

Evarsito family walks the fine line of concurrent planning

Cesar and Augustina Evaristo straddle two worlds in many senses. Theirs is a home where they speak both Spanish and English. They are doing foster care, along with raising their daughter by birth. They also have successfully navigated the challenges of doing reunification foster care while preparing for adoption. What is known as concurrent planning calls upon a caregiver to support a child's parents and at the same time be committed to adoption if a return home is not possible.

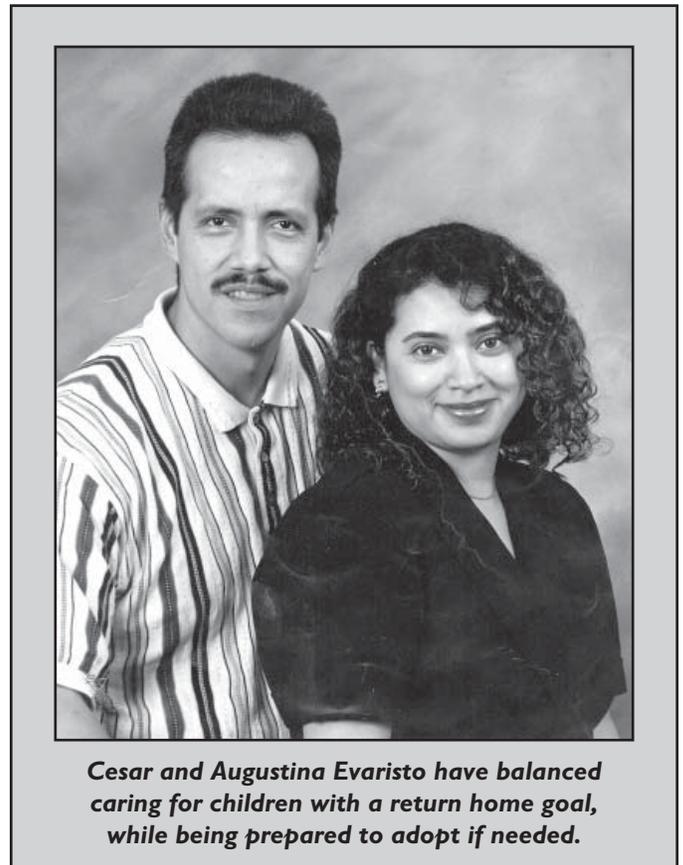
The Evarsitos' willingness to support two siblings on their road to permanency led caseworker Beatriz Ramirez to nominate them for the DCFS Latino Advisory Council Outstanding Achievement Award. In November, the family was surprised to learn they had been selected as the DCFS Foster Family of the Year.

Ramirez recalled two years ago bringing a nervous three-year-old boy to the Evaristo home. He was very scared of adults, did not like to eat, had difficulty falling asleep and often woke up screaming in the middle of the night due to nightmares. It was a difficult adjustment; but he settled in. After one year, Ramirez called asking if they could care for his infant sister. She said Augustina and Cesar did not hesitate to agree.

To nurture two young children through the trauma of separation and also care for their birth daughter called for sacrifices of time and energy. Augustina gave up employment opportunities to stay home with the children. Cesar regularly shifts his schedule to take children to medical appointments.

Fortunately, the investment of two years of consistent attention is paying off. Once Ramirez made an unannounced visit and found them outside "exploring the jungle" looking for "tesoros" (or treasures in the form of rocks and sticks) as they roamed in the grass on hands and knees. The children were having too much fun to realize that they were developing their imaginations and physical motor skills, accomplishing important milestones.

As the Evaristos created a sense of normalcy in their home, they also helped the children stay connected



Cesar and Augustina Evaristo have balanced caring for children with a return home goal, while being prepared to adopt if needed.

to their own family. In support of the reunification goal, the Evaristo family has transported the children to family visits and has made it possible to have additional visits when requested. More importantly, beyond the activities they created a positive atmosphere of respect for their mother and her love for her children. Six large paintings done by the children's mother cover the son's bedroom walls.

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DCFS arranges free camp with Chicago and suburban park districts



The S.O.A.R. program has a full slate of free summer activities for children in foster care and for those with open adoption or guardianship subsidies. DCFS has made arrangements to pay for day camp programs with the Chicago Park District and many suburban park district camps in Cook County. Children age 6 to 16 are eligible. The DCFS Division of Service Intervention, which runs S.O.A.R., has already identified eligible youth and will contact caregivers by mail in March with instructions on how to register for programs.

The DCFS regional offices will be the hub for distributing further information on summer camp. The regional offices will arrange times in April when caregivers can come to pick up registration packets. In Chicago, DCFS will provide caregivers with forms confirming that the Chicago Park District registration fee will be paid by DCFS. Transportation costs are not covered. Caregivers can enroll children at the park of their choosing, as long as there is space.

Caregivers who would like to register

their children for one of the funded programs should take forms provided by DCFS with them when they go to register at the park.

The Chicago Park District has day programs running all summer in 190 parks across the city. Before-care and after-care is available in many sites. Parks may offer different programs for different ages, so caregivers should identify in advance the program that they would like. For more details, go to the park district Web site www.chicagoparkdistrict.com.

To use DCFS funding, registration must be done in person. In-person registration begins April 24 and continues through the first week of camp. Camp starts June 28 and most programs run at least six weeks through August 23. DCFS does not guarantee slots at any particular program, so caregivers should promptly handle registration for their children. Many popular park programs do close out quickly.

The Department is also making payment arrangements for youth day camp programs at some suburban

camps throughout Cook County. At time of publication, suburban program locations include:

- Blue Island Park District
- Burbank Park District
- Calumet Memorial Park District
- Clyde Park District
- Crete Park District
- Dolton Park District
- Elmwood Park District
- Evanston Park District
- Franklin Park District
- Harvey Park District
- Hazel Crest Park District
- Hoffman Estates Park District
- Ivanhoe Park District
- Orland Park Park District
- Plainfield Park District
- Skokie Park District
- Veterans' Park District
- Wheeling Park District
- Wilmette Park District

Other suburbs have participated in past summers and new ones may join the program as registration approaches. Be sure to ask in advance. Caregivers in suburban communities can take the DCFS-provided forms to the park district program when they register. These programs will be funded for DCFS youth currently in foster care or with open adoption/guardianship cases. However, transportation costs are not included.

For more information on day camp, contact the S.O.A.R. Program at 312-814-4145.



Agencies help prepare youth for employment

There are many employment avenues for youth living in Cook County. The DCFS booklet Youth Employment and Training Programs outlines many local and statewide programs, including:

Added Chance Program

An employment program for DCFS youth ages 16-20 who live in Cook County. Contact Doreen Sorenson at 773-342-4243.

Hire the Future

A statewide program of the IL Department of Employment Security. Students work in manufacturing, financial, transportation, trade and service industries. Contact Roderick McNeese at 312-793-6835.

IL Employment and Training Centers

These service centers comprise a

statewide network to help job seekers with pre-employment training and job placement. To find the nearest service center, call 888-FOR-IETC and ask to speak to the coordinator for youth employment.

Job Corps

This national program has offices in Chicago, Joliet and Golconda. Job Corps provides education and training for students ages 17- 24. Students can learn a trade, get a high school diploma or GED and receive help getting a job. Call 800-230-JOBS for more information.

The DCFS Education and Transition Managers are also available to help. Call 312-814-5959 to be connected to the transition manager in the DCFS regional offices.

Evaristo, con't.

"I was moved by Mrs. Evaristo's gesture. I felt the love in the room as the result of one parent's love on the walls and the Evaristo's love in the home," Ramirez said after a visit.

The permanency goal for the children has since been changed to adoption. Cesar and Augustina are looking forward to making their family "official" but don't feel that things will change too much. From the beginning, they wove the children and their family into the household's regular rhythm. That will continue. The phone calls to their mother and visits will help everyone make a smooth transition. Meanwhile, they will continue their family vacations and trips to theme parks as they build new family memories, leading up to and after the adoptions are finalized.

As a caseworker, Ramirez understands the challenges and the perseverance it takes for a family to successfully maneuver a concurrent plan.

"With the unconditional love, patience, dedication and good parenting practiced by the Evaristo family, the five year old is no longer afraid and the two year old climbs and runs without a care in the world.

Because of this family's dedication to these children and for going beyond their call of duty, they were my humble nomination for foster parents of the year," said Ramirez.

City of Chicago Web site links youth to jobs

Young people who live in Chicago can apply for summer employment and volunteer positions through the Youth Ready Chicago Program. The program provides work experience to young people ages 14 to 24 in a variety of settings. Individuals may find themselves working in one of the city's parks, public agencies, leading corporations or nonprofit organizations.

There will undoubtedly be more applicants than there are opportunities available, so it is best to apply early. The online application and many job-related resources can be found on the program's Web site at www.youthreadychicago.org.

Applicants must:

- Be a resident of Chicago
- Be age 14-24
- Have experience working within their school or community
- Apply online
- Have parental or guardian signature if under 18 at the time of application

Applicants are selected for interviews and placed in opportunities based on their qualifications and on how well their applications match the needs of participating partners.



Support group hears of help with home damages from foster care



Foster Parents: Our Greatest Resource, the Cook South foster parent support group, recently discussed how to cope with the “hazards” of foster care. The group heard from Bruce Hirsh, the administrator of the Foster Parent Reimbursement program. He reminded the caregivers in attendance that there is a safety net to help when items in their homes are damaged due to the foster care they provide. The Foster Parent Reimbursement Program is not insurance. However it can offset the cost of replacing items that a child may break in a fit of anger or by accident. The program can also help caregivers recoup funds that are stolen, including charges for unauthorized phone usage.

Hirsh spoke very candidly with caregivers about the intricacies and the limitations of the reimbursement program. Foster parent caregivers begin by notifying the child’s caseworker that they want to file a claim. The caseworker will contact Hirsh to obtain a copy of DCFS form CFS 851 for the caregiver to complete. It requires thorough documentation of the value of the item broken

such as original purchase receipt or estimate of cost to replace or repair. Hirsh does not make decisions on the claims or the reimbursement amounts. However, he can assist caregivers to complete the packet for the review committee.

He reminded caregivers to take some proactive steps:

- Take pictures of your home and of any new items over \$50
- Let your homeowner’s/renter’s insurance agent know that you are doing foster care.
- Make copies of all claims paperwork before sending it in to his office.

Bruce Hirsh is available to answer questions about the Foster Parent Reimbursement program by calling 312-793-8896.



Bruce Hirsh

The Cook South Foster Parent Support Group meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 10 a.m. at the DCFS office located at 6201 S. Emerald, in Chicago.

Cook South celebrates Black History Month with kids and caregivers

The Cook South Region has a rich tradition of Black History Month celebrations, dating back to at least the 1980s. Yvette Whitney, a former employee of the DCFS Medical Unit, established this tradition at Cook South by posting historical

memorabilia that sparked ethnic pride and recognition. The office celebrations grew to include various activities, an ethnic fashion show and a culminating down-home meal enjoyed together.

Throughout the month of February 2010, South Region staff presented a slate of activities designed to inform and inspire staff and guests. South Region foster parents, retirees and other guests shared information from their personal “tragedy to triumph” journeys. Other activities included inspiration from daily quotes from famous African-Americans, a fabulous Soul Food Luncheon, a talent show, a Market Day, Black History quizzes and fun “stress

busters.” The building was adorned with African-inspired artwork, crafts and fabrics that were loaned by staff and pooled together for a wonderful display all month long.

The staff also played host to the seventh grade class of Sherman School. The seventh graders got to compete against staff in the game “Do You Know Your Black History?” The students finished the afternoon participating in the luncheon and a question and answer session with some of the management team in the region. Regional Administrator, Di-
anne Bradie-Baskin encouraged the students in their studies and extended South Region’s well wishes for their success in February and beyond.



North suburban System of Care program helps stabilize placements



When a foster care placement seems to be at risk of disrupting, caregivers do have a place to turn to for help. For residents in the northern portion of the Cook North Region, the Leyden Family Services System of Care (SOC) Program is the resource.

The program has expertise in assessing a placement that does not seem to be working and providing resources to help it succeed. It is available to families in these five Local Area Networks (LANs):

- LAN 38A (Wheeling Township)
- LAN 42 (Maine Township/Elk Grove Township)
- LAN 45 (Palatine Township/Barrington Township)
- LAN 46 (Schaumburg Township/Hanover Park Township)
- LAN 61 (Leyden Township)

The program provides brief to intermediate term services (six months on average) for DCFS youth whose foster caregivers need help in stabilizing the children in their current foster home. This program also targets youth who have a history of failed placements or who have failed outpatient based therapy. The System of Care

program can also assist youth transitioning home to their family, those youngsters being stepped down from residential, and those referred to the SOC Program by the juvenile court or as a result of a Child and Youth Investment Team staffing.

Depending on the circumstances, the caseworker can make the referral to program. A Child and Family team (including the caregiver) will develop an Individual Plan of Care (IPC). The plan could include home-based individual therapy and family therapy, school advocacy, and any needed services and support which may include tutoring and/or mentoring with a focus on de-escalating negative behavior. The System of Care program assists in putting community services in place to help maintain the placement after the SOC involvement has ended. Leyden Family Services SOC Program has succeeded in preventing placement disruption in 97% of the youngsters referred to the SOC Program.

Talk to your child's caseworker about referrals to the Leyden Family Services program or call the System of Care line at 800-345-9049 for more information.

Free North Side parenting classes enhance child-adult relationship

Even experienced caregivers can benefit from parenting classes to help with communication and to improve the relationship between children and adults. Community Counseling Centers of Chicago (C4) offers free parenting classes year-round at North Side locations in Chicago. The free courses are conducted in English and in Spanish.

The parenting classes can help caregivers gain new skills for the difficult job of parenting. Issues dealt with include learning what to do about tantrums, effective discipline techniques, handling behavioral problems and building a child's self-esteem.

A new round of classes will start in April. The courses are divided by the age of the child parents are caring for, as well as the language preference.

Mondays

April 19 - June 14
Ages 0 - 7
Spanish
C4 Peterson office
2525 W. Peterson

Tuesdays

April 20 - June 8
Ages 7 - 12
C4 Clark office
4740 N. Clark

Wednesdays

April 21 - June 9
Ages 12 - 16
Spanish
Roosevelt High School
3436 W. Wilson

Fridays

April 23 - June 11
Ages 0 - 7
Spanish
Chicago Public Library
6907 N. Clark St.

Call the Community Counseling Centers of Chicago at 773-769-0205, or 773-765-0829 for registration information.

LAN 60 Fun Fair provides Maywood families service resources and fun



On Friday, April 30, 2010 a free event for the family with fun, food and entertainment will be held from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Proviso Area Exceptional Child (PAEC) gymnasium, located at 1636 10th Ave, Maywood. There will be games and prizes for all ages. There will also be a door prize drawing for a gift basket.

All are invited to this event, which celebrates families and communities working together. The Family Fun Night is sponsored by the Child and Adolescent Local Area Network

(LAN) 60 and its participating agencies.

Included in the variety of games to play will be Bozo Buckets, Ring Toss, and Bean Bag Toss. A clown, balloons, face painting, washable tattoos, crafts and coloring will all be provided as part of the entertainment. Food and beverages will be provided. School age children in grades K to 12 will be eligible to enter a Poster Contest. The students can bring in one of their own drawings and enter their drawing in the contest. All the drawings will be displayed on the walls and everyone at the event can vote for their favorite drawing. No

drawing depicting violence can be entered. There will be a prize for the winner.

Caregivers can take advantage of the Resource Table, which will provide a selection of literature, pamphlets, and other materials with information about programs available in the community. All are welcome. However, caregivers cannot drop off children. Children without a supervising adult will not be admitted.

For more information, contact Rich Tangedahl at 708-450-2100.

Cook Central Advisory Council

The Cook Central Regional Advisory Council invites all foster, adoptive, guardianship and relative caregivers to join the local council. The council meets each month on the fourth Tuesday at 3518 W. Division. The meetings begin at 9:30 a.m.

At the February meeting caregivers heard from Elizabeth Monk of DCFS. She spoke on the AIDS/HIV program to support HIV-affected youth. She also discussed how caregivers could talk to youth about HIV prevention.

The March meeting will feature a representative from the Chicago Park District to present free summer programs for young people.

The advisory council is a good way to get involved and to stay informed about DCFS practices and policies. It is open to homes supervised by DCFS and private agencies.

For more information, contact Adrienne Welenc, DCFS Lead Foster Parent Support Specialist at 773-292-7879.

Free caregiver appreciation event

Foster parents in Cook County are invited to a free event to mark Foster Parent Appreciation Month in May. This event is sponsored by Foster Care Institute-Illinois, a proposed charter school that will specialize in serving youth in care.

The event "A Celebration of Foster Care" will feature music, foster care success stories and refreshments.

May 15, 2010 at 12 noon

Illinois Theater Center

371 Artists' Walk

Park Forest, IL 60466

(Off Indianwood Blvd. Between Orchard Drive and Western Avenue, adjacent to Village Hall)

Please RSVP by April 15 at 708-769-7123. This event is independent of DCFS. Contact Dr. Barbara Jackson at the number above for more information.

Cook's early childhood coordinators ensure 0 to 5 development

DCFS has resources in place to ensure that all young children in care receive developmental screenings. Children entering care for the first time under the Integrated Assessment Program received these important screenings as part of their assessment. If the child needs services for a developmental delay or a social/emotional disorder, DCFS will make a referral for intensive services. Alternatively, the screenings could find that the child would benefit from a referral to an enrichment program.

Even children who show no developmental concerns will later receive a follow-up screening, as required for their age. The service providers often contact foster caregivers directly. When this happens, caregivers should respond and make the child available for all follow-up services. In addition to the mandated screenings, foster parents should continue to watch for potential signs of developmental delay and discuss their concerns with the child's caseworker. Each DCFS Cook region has a developmental screener to work with children from birth to age three. Youth ages three to five receive screenings through their school district.

Cook County also has two Early Childhood Coordinators who support families and staff on developmental issues: Lynnare Deutsch focuses on children up to age three. She can be reached at 847-745-3065 or by e-mail at lynnare.deutch@illinois.gov. Robin York specializes in youth age three to five. Contact her at 312-328-2047 or by e-mail at robin.york@illinois.gov.

The coordinators can help link caregivers to one of the Child and Family Connection community providers listed here:

North Suburban

Clearbrook Center
1835 W. Central Road
Arlington Heights, IL 60005
847-385-5070

Central Suburban

Suburban Access, Inc.
4415 W. Harrison St., Ste. 201
Hillside, IL 60162
708-449-0625

Chicago Southwest

Easter Seals Society
9455 S. Hoyne
Chicago, IL 60620
773-233-1799

Chicago Central/West

Cook Cty. Children's Hospital
1901 West Harrison
Fantus Clinic - Room 209
Chicago, IL 60612
312-864-6575

Chicago Southeast

LaRabida Children's Hospital
950 E. 61st Street
Chicago, IL 60637
773-324-7434

Chicago North

945 W. George Street, Suite 300
Chicago, Illinois 60657
312-942-7800

South Suburban

Easter Seals Society of Metro
Chicago
17300 S. Ozark Ave., North Bldg
Tinley Park, IL 60477
708-429-8231



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.