

Cook County Advocate

News for Chicago Metro Area Families

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Soberal family holds true to language and culture

Each year at the annual DCFS Latino Institute, a caregiver is honored with the Outstanding Achievement Award. Aida and Luis Soberal of Chicago were surprised to discover that they had been selected as the Bi-Lingual Family of the Year. In the 10 years that the Soberals have been licensed, they have cared for many Latino youth and teenagers. Currently at home are four teenage girls ages 17, 17, 15 and 13. The younger sisters came on the heels of another youth leaving for an independent living program and college.

“As long as God gives me strength, we probably will never have an empty house,” said Aida.

The foster care journey started for the Soberals after their children were old enough to be on their own. Aida enjoyed raising children and wanted to have more youngsters around. The first children placed with them were three and four years old. Since their return home, the Soberals have provided short-term and long-term care to eight other youth, including a teen mother. The Soberals have become a “go-to” home when case-workers need a placement for a Spanish-speaking child. The problem is that they rarely have any openings. Once kids get to their home they seldom want to leave.

Even when youth return home to their parents, Aida and Luis make a point of keeping the families connected. Over the years, they have always supported children and parents towards reunification. They have willingly met parents and allowed them access to their phone number and their home. They often transport children to and from parent-child and sibling visits and have supported shared parenting activities.

Building strong family connections is a priority in both directions. The Soberals make a point of integrating the kids into all the household events and include them in their large extended family. Aida fondly remembers when foster daughter Ricio reached her 15th birthday. Her mother hosted a *quinceañera* to mark her coming of age and invited Aida to the party as well. But for Ricio, her celebration would not be complete until she was able to share it with Aida’s mother. In her long white dress, she walked down the hallway of the nursing home to the delight of the woman she had come to love as a grandma.

Simple family values are the foundation for the family that the Soberals share with so many. Despite the various ethnicities of Latino children who



Luis and Aida Soberal make certain the teenagers in their home develop and maintain their cultural identity.

have been in their care, the Soberals promote the importance of embracing dual languages and cultural preservation. Theirs is a bi-lingual home so youth can hold on to their first language and in some cases, learn Spanish from their foster caregivers.

“Knowing the Soberals is truly a joy,” said DCFS licensing worker Carol Klein, who nominated this family. “They deserve to be recognized and thanked for the many years of loving care and warm attention they have provided to scores of our Latino children and the encouraging support they have given to Latino parents and families.”

Families find local support through Local Area Networks

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 inclusive networks in specific geographic areas that promote collaboration between agencies, parents, schools, and community groups. The agencies work together to ensure that children with mental, emotional, and behavioral problems and their families have access to the services and supports they need to succeed.

The 16 Local Area Networks that

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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.

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 LANs 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.

Working with a LAN can benefit families in many ways that might not be readily apparent, but could be helpful:

- The LAN provides a means to identify resources that may be unknown to an individual worker or foster parent
- The LAN can assist a worker or foster parent in accessing needed services
- The LAN looks for donated items that may be needed by individual youth and families
- The LAN pays for tutors and mentors for youth who are at risk of

truancy, suspensions, and expulsion

- The LAN is an example to the youth of community commitment and support
- The LAN promotes “creative out of the box” ideas to address youth needs
- The LAN uses 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 find more information on Local Area Networks go to the website www.systemofcareillinois.com. There one can find program descriptions, referral applications and a search function to find individual LANs by zip code. To ask questions about LANs by phone, contact the DCFS Regional Office and ask for the LAN Liaison.

DCFS offers programs for pregnant and parenting teens

For a teenager, making the transition to adulthood while in DCFS care can be complicated. Making a transition to being a parent at the same time, adds another degree of difficulty. Fortunately, the Teen Parenting Service Network (TPSN) can help teens and caregivers who support them with resources for youth who are pregnant or parenting.

The DCFS Division of Service Intervention oversees TPSN cases for more than 500 young women and nearly 100 young men in Cook County. The mission of the Teen Parenting Service Network is to bring together the community's best resources to provide pregnant and parenting youth with comprehensive care and services, while encouraging them to nurture and care for their babies. These services are available to youth who are still under DCFS custody in foster care, residential or independent living situations.

When a pregnancy occurs, the caseworker for the mother or for the youth who is the father files an Unusual Incident Report. When the TSPN receives the referral, one of six regional service providers will provide case management. The agency will assess the services the young person needs and coordinate local resources.

TPSN providers strive to develop clients into productive adults and parents. They keep the focus on four goals for those who become young parents:

1. Develop a support network of personal and community resources
2. Prepare for independence with an emphasis on education and vocational development
3. Develop their parenting abilities

and family choices including subsequent pregnancy prevention

4. Ensure safety and well being of themselves and their children while in the program, addressing both physical and emotional needs.

When a young person becomes pregnant while living in a foster home, the caregiver role shifts in important and sometimes complicated ways. Along with parenting the younger new parent, caregivers can help the youth learn to be a parent as well.

“That is what we really need from foster parents. Your role is to be a mentor and teach life skills,” said Lynda Swan-McClendon of DCFS, who oversees the TPSN contracts.

In cases where the youth has custody of his or her baby, caregivers should remember that DCFS has no jurisdiction over the child. DCFS will attach

a payment of \$107 to the caregiver's board check and the caregiver is required to give the \$107 to the parent to buy items for their child. DCFS also starts a medical card for the baby as soon as DCFS Central Office is notified of the delivery.

The caseworker from the TPSN provider agency can support the youth parent in putting these resources in place and identifying others. With the added layer of supportive caregivers, the young person can get on track to successful parenting. Questions about the pregnant and parenting teen services can be directed to the youth's caseworker or Lynda Swan-McClendon at 312-814-5959.



The Evanston Male Involvement Group and Evanston Early Head Start celebrated dads at a holiday party. The Strengthening Families program also led a parenting discussion before the real fun of food and presents started.

College help in Cook County

Introspect is a community-based agency that can advise students on how to pick a college, discover financial aid resources and assist with the application process from undergraduate coursework all the way through the doctoral level. The agency is located in Chicago and focuses on Cook County.

The organization primarily serves youth still in DCFS care. However, young people who aged out of the system, left through adoption or guardianship, and even those who had never been in care can also receive assistance. For more information, contact Bernard Clay at 773-287-2290.

A second program called Project Success focuses on helping adults 19 or older attend the college of their choice. The program's service area includes Chicago and the south suburbs. Project Success targets students from low-income households who are the first in the family to go to college. Yet, the organization also can assist students in other circumstances.

Project Success can provide career counseling, college search services, and financial aid counseling. Project Success also does presentations to groups of young people or the adults who support them. To get an application for the program, call 773-995-2371.

Community colleges in Cook County offer careers in hospitality industry

Cooking for oneself comes in handy. Knowing how to cook for others could become a career. Community colleges in Chicago and in the Cook suburbs can provide hospitality certificates and degree programs that can translate into long-term, well-paying careers. Young people who are transitioning to adulthood may want to consider a local hospitality program at Harold Washington College, Kennedy-King College or Triton College. Community colleges are a bargain relative to other institutions. Young adults in still under DCFS can take advantage of the Community College Payment Program to offset costs after other financial assistance.

Triton College

Triton College is located just west of Chicago in River Grove. Its Hospitality Industry Administration Program offers courses in Culinary Arts, Restaurant Management, and Hotel/Motel Management.

The Culinary Training Certificate Program is offered in conjunction with the Chefs of Cuisine Association of Chicago. This is designed for students interested in becoming cooks or chefs. The Baking and Pastry Certificate Program like the Culinary Program offers hands-on experience combined with academic courses. The on-the-job training is learned at the full-service kitchen and full-service dining room that the students operate. The Restaurant Management Program prepares students for potential positions as a restaurant manager or restaurant owner. The Hotel/Motel Management Program teaches skills for potential positions as sales managers, front office super-

visors, catering managers, and other entry-level positions in the hotel industry.

Harold Washington College

In 2007, Harold Washington College announced the (HWC) Hospitality Bridge Program that prepares Chicagoans for entry-level employment in the hotel, restaurant and retail industries.

Students learn in a realistic setting, which is designed to simulate an elegant hotel environment, a retail operation and a casual dining restaurant.

After completing the 12-week Hospitality Bridge Program, students will have earned five industry certificates and a total of eight college credits toward a two-year degree in Hospitality Management in the Harold Washington College AAS degree program.

Washburne Culinary Institute

Washburne Culinary Institute of Kennedy-King College offers certificate and Associate Degree programs developed to provide skills for immediate employment.

Washburne students can earn basic or advanced certificates in Culinary Arts or Baking and Pastries, along with Associate Degrees in both areas. Real work experience while learning happens at the two school-operated restaurants the Parrot Cage at South Shore Cultural Center and Sikia on Kennedy-King's new campus.

Cook North Council focuses on local recruitment and training opportunities

The Cook North Regional Advisory Council encourages all caregivers to join the monthly meetings. Regional Administrator Jackie Bright and key staff members discuss DCFS policy and important issues at the regular meetings. Concerns or questions that affect the larger community of caregivers can flow to the statewide council. Royann Garcia and Cecil Garner are caregivers who represent Cook North on the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council.



Royann Garcia



Cecil Garner

Any licensed foster caregivers, adoptive or guardianship parent living in the DCFS Cook North Region can participate, including home supervised by private agencies. The group meets at 10 a.m. on the second Tuesday of each month at 1911 S. Indiana. There is also a call-in number for participation by conference call. For more information contact, Iris Cuevas at 773-866-5680.

Recruitment Council

The Cook North Region is setting forth a new recruitment council. Like each of the six DCFS regions, it will develop a recruitment plan to reach out to families in the community for

new foster homes. The council has met twice so far and is putting together a calendar of events and activities.

The recruitment effort will focus on foster homes for older youth, bi-lingual homes and caregivers who will support reunification. Current foster caregivers are often the best ambassadors to recruit. To offer ideas, contact DCFS supervisor Harold Dixon at 708-210-3060.

Local training opportunities

As part of the Cook North Implementation Plan, the Foster Parent Training Committee announced a full slate of trainings for caregivers. These courses are developed to meet the needs expressed in the region. Caregivers who attend will receive training credit hours that can fulfill licensing requirements. The training sessions each begin at 10 a.m., but the location can move between the three regional offices, so contact Iris Cuevas at 773-866-5680 to confirm.

February 26

Understanding Autism

March 26

Permanency-Foster Parents' Perspective

April 30

Juvenile Court and Service Appeals

May 28

CPR Training

June 25

Grieving and Loss

Cook Central Council Update

The month always ends on a positive note when the Cook Central Regional Advisory Council meets. On the last Tuesday of the month caregivers come together to learn about new DCFS policies and gain important parenting information. "We try to keep things interesting so caregivers will feel good about coming to the meetings," said council chair, Jerry Welenc.

At a recent meeting, a representative from the Illinois State Treasurer's Office spoke to caregivers about protecting themselves from credit fraud. The risk of identity theft also extends to the children in their care. Even young people can be vulnerable to having their personal documentation exploited.

A typical council meeting includes one or more special interest topics, along with updates from DCFS. Whenever possible the trainings are structured so that caregivers receive credit hours that can be used for re-licensing.

The council receives the support of local staff, supervisors and the Regional Administrator Joyce Hall. By having key staff at the meetings, caregivers often find a more direct path to resolving issues. Concerns that have an impact beyond the local region can go forward to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory council through representatives Birdia Jenkins and Rolinda Robinson.

The next meeting of the Cook Central Regional Advisory Council is March 30 at 9:30 a.m. at the regional office, located at 3518 W. Division. Call 773-292-7879 with questions.

DCFS families celebrated holidays with Bears and Bulls

As Santa's sleigh rolled through DCFS Cook County offices, Connie Payton, of the Walter and Connie Payton Foundation, got to be a special helper. For 15 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 children had an opportunity to celebrate on Saturday, December 13 during three simultaneous holiday parties in the DCFS offices at 6201 S. Emerald, 3518 W. Division and 1911 S. Indiana.

The foundation has helped collect and distribute more than 800,000 gifts to DCFS youth throughout Cook County and, for the last two years, in parts of Northern Region.

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, clowns, decorations and many excited children, the holiday parties are always memorable.

The scene turned from Bears to Bulls the following weekend. On Sunday, December 14, Chicago Bulls guard Ben Gordon hosted a holiday party for the families that receive intact services from DCFS. More than 300 parents and children joined Bulls team



Bulls guard Ben Gordon greeted families at the DCFS Holiday Party.

members at the Bulls/Sox Training Academy in Lisle.

Gordon, Andres Nocioni and Cedric Simmons helped serve lunch, handed out gifts and signed autographs. With an assist from Harlem Irving Plaza, McDonald's, ATT and Country House Restaurant, families enjoyed food and fun.

DCFS Director Erwin McEwen said, "Helping these families is not all government work. You need private citizens and private organizations to have a heart and open up those hearts in helping us do this real important and difficult work."



Connie Payton, DCFS Director Erwin McEwen (center) and Regional Administrator Michael Byrd shared holiday fun at the DCFS Cook South office. Each Cook County region hosted a party.

Cook South families find food help

Barb Schwartz of the Illinois Department on Aging and Rochelle Crump, Chief of the DCFS Office of African-American Services recently came to the Cook South Region to inform older caregivers about community resources. Angel Food Ministries provides participants with food valued at \$60 for approximately \$30 in cash or food stamps. This is a national program that buys food from first-rate suppliers at substantial volume discounts. They do not use out of date or inferior products. Generally a box of Angel Food can feed a family of four for a week or a single senior citizen for a month.

The menu differs each month and consists of fresh, frozen and packaged food items. There is no purchase limit for Angel Food and no qualifications or applications are required. Their goal is to give people a hand during difficult times. Participants do have to order ahead of time

through a local Angel Food host site. The menu for any given month can be seen on the website: www.angelfoodministries.com and any questions can be answered at the national office at 888-918-3745.

Some of the sites for Cook South caregivers are:

House of God Church, 10555 S.

Emerald, 773-568-3520

Bethsaida Missionary Baptist Church, 5560 S. Sangamon Av., 773-436-0368

Mary Magdalene Missionary Church, 10920 S. Princeton Av., 773-468-2283

The Angel Food Ministries program is not restricted to seniors. Anyone can participate. For more information on programs specific to seniors, contact the Illinois Department on Aging Senior Helpline at 800-252-8966

Cook South groups support caregivers

The Cook South administration sponsors several support groups to give caregivers an opportunity to discuss issues, fellowship with others and learn information to help them parent. Caregivers with questions about the support or advisory groups can call 773-371-6113.

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. *Meets third Wednesday of the month at 10 a.m. at 6201 S. Emerald in Chicago.*

Foster Parents, Our Greatest Resource

Cook South foster, adoption 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. *Meets 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. *Meets the fourth Thursday of the month at 10 a.m., 15115 Dixie Highway, Harvey.*

Cook South works to help teens

The Cook South Region has 756 youth in care, who range in age from 13 or to early twenties. They are in various living situations that include youth in college, adoptive homes, foster homes, relative homes, independent living arrangements and special services of a more intensive nature. Private agencies provide direct supervision of several hundred more youth. They all share the goal of helping youth become successful adults and providing resources to launch them toward independence.

In the Cook South Region, John Kasper is an important resource. Kasper



John Kasper

serves as the DCFS Cook South Transition Coordinator. He is with the Office of Education and Transition Services, part of the Division of Service Intervention. This office prepares youth for self-sufficiency and independence through educational, employment and recreational programs.

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.

**Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.
Call the DCFS Office of Training 877-800-3393 • toll free**

Cook County Training Calendar

All caregivers can attend PRIDE In-Service Training. Advance registration is REQUIRED. Detailed address information will be provided with registration. Information included here is accurate at the time of publication. Training dates, times and locations may change based on enrollment and other circumstances. For the most up-to-date schedule information, 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.

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

Module 1 - The Foundation For Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children (12 training hours)

Chicago Kids Hope United
March 2, 4, 9, 11 (Mon, Wed)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Harvey DCFS office
March 3, 5, 10, 12 (Tue, Thu)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Module 2- Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs
(9 training hours)

Matteson Aunt Martha's
March 2, 4, 9 (Mon, Wed, Mon)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Harvey DCFS office
March 17, 19, 24 (Tue, Thu, Tue)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Module 7 – Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity (6 training hours)

Chicago DCFS Emerald
March 3, 5 (Tue, Thu)
6:30–9:30 p.m.

Module 8 – Promoting Permanency Outcomes (9 training hours)

Chicago DCFS Emerald office
March 10, 12, 17 (Tue, Thu, Tue)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Module 9 – Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family
(6 training hours)

Chicago DCFS Emerald Office
March 24, 26 (Tue, Thu)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Module 4 - Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse
(9 training hours)

Harvey DCFS Office
April 2, 7, 9 (Thu, Tue, Thu)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Matteson Aunt Martha's
April 6, 8, 13 (M, W, M)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Module 12 - Understanding and Promoting Preteen and Teen Development
(6 training hours)

Chicago DCFS Emerald office
March 31, April 2 (Tue, Thu)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Educational Advocacy

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.

Chicago **Mt. Sinai Hospital**
March 3, 10 (Tue)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Chicago **UCAN**
March 17, 19 (Tue, Thu)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Chicago **Hull House**
March 17, 19 (Tue, Thu)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Chicago **Kids Hope United**
March 17, 19 (Tue, Thu)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Chicago **LSSI**
March 17, 19 (Tue, Thu)
6:15 – 9:30 p.m.

Attachment and the Teen in Family Foster Care (6 training hours)

Chicago DCFS Emerald office
April 7, 9 (Tue, Thu)
6:30 – 9:30 p.m.