

Licensed relative care works well for new Bell family

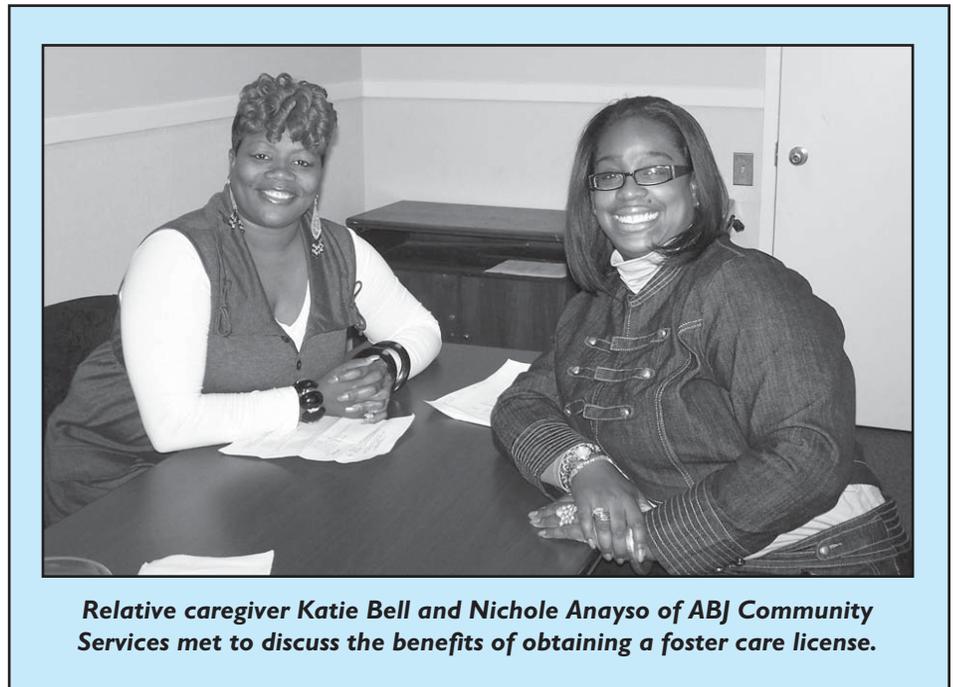
Katie Bell has raised two grown children and has another daughter in high school. Diapers were a distant memory until she started taking care of her two-year-old grand-nephew and his sisters who are seven and nine. It was one thing to have them come over for visits on the weekends, but now she has to be the “auntie” and full-time caregiver.

“I think the whole family knew that with the problems their mom was going through, we would need to help out. It was my turn. Now they are physically in my home,” said Bell, with wide eyes, but a broad smile.

She has had eight months to get used to the idea. By all accounts from her and her case managers at ABJ Community Services, everyone is adjusting well. It was Bell who suggested the children move to her Matteson home. Another aunt had been caring for the siblings, but added to the demands of taking care of an older parent it was just too much.

“I thought it was best for them to be at my house because the schools were better. I thought it was better for them to grow up out here, rather than Chicago. They have friends. They love it out here.

Even though she knew how to parent and she knew the children



Relative caregiver Katie Bell and Nichole Anayso of ABJ Community Services met to discuss the benefits of obtaining a foster care license.

she was going to parent, Bell still said it felt like starting over. She decided to get licensed and do foster parent training. She started classes just a month after the children came to live with her.

“I think that everyone should get licensed. I became a licensed foster parent because I wanted training and to get an understanding of exactly how things work. I am new to this. It is like I am learning all over again,” she said.

Bell recently spoke out about her experiences as a relative caregiver on the DCFS cable television program Dialogue. She appeared on a panel with DCFS executives to put a real

face to the Department’s initiative to license relative caregivers.

While she speaks positively about what she is doing with her family, she personally understands the challenges that come with complicated family dynamics. Still, she believes that it is best to have the three children with family. Studies back her up. DCFS is committed to looking to family resources first when children can’t safely stay in their parents’ care.

“They are with family. That lessens the trauma. If at all possible, let’s go out and support relatives,” said Miller Anderson, DCFS Deputy Director.

Continued on page 2

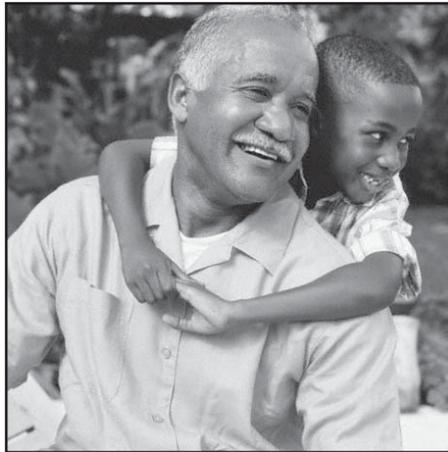
Relative care, con't.

The support has been especially important to Bell. While relatives receive a higher board rate after becoming licensed, it was the training that she found invaluable.

“The meetings are great. It is like I am going through a parenting class. I need a different perspective. The kids might have a unique need that I need to know about,” she said.

As the shape of her family continues to develop, Bell is enjoying this new chapter of parenting. She even sees a future where she could take care of other children who are not related. With a full license, she will be ready.

Metropolitan Family Services supports older caregivers in demands of raising children



Raising children after age 60 comes with unique challenges. The wisdom that comes with age has to balance with the realities of parenting. Enforcing a teenager's curfew during what should be the “golden years” requires an emotional adjustment.

As caregivers age, they may develop health concerns. Back-up planning for a serious illness or death can be more complicated.

DCFS works with Metropolitan Family Services on the citywide Older Caregiver Project. It is designed to help foster, adoptive and guardianship families face the aging issues that can arise for older caregivers. They provide home-based assessments of needs, connection to resources, advance planning to prepare for a caregiver's death, and financial and housing consultation.

Older caregivers in Chicago can call 773-884-2235 for more information or a referral.

Introspect helps Cook County students prepare to enter college

DCFS has contracted with Introspect to assist Cook County children who want to enter college. Introspect Youth Services, Inc. is a community-based, not-for-profit, post-secondary placement readiness agency. Introspect has developed outreach services that encourage at-risk students to not only graduate from high school but create post-secondary plans.

Some of the services that Introspect provides are:

- Career counseling and educational guidance
- Assistance with admissions into college, trade, technical or vocational institutions

- Financial aid advisement
- Access to a resource library which contains a vast assortment of information on after high-school programs locations and services
- Campus and college tours
- Test preparation
- Enrollment seminars and workshops.

The Introspect FOCUS Talent Search Program has assisted thousands of young adults to achieve their dreams of entering a post-secondary institution. Services provided under the Facilitate Occupational, College and University Studies (FOCUS)

Talent Search Program are designed to link the specific career goals of each youth with the appropriate post-secondary institution. Assistance is geared to youth that are in need of academic counseling to further their education; need assistance to enroll in a college; need assistance with the admission process or financial aid; or need information on career planning and preparation.

Youth and/or care providers that desire additional information and want to access these services can contact Introspect. The contact person is Bernard Clay at 773-287-2290.



Cook Regional Youth Advisory Board teaches youth how to advocate for change

The Statewide Youth Advisory Board has the mission to advocate and educate all youth in care. The board makes specific recommendations to the DCFS Director aimed at improving programs and outcomes in education, sibling rights, mental and physical health, youth employment and training, juvenile delinquency, lifetime connections and group home monitoring. The board also plans and hosts activities, such as the Youth Summit, graduation celebrations, and financial aid workshops.

The core of the statewide board is the regional board network that represents the state. In Cook, the three DCFS regions form a combined board. The combined regional board meets at 1911 S. Indiana on the 3rd Thursday of the month from 6 to 8 p.m.

The meetings are a way for youth to get advance knowledge of policies, provide input to new policies and learn valuable leadership skills. All meetings are run according to Robert's Rules of Order. The board has elected officers for the positions of President, Vice-President and Sergeant-at-Arms. The officers and a selected team member go on to the statewide board. They can participate in six yearly meetings that include travel to other parts of the State.



Asia Thompson (center, seated) of Cook County is President of the Statewide Youth Advisory Board. The youth board recently met with the adult foster care council to discuss mutual issues.

The DCFS Director's Office oversees the youth boards with its coordinating organization, The Chicago Area Project. While there is adult involvement, youth are encouraged to take the lead on setting their own agenda. They learn to work collaboratively toward solutions and to implement the changes they seek.

The Cook Regional Youth Advisory Board welcomes more participants. The board has asked that caregivers encourage their teens to join the board. It is a way to learn life skills and earn community service hours.

Membership is open to youth 14 to 21 who are or were in DCFS care. Transportation is available to members if the RSVP is made one week in advance.

Contact Antwan Turpeau at 312-588-3842 or via email at antwan_turpeau@yahoo.com.

Cook North answers training requests at monthly meetings

The Cook North Region will continue to offer training for caregivers on the topics that surfaced from their suggestions. Caregivers 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 begin at 10 a.m. and are typically over at Noon. Credit hours are also offered. To register, contact Iris Cuevas at 312-808-5000.

- 2/26 Panel Presentation: Caregivers, Birth Parents and Permanency Workers Working Together toward Permanency
- 3/26 Anger Management in Children and Adolescents
- 4/29 CPR Training
- 5/21 Cultural Sensitivity Training
- 6/25 Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder

Caregivers can also attend the Regional Advisory Council meetings. In addition to news about DCFS policy, training credits are often provided for specific discussion topics. Council meetings take place at 1911 S. Indiana on the second Tuesday at 10 a.m.



Monthly groups support caregivers



Each month caregivers can turn to each other and top regional staff with three important meetings in the Cook South region.

Regional Advisory Council

Foster caregivers, adoptive and guardianship parents from across the DCFS Cook South Region can come together each month to learn about how DCFS policies can make a difference in their families. Key staff from the region are on hand to answer questions.

The council meets the third Wednesday of the month at 10 a.m. at 6201 S. Emerald in Chicago.

Foster Parents, Our Greatest Resource

Cook South foster, adoptive and guardianship families choose the topics that reflect the needs they find most pressing. Often training credit hours can be gained when guest speakers make presentations to the group.

The group meets the second Tuesday of the month at 10 a.m., 6201 S. Emerald in Chicago.

South Suburban Support Group

Caregivers who live outside of the city can gather with other families to discuss issues that affect their households. Training credit hours are available.

They meet the fourth Thursday of the month at 10 a.m., 15115 Dixie Highway in Harvey.

Cook South grandparents have resources

In Illinois there are over 200,000 children being cared for by their grandparents. The Cook South region is fortunate to have many grandparents who have adopted or continued to provide foster care for children. Being a grandparent raising grandchildren can be complicated, bringing up issues that could include housing, finances and emotional concerns, but there are resources that can help.

The Illinois Department on Aging offers many programs, including Legal Counsel, Family and Individual Counseling, Support Groups, Information and Assistance, Benefits Check Up, Gap Filling Services, Senior Save Program, Meals on Wheels Chicago, Transportation Programs, and more.

In the Cook South Region these Department on Aging centers can assist grandparents 60 years and older who are raising children:

- Southwest Regional Center, 6117 S. Kedzie Ave. 312-747-0440
- Southwest Satellite Center (Englewood) 653-657 West 63rd St. 312-745-3328
- Southeast Regional Center, 1767 East 79th St. 312-747-1089
- Southeast Satellite Center 49 East 95th St. 312-745-3493
- SSSO Senior Satellite Center, 6012 S. Archer 773-288-0428

Barbara Schwartz is the statewide director for senior parent programs. Contact her by e-mail at Barbara.Schwartz@illinois.gov or call the Senior Parent Hotline at 888-727-5889.

Connecting youth to transition services

In the Cook South Region, John Kasper serves as the DCFS Cook South Transition Coordinator. Young people and the adults in their lives can contact Kasper for information on transition programs including: Community College Payment Program, Youth in College/Vocational Training Program, Education and Training Vouchers, and the DCFS Scholarship program.

For information about these programs and other resources please contact John Kasper at 773-371- 6134.



John Kasper

Family Focus grandparents as parents group stays active and fun

Family Focus, located at 3517 W. Arthington, has an ongoing support group for grandparents raising grandchildren. This group meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month from 12 to 2 p.m. for lunch and discussion. Each meeting has a topic and or guest presenter. However, as a support group the discussion often revolves around an issue one of the grandparents is encountering. For example, much of the talk centers on the newer and more difficult challenges of raising a teen in today's society.

To make it easier for caregivers to attend, the group provides lunch and child care for any infants and preschoolers who accompany the grandparents. There is a supervised room for infants and a separate supervised room for toddlers. In addition to the discussion, the group enjoys a lot of camaraderie through trips and special events around the holidays. Family Focus sponsors a yearly Thanksgiving Dinner, a large Mother's Day Luncheon and a Christmas toy give-away. Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's hospital has an annual Adopt a Grandparent Program, which gives Christmas gifts to some of the families in this group.

The group enjoys "field trips Fridays." So far they have had a luncheon cruise on Lake Michigan on The Spirit of Chicago, a City of Chicago sightseeing tour on a double-decker bus, a visit to Navy Pier, and visits to



several different restaurants. They also had their first annual two-day retreat at the Embassy Suites.

Additional planned future events include a movie theater-lunch program, another sight seeing tour and a repeat of many of last year's favorite programs. A popular one-day workshop teamed a grandparent with a young mother from The Moms Group. The grandparent helped mentor and offer insight and advice on raising young children.

All the programs and events are free. Cook Central region grandparents who are raising their grandchildren can get information on joining the support group by calling Gail White at 773-722-5057.

Cook Central Advisory Council meetings also provide training credits

The Cook Central Regional Advisory Council gives caregivers a chance to meet with the regional administration and discuss how DCFS practices and policies affect families. Most meetings also offer an educational component that is eligible for training credit hours.

The council meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 9:30 a.m. in the DCFS office at 3518 W. Division Street. All caregivers who are

licensed with DCFS and private agencies are welcome.

"We try to keep the agenda interesting and helpful for all the caregivers," said Jerry Welenc, the council chair and foster/adoptive parent.

In October, the council presented the final draft of the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan. All DCFS-supervised homes will receive a copy, and it is on file at the regional office.

In November, Warren Kunstler from the DCFS Post-Adoption Unit came to introduce the new KinGAP guardianship subsidy program. The council took a holiday break in December and came back with plans to start the year talking about first aid safety tips from the Red Cross. The next meeting will be on February 23.

Call the Foster Parent Support Specialists at 773-292-7879 with questions.

Bears and Bulls grant holiday wishes for children with family fun



Jarrett Payton, Connie Payton-Stratter, and Britney Payton welcomed Dave Ecton of Dominick's, who donated refreshments.



Connie Payton-Stratter offered holiday greetings to the crowd at the Cook Central party.



Benny the Bull kept families in high spirits at the holiday party hosted by the Chicago Bulls.

Santa's sleigh rolled through DCFS Cook County offices bearing gifts courtesy of the Walter and Connie Payton Foundation. For 16 years the foundation has supported DCFS in providing gifts to children in foster care programs, as well as young people in residential centers, independent living programs, the armed forces and Youth in College Program.

Foster caregivers whose licenses are supervised by DCFS programs and the children in those homes had an opportunity to celebrate on Saturday, December 19. The three Cook regions held simultaneous holiday parties in the DCFS offices at 6201 S. Emerald, 3518 W. Division and 1911 S. Indiana.

Connie Payton-Strotter and her adult children Jarrett and Brittney attended each party to greet the families and help hand out gifts. The foundation has helped collect and distribute more than 800,000 gifts to DCFS youth throughout Cook County and, for the last three years, in parts of Northern Region.

"We look forward to this every year. It is a special honor to share the holiday spirit with so many wonderful families," said Payton-Strotter.

Families look forward to seeing the Paytons, who through the years have become familiar and friendly faces. They posed for pictures and swapped stories about their children.

Dominick's Finer foods is another long-term partner in the parties, contributing food and drinks.

Volunteers from DCFS staff and other individuals logged countless hours before, during and after the parties to ensure that every child had a reason to smile. It takes months of advance work to compile the lists, collect gifts and prepare to distribute them in time. With the addition of music, Santa's helpers, decorations and many excited children, the holiday parties are always memorable.

On Sunday, December 13, Chicago Bulls players Joakim Noah and Jannero Pargo hosted a holiday party for the families that receive intact services from DCFS.

More than 500 parents and children joined Bulls team members at the UIC Physical Education Building. Bob Love and Benny the Bull were also on hand for the afternoon event. Players helped serve food, handed out gifts and signed autographs. With an assist from Hinkley Springs, Edy's Grand Ice Cream, Eli's Cheesecake and Country House Restaurant, families enjoyed food and fun.

DCFS Director Erwin McEwen said, "In these tough economic times, it is great to have so much help to give our kids something to celebrate. We really appreciate the generosity of all our sponsors who make sure our families can have a good time."



Local Area Networks link families to services

In 1992 Local Area Networks were formed throughout Illinois with the goal of reducing out of home, school and community placements for at-risk youth. The LANs are groups of agencies, parents, schools, and community organizations that work together to meet the identified needs of families in specific geographic areas.

The 16 Local Area Networks that cover Cook County can each develop programs that address the specific needs of the community. However, the School Initiative programs and Wraparound Plans are two basic constants. Since 2004, DCFS has asked that the LAN providers focus on services that address children in the school setting who are at-risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion. Under the School Initiative, providers have responded with many unique approaches to stabilize students at school.

Additionally, each LAN receives a small amount of “flex funds” from DCFS and the Illinois State Board of Education. The flex funds are used to provide services that a child and family team determines to be needed but are not available through state, federal, or community programs. These funds are granted through a process called wrap-around services. Regardless of the program, the LAN’s approach to identifying and providing services is one where the family, teachers, and providers work together as a team to find the solution that meets an individual’s strengths and needs across home, school and community.

LANs can help caregivers by:

- Identifying resources that may be unknown to an individual worker or foster parent
- Assisting a worker or foster parent in accessing needed services
- Looking for donated items that may be needed by individual youth and families
- Arranging for tutors and mentors for youth who are at risk of truancy, suspension, and expulsion
- Promoting “creative, out of the box” ideas to address youth needs
- Using the child and family team model, where a group of advocates works on behalf of youth and families and increases collaboration among service providers, schools, and parents

Any family can look for assistance from the LAN serving their community. They can request services on behalf of children in their home, whether they are in foster care or have moved to adoption or guardianship. Caregivers can also take part in the regularly scheduled meetings to have input on the services delivered in their LAN.

In each LAN a local agency serves as a co-convenor and a DCFS LAN Liaison helps bridge the community needs with the Department resources.

To ask questions about LANs by phone, contact the DCFS Regional Office and ask for the LAN Liaison.

- Cook South 773-371-6000
- Cook North 773-808-5000
- Cook Central 773-292-7700

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 story suggestions about:

- Foster parent association news and schedules
- Local training notices
- Features on foster families and community members working for children
- 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.