 S. Woodlawn

Prologue Learning Ctr.
640 W. Irving Park Road,

Sullivan House
8164 S. South Chicago Ave.

West Town
2021 W. Fulton

Westside Alternative
839 N. Central

Winnie Mandela (Prologue)
7847 S. Jeffrey

One caregiver teaches others how to build stronger families

The Strengthening Families program is an initiative to prevent child abuse and neglect that brings together early childhood center staff, parents, child welfare agencies, and others to strengthen families with young children. At the heart of the program are Parent Cafés, where parents can talk freely about the challenges of raising children and find support. The café concept was recently tailored for foster parent caregivers, and Angela Barber is leading the way in Cook County. Barber, a foster and adoptive parent to two young daughters, is specially trained to lead the group discussions.

She first encountered the Parent Café during a presentation at a Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council meeting, where she is vice chair. The presenters took members through a sample of a typical cafe they would do for parents.

"I was blown away. This is really good stuff for foster parents, too. I went through the training and became a parent leader," she said.

Now she is the Chicago regional coordinator. That new role is expanding since the council helped design cafés with discussion questions specific to foster and adoptive caregivers. Those cafe sessions began in October.

Barber brings a multi-faceted perspective to the discussions. She has been licensed since 2002. Her first daughter was placed with her at nine months old. Barber built a mentoring relationship with her mother. She has maintained connections with her father's family through the six-year journey toward an adoption that is soon to be finalized. Her youngest daughter would have been placed within days of her birth had it not been for an extended hospital stay since she was born premature. She left the hospital at two months old, weighing only four pounds. Barber has raised both girls as a single mother.

Adoptive mother Angela Barber (L) is now certified to lead Parent Cafés for Strengthening Families Illinois

"My friends thought I was insane to take this on by myself, but I did not want to wait and miss having kids," she said.

That led to the initial phone call to inquire about adoption.

"I don't know that I realized then that I was calling about DCFS kids, but it was probably meant to be. I had come full circle. I had been in the system myself," she recalled.

After turning five, Barber spent three years in care, mostly with relatives. She sometimes wonders why the stories of children who go into care, come out and go on to be successful adults don't get more attention. She surprised herself by speaking openly of her own experiences for the first time in Washington DC before a panel on guardianship subsidies for relative care. In her work with the Parent Cafés and the advisory councils that she serves on, she vows to continue to advocate for those who care for children.

To learn more about the Strengthening Families program in Illinois, go to www.strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org.

Adoption support group adds group for children

Metropolitan Family Services has recently added a concurrent children's group, along with the support group for adoptive and guardianship parents. The group meets twice monthly to discuss various adoption-related issues.

2nd and 4th Mondays
10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. or
6 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
Metropolitan Family Services
Midway Center
3843 W. 63rd St.
Chicago, IL
773-884-3310

A light meal will be provided. RSVP to Anthony Heard at 773-653-9942.

Cook South welcomes new Regional Administrator

Dianne Bradie-Baskin

Dianne Bradie-Baskin, the new Regional Administrator for Cook South, brings experience and familiarity to the position. This is the start of her second chapter with DCFS. After coming up the ranks as an adoption caseworker and supervisor, Bradie-Baskin served as Regional Administrator in the Cook North Region. She left the Department in 1996 to start a consulting practice for community organizations. From there she came back to state government to administer programs for the Department of Human Services. Now she is happy to focus her energies on serving the children and families in Cook South.

Since starting in child welfare, she has been encouraged by caregivers' years of commitment to a "job" with a work schedule that goes 24 hours, non-stop.

"The caregiver's role of nurturing, guiding, directing and supporting our children is a complex and challenging task, particularly with the high risk families we encounter," she said.

"Caregivers are an integral part of our mutual success. I look forward to joining their efforts.

Cook South acts to improve permanency

Cook South Regional action teams are looking for involved foster parents to join them in improving the permanency outcomes of children in the child welfare system. These action teams came out of the Permanency Enhancement Symposium that DCFS hosted in June with the African-American Family Commission and the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The symposium served as a town hall meeting to bring many diverse voices together to address issues that persist in the child welfare system related to the over-representation of children of color in foster care. More specifically, the administration is focusing on permanency outcomes for African-American children. Research shows that they are most likely to remain in foster care longer, are moved more often, receive less services, and are less likely to be returned home or adopted. Other issues being addressed include:

- Revamping the investigative procedures in cases where the risk of harm to a child is low
- Improving the quality and frequency of visitation between parents and teenaged foster children
- Implementing The Foster Child Successful Transition into Adult Act, which calls for DCFS to provide developmental and financial assistance for children aging out of foster care.

The symposium brought together parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, child welfare professionals, community and faith-based providers, court and law enforcement personnel in Cook County. These stakeholders explored how various roles, philosophies, and practices may impede permanency outcomes for the children in care.

From there, three Cook South Action Teams have been meeting monthly to devise strategies to improve permanency outcomes. One of the Cook South Action Teams is developing strategies for the permanency goal of "Return Home." This team has submitted information to policy makers regarding redefining the definition of "family." Some other action teams strategies strengthen families and prevent children from coming into care incorporate the Family Advocacy Centers and the TDM (Team Decision Making) process.

The teams welcome more input from caregivers. Individuals who wish to participate on an action team can contact one of the DCFS staff listed below:

Bremen Campbell
773-371-6388
Bremen.Campbell@illinois.gov

Jeffery Walker
312-793-5391
Jeffery.Walker@illinois.gov

Felicia Fair-Thompson,
708-210-3084
Felicia.Fair-Thompson@illinois.gov

Cook Central caregivers approve regional plan

Cook Central Regional Management worked with caregivers and other stakeholders to develop the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan, which all foster care programs must submit to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council. The Cook Central region submitted the plan that the regional council reviewed and approved before the November 30 deadline.

The plan details how the program will protect foster parent rights and assist families with the responsibilities outlined in the Law.

Lead Foster Parent Support Specialist Adrienne Welenc; Jerry Welenc, chair of the regional foster parent advisory council; and DCFS Placement Manager Mildred Cardona have been strong proponents of open communication and effective partnership to craft the perennially successful Cook Central Foster Parent Implementation Plan.

The 2009 Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan is available for all caregivers to review. Contact the Support Services phone line at 773-292-7879.

Free culinary training and job help for youth

Oliver's Kitchen, housed at the Chicago Anti-Hunger Federation on the northwest side of the city offers a free 12-week culinary course. The training runs Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at 4345 W. Division. Participants must be at least 18 years old, drug free and earn less than $24,000 per year to be entitled to free tuition. As this is a workforce development program, the graduate must be willing to work for at least six months in the food industry. The program offers assistance in job placement.

Other requirements include a test for TB and Hepatitis, passing the TABE test (5th grade level math, reading and word comprehension), and completing their application. The application can be picked up at their office at 4345 W. Division or printed off their Web site at www.antihunger.org.

There are 20 slots per class and the next two classes are scheduled to begin on January 4 and April 5, 2010. Submitting the application early improves the applicant's chance of being admitted to this very popular and quickly filled program.

When the student graduates he or she will have passed the tests to receive: the Food Safety and Sanitation Certificate from Chicago, Certificates of Catering, Kitchen and Sanitation from Oliver's Kitchen, and the Serve Safe Managers Certificate from the National Restaurants Association. The graduate will also be eligible to take the State of Illinois test to be licensed in Food Safety and Sanitation.

For more information, contact Donna Greer at 773-252-3663.

Message from the Cook Central Regional Administrator

Joyce Hall

There is an "R" word that some in child welfare don't want to acknowledge. We've all seen and have probably used the word "retaliation' in connection with actions like revenge, but it should not come into play if we are looking out for the best interests of the children. Yet, the reality exists that sometimes the threat of retaliation exists whenever individuals have to make subjective and complicated decisions. Because the threat is real, it must be recognized and must be dealt with swiftly and handily.

Some caregivers have stated that they feel staff have made and carried out threats against them for things such as speaking forcefully on behalf of their foster children, making complaints, or even for disagreeing with their caseworkers. I encourage caretakers to contact the local supervisors or even regional administration if there is even a suspicion of retaliation. An open and honest conversation is sometimes all that is needed to resolve a negative situation. As Regional Administrator, I can pledge that we will address any and all concerns from our valued caregivers, including retaliation.

With that said, I hope that during this holiday season you can focus on other R-words like rest, relaxation and recreation.

Message from the Cook North Regional Administrator

Jackie Bright

As foster parents, you have received "a calling" and partnered with DCFS Cook North Region. You have made a profound commitment to protect our children by providing a safe, nurturing, and loving home environment. As Regional Administrator, I find comfort in the work that you're doing and the partnerships we continue to establish.

Although the Christmas holiday season is a time of celebration and fellowship with family and friends, it is also a time for reflection on the blessings bestowed upon us. Through teamwork, we have made numerous accomplishments this year. You've joined us in strengthening and supporting our families by involving our children and youth with community programs and activities. You have worked with families to ensure timely reunification. In August, you supported the Cook North Annual Back to School Fair so children could start off a productive year with new book bags and school supplies.

Cook North Region will continue to support your endeavors to ensure that the needs of our children are met. Please contact me if you experience any difficulties, so we can work together to reach resolution. I'm looking forward to growing together in 2010, as we strengthen and support our families and children.

Cook North Christmas starts in summertime

At Christmas time, gift giving is usually part of the celebration. Each year, the Cook North foster parent support specialists try to help make the foster children's holiday brighter by working with individuals who wish to donate gifts for them. Starting during the summer, DCFS workers are asked to identify specific types of gifts that foster children in DCFS-supervised homes might like to receive.

As the holidays draw near, many people contact the region wishing to donate gifts to the foster children. There are some who have just recently started calling, and other people who have been doing this for more than 20 years. These calls come from families who live near one of the DCFS offices, businesses that may have overstock, and individuals who want to share their blessings with a child.

Mattie Brown, lead foster parent support specialist, sorts through Christmas donations that will go to youth in care.

The foster parent support specialists and the DCFS Office of Communications work to match the donations to families so that foster caregivers can make Christmas memorable for the children in their homes. Special thanks go to Mattie Brown, Edith Cruz and Desiree Benbenk, the foster parent support specialists who have worked so diligently on this special program.

Foster parent training slated for new year

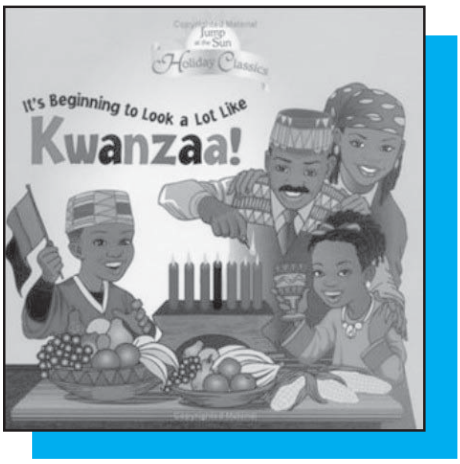
The Cook North Region will continue to offer training for caregivers on the topics that surfaced from their suggestions. Foster parents who are interested in these trainings must register in advance since training dates and topics are tentative and subject to possible change.

The training sessions are held at 1911 S. Indiana. They typically begin at 10 a.m. and are usually over at Noon. Credit hours are also offered.

- January 28: Changes in Education and Changes in 402
- February 26: Panel Presentation: Caregivers, Birth Parents, and Permanency Workers Working Together toward Permanency
- March 26: Anger Management in Children and Adolescents
- April 29: CPR Training
- May 21: Cultural Sensitivity Training
- June 25: Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder

To register and confirm date and location, contact Iris Cuevas at 312-808-5000.

Stay busy with free (or almost free) holiday fun in the city



Kwanzaa movie

Learn about Kwanzaa at the acclaimed DuSable Museum of African American History. The "Penny Theater" program will present the movie *It Is Beginning to look a Lot Like Kwanzaa.* Through the rhythmic sounds of traditional West African drums and a look into the colorful significance of the clothes and candles, viewers are introduced to the African-American family celebration of Kwanzaa.

Wednesday, December 30
Time: 10:30 a.m.
Cost: One penny – every adult must be accompanied by a child.

For reservations, call 773-947-0600 ext. 225, or RSVP online at dusablemuseum.org

DuSable Museum
740 East 56th Place, Chicago
Hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, Noon to 5 p.m.

Mayor Daley's Chicago Sports Fest

Head to Navy Pier for a two-day, free sports extravaganza. Certified fitness instructors will lead classes in cardio kickboxing, salsa aerobics, Pilates, yoga and more! There will be fitness demonstrations, as well as lectures on nutrition, bike safety, and family fitness. Essential health screenings will also be available, including body fat composition measurements.

The Chicago Public Schools will host the action-packed Holiday Hoops Basketball boys and girls sophomore tournament. Youth can also participate in clinics for fencing, football, tennis and martial arts. There will even be an appearance by the Harlem Globetrotters on Monday, December 28.

December 27 & 28
Time: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Cost: Free
McCormick Place in Halls A & B
2301 S. Martin Luther King Drive

Brookfield Zoo Holiday Magic

Brookfield Zoo will be adorned with nearly one million twinkling lights illuminating the zoo's walkways. Visitors can enjoy ice-carving demonstrations, live musical performances, magicians, and the Wild Lights Spectacular light show at Roosevelt Fountain. Santa will be available to hear children's wish lists (through December 20) at the Candy Cane Corner, and many exhibits will be open for viewing favorite animals.

December 5-6, 12-13, 19-20, 26-31
Time: 4 p.m. - 9 p.m.
Cost: $12 for adults, $8 for children and seniors

Brookfield Zoo is located on First Avenue between Ogden Avenue and 31st Street in Brookfield, Illinois.

Lincoln Park Zoo Zoolights

The zoo will be dressed up in holiday lights, and Santa will be on hand in the Lion House for photos during the annual Zoolights Celebration. There will be crafts for kids and a spectacular musical light show on the South Lawn.

Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights: Nov. 27-29, Dec. 4-6, 11-13
Open every night from December 18 - January 3 (excluding December 24 & 25)
Cost: Free, refreshments and ride prices vary
Time: 5 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Lincoln Park Zoo is located off Lake Shore Drive at the Fullerton Parkway exit.

Cook County Advocate Regional Reporters

Cook North ~ Joann Niemuth
847-745-3048 office
847-745-3066 fax
Joann.Niemuth@illinois.gov
8140 N. McCormick, Skokie, IL 60076

Cook Central ~ Merrylee Guge-Jorgensen
773-292-7700 office
773-292-7861 fax
Merrylee.Guge-Jorgensen@illinois.gov
3518 W. Division, Chicago, IL 60651

Cook South ~ Rod Mulford
773-371-6350 office
773-371-6065 fax
Rod.Mulford@illinois.gov
6201 S. Emerald, Chicago, IL 60621

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.

Cook Region Caregiver Training

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Training. The descriptions below will allow you to decide which classes fit your family's needs or circumstances. Advance registration is required for all classes. In addition to the slate of classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of Digital Pride modules on CD and the full offering of Lending Library materials.

For the most up-to-date and complete schedule information for classes offered in your area, 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 1 - Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk (12 training hours)
This module focuses on building self-esteem in children. It covers how kids act when they need recognition, power, freedom, enjoyment, and a feeling of belonging. Caregivers will learn 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 training 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 and how to catch kids being "good" and what to do to encourage positive behavior.

Module 3 & 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.

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.

Module 6 - Working as a Professional Team Member (9 training hours)
Foster parents learn team members' roles, 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 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.

Module 8 - Promoting Permanency Outcomes (9 training 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 training hours)
In this training, caregivers learn how fostering children can affect family relationships and how to minimize stresses that can result. They also learn about the supports that are available.

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

Module 12 - Understanding and Promoting Preteen and Teen Development (6 training hours)
This new course assists 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 understand teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use when fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.

The Teen in Foster Care: Supporting Attachment (6 training hours)
Attachment and the Teen in Family Foster Care will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand how early attachment experiences have impacted the teen's development. The training covers the teen's perspective on how the accumulation of loss, separation and trauma impacts his or her beliefs, feelings, behaviors and relationships. Participants will learn specific tips for helping manage behaviors that develop over time from the teen's adaptive responses to trauma, grief and loss.

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.