

Cook County Advocate

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News for Chicago Metro Area Families

DCFS handles large agency's closing

Fortunately, it is not often that a foster care agency with nearly 900 cases closes its program. Fortunately too, is that DCFS could fashion a smooth transition after Catholic Charities announced in May that it would have to end its foster care program. The DCFS Division of Monitoring and Quality Assurance rallied to ensure that cases moved to other agencies in the least disruptive manner and in very little time.

Treva Hamilton, acting associate deputy director, described the complicated process to the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council in June.

"First we convened an internal team and then made a transition team with Catholic Charities. We started weekly teleconferences and meetings to afford lots of communication," she said.

Next came building a computer spreadsheet to chart the names and addresses of the youth whose files would have to move. Then they matched Catholic Charities foster homes with the agency nearest the home, keeping in mind other considerations like joining

Continued on page 2

Benchmark hearings keep older youth on track to adulthood

For a young person in DCFS care, age 21 can feel like a starting line and the end of the road at the same time. In Cook County, most cases with a permanency goal of independence remain open past the 18th birthday until age 21. When the clock is ticking, some youth are not prepared for life without the services and supports of DCFS—even if they are desperate to be on their own. The Benchmark Permanency Hearings at the Cook County Juvenile Court may be the missing piece that makes everything click.

Judge Patricia Bishop Martin, the Presiding Judge for the Child Protection Division, created the benchmark hearings in 1999 as a kind of "tough-love" intervention by the courts. Youth ages 16 to 19 may find the approach surprising. For one reason, these hearings take place in a conference room, not in front of the judge's bench. Judge Sybil Thomas talks one-on-one with the young person. They actually discuss the youth's desires for his or her future. Judge Thomas still reigns with authority. They sign a contract stating what has to be accomplished before the next meeting. Knowing the youth's

future is at stake, she sets expectations high, does not tolerate excuses, and tempers it all with encouragement.



Judge Thomas

Judge Thomas has the strength of the bench to help ensure that needed services are available. Foster parents, GALs and other adults can also push, but ultimately it is up to the youth to do what it takes to shape his or her own fate.

Caseworkers or GALs refer youth to benchmark hearings. On August 24, youth can come to Juvenile Court to see the program first-hand. The court and the DCFS Office of Legal Services are hosting a Benchmark Youth Day. They have fun events planned and are doing special outreach to parenting or pregnant teens, without excluding others. The event starts at 9 a.m. at the Juvenile Court Building, 2245 W. Ogden Ave. in Chicago. For more information call Jacqueline Johnson at 312-633-3207.

sibling groups to avoid multiple agency involvement.

“Never have we had to transfer this many cases. We had to work through the logistics and at the same time we tried to remain sensitive to the foster parents and agencies,” said Hamilton.

DCFS also arranged an agency fair so Catholic Charities’ licensed foster parents without any children could learn about other agencies and transfer their license.

By mid-June, almost every foster care program in Cook County and some in Northern Region had at least one new case, and DCFS was tying up the last few loose ends.

Cook County Advocate reporters

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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.

Education Advisors help with school issues

Caregivers and caseworkers working together most often can successfully advocate with schools for the children in their care. However, when families need additional expertise to work through school issues, they can contact the Education Advisor. Advisors support DCFS-supervised foster families and families who adopted or took guardianship of children who were in DCFS care. Families with licenses supervised through private agencies can receive similar help from their agency’s education liaison.

Education Advisors are part of the Northern Illinois University Educational Access Project. They work with families where children may have discipline or behavioral concerns at school. They can take part in meetings for special education. They will help caregivers and caseworkers determine the best strategies to help youth make successful transitions through school.

The education advisors offer these suggestions to caregivers:

- “Trust your gut”—if you see something that leads you to believe that your child is struggling in school, explore the issue with your child, caseworker, teacher or education advisor.
- Become comfortable in your role as an advocate for your child’s education by participating in the educational advocacy training and asking

questions about issues and terms that are unfamiliar—don’t be afraid to ask for help!

- Talk about how you manage the child at home.
- Make yourself known and establish a presence in your child’s school—schools are much more supportive and cooperative if they have a willing and invested parent!

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Cook South kicks off back to school (and pre-school) with fun, food and a fair

The Cook South Region is embracing the Department's emphasis on early childhood education. Among recent research, the Perry Pre-school Study looked at the impact of providing high quality preschool programming on low-income African-American children. The study concluded that children who went to pre-school were far more likely to graduate from high school, stay out of prison, earn more money and stay off welfare.

Early education is part of the DCFS strategy for helping the older youth in care transition successfully to adulthood. One important goal of The Early Learning Initiative is the expectation to enroll 100 percent of all young children between three and five years old in Head Start or a state-funded pre-

Kindergarten or, if one of those options is not available, an accredited early care and education program for at least part of the day.

In keeping with that goal, this year Cook South is hosting a back to school fair on August 2, at Central Park in Park Forest. In addition to getting help registering children for pre-K, students of all ages can get ready for the upcoming school year. This annual event is a great way to build momentum. Many volunteer staff from DCFS and community organizations are always on hand to distribute flyers about education and health resources, and to pass out necessary school supplies. Foster and adoptive parents can count on food, fun and helpful information at the picnic each year.

Cook South appreciates foster parents in May with a full slate of events

The staff at Cook South arranged a full slate of events for caregivers during Foster Parent Appreciation Month. Foster parents mingled with staff during "meet and greets" at all three offices. They relaxed over movie screenings. Caregivers "shopped" for free at the Grand Bazaar. Finally, families gathered for a night at ETA Theatre to enjoy the play "Living in the Wind."

"I cannot say enough about the Cook South foster parents. They always rise to the challenges of rearing children under difficult circumstances," said Regional Administrator Michael Byrd. "It is a privilege to host these events to show our appreciation. I just wish we could do more."

Cook South resource helps fathers help their kids in care

The Cook South Region realizes that fathers who are involved while their children are in substitute care can have a positive effect on their children. The region is working more directly with parents, and is also aiming resources toward fathers. The Parental Involvement Center will help children in care get connected to their fathers. This can be especially valuable in situations of kinship care.

The center has been created to help fathers establish positive relationships with their children and empower them to take a more active role in responsible fatherhood. The center also helps fathers address barriers that prevent them from being involved in their children lives. The agency has six key areas of focus: employment, parenting, continuing education, substance abuse, counseling, and visitation services. The Parental Involvement Center is located at 1140 E. 87th Street, 773-375-0700.

Relative foster parents that have relationships with family members should explore this program as a resource.

Cook Central has success in the bag

In August, Cook Central will have the third annual "Book Bags for Success" distribution. Adrienne Welenc, lead foster parent support specialist, and Donna Moore, LAN 67 liaison, will again spearhead this program. Last year, 500 book bags were donated to the cause. The staff at 3518 W. Division also purchases supplies to go inside the bags that they distribute to foster and intact families at the start of the school year.

The project actually goes on all year. It is not uncommon for staff members to get hungry or thirsty as they work. The foster parent support team seizes that opportunity and keeps snacks on hand in exchange for donations. The money they collect goes toward supplies for the book bags. Many make individual contributions as well.

The bookbags will be filled with dictionaries, notebooks, paper, rulers, glue, pencils, pens, and folders. The staff at all three sites, 3518 W. Division, 4909 W. Division and Maywood will help distribute book bags to families.



Michelle Halsell, Denise Robinson, Estella Herrera and Ken Clark help fill bags last year

Cook Central marks appreciation month

Cook Central had a series of events at 3518 W. Division for Foster Parent Appreciation Month to commemorate the hard work, support and commitment foster parents have provided to children. The planning committee made sure that caregivers could get valuable information through trainings, as well as finding encouragement from the appreciation events.

The first event scheduled was a four-hour training on gangs, held May 10. Khaldun Everage informed foster parents about gang graffiti, symbols, colors, and mode of dress, focusing on gang activity on the West Side of Chicago. He also talked about cultural influences from the movies and how to listen to rap music for clues in the lyrics. Afterwards, caregivers had lunch and continued the important discussion.

At the "Meet and Greet" on the evening of May 16, foster parents could informally talk to supervisors, managers, and administrators from Cook Central. An area was set aside for the children to watch movies, have their faces painted and play games. All of the children received toys. The grown-ups had a chance to win a George Foreman grill and a 21-piece barbeque grill set that were donated for the raffle. In addition to the fun, the region set up an information table with brochures and pamphlets about fire safety, drug prevention, and adoption. Caregivers each took away a flyer with the names, titles, and phone

numbers of the administrators, managers, licensing supervisors, and foster parent support specialists from Cook Central.

The Foster Parent Advisory Council met on May 22. First, there was a guest speaker, Janet Chandler, DCFS psychologist and specialist for alcohol and other drug addictions. Her informative presentation taught caregivers how to lookout for potential drug-related issues with the children in their care. Afterwards, the meeting turned into a celebration over a catered luncheon. Staff presented caregivers with flowers, awards and gifts of appreciation.

Appreciation month events ended May 29 with a foster parent "shopping spree." This was a special opportunity for the staff at Cook Central to show their appreciation to the foster families. The staff and other groups donated new clothes, and gently-used items such as videos, books, CDs, toys, and other household items. The families came to browse and shop "free of charge." Leftover items were donated to local social service agencies.

Several Cook Central staff volunteered for the Foster Parent Appreciation Month planning committee: Joyce Hall, Myra Burgos-Biott, Adrienne Welenc, Sharon Thames, Ken Clark, Estela Herrera, Carol Kline and Linda Leroy-Holowinski. Denise Robinson and Ella Smith provided additional help.

Cook Central: Extra layer of life skills helps students get back in high school

Youth Skills Development Training Program (YSDTP) was developed by the Alternative Schools Network and DCFS. The program is integrated into the curriculum at Antonia Pantoja High School, located at 3121 N. Pulaski, in Chicago. Antonia Pantoja high school is a state certified, diploma-granting school that serves youth who have been officially dropped from the public school system without a high school diploma or GED. YSDTP provides additional education and life skills services to 16 to 20-year olds in DCFS care, who enroll in the high school.

The school provides all YSDTP students with a full-time mentor and a transitional counselor. The mentor and counselor work closely to monitor academic achievement and personal development through supportive services.

The mentor, Milagros Pagan and the academic advisor, Cecilia Alcaraz gave a presentation to the Cook Central Foster Parent Advisory Council in the spring. Pagan and Alcaraz are from ASPIRA Inc. of Illinois. ASPIRA is a Puerto Rican

not-for-profit organization committed to the self-determination of Latinos and other minorities through education, leadership development, and cultural awareness.

YSDTP provides cultural and recreational activities. Students earn extra money for participating in after-school activities and completing on-line courses. The program helps juniors prepare for continuing their education by arranging trips to colleges, providing ACT preparation, conducting scholarship searches and making financial aid suggestions. After a student is accepted and enrolled in college, YSDTP will give the student a laptop computer to take to school.

The program enrolls students year round. The summer program has classes in the morning and the students work in the afternoon. For more information, call the mentor, Milagros Pagan, 773-252-0970 x226 or the academic advisor, Cecilia Alcaraz, 773-252-0970 x225.



Cook Central caregivers received special treatment at the Foster Parent Appreciation Month luncheon.

The luncheon was one of many events held in the region for caregivers.

Cook Central council meets all summer

There is no summer vacation for the Cook Central Foster Parent Advisory Council. Meetings continue to be the 4th Tuesday of the month at 3518 W. Division from 9:30 a.m. - Noon.

Besides offering an opportunity to discuss DCFS policy and local issues, caregivers can earn training hours. The meetings are open to all DCFS and private agency homes in the Cook Central Region. All foster, adoptive and guardianship families can participate.

The local council is the point of entry for topics or concerns that may affect families across the state. Cook Central's representative to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory council is Birdia Jenkins. One position is currently open.



Birdia Jenkins

Parents that have any questions about future guest speakers, training topics, or events can call Jerry Welenc, council president, at 773-582-8354.

Cook North explores compassion fatigue with caregivers

In recognition of Foster Parent Appreciation Month, the region sponsored trainings on “Compassion Fatigue and Burnout” at the offices at 1911 S. Indiana and Bradley Place. Charles Saunders and Joyce Bryan from the DCFS Office of Training were the presenters. Foster parents discovered that compassion fatigue is a condition that can develop when providing emotional support to a person who has suffered a trauma. While caring for troubled kids, the foster parents, caseworkers, therapists and others can be vulnerable to a secondary trauma themselves. Caregivers may find that helping brings on symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Some of the signs and symptoms include:

- Sense of helplessness
- Depression
- Lack of motivation
- Sleep disturbances
- Fatigue



After the training, caregivers took time for themselves, enjoying lunch provided by Cook North administration and staff.

- Physical symptoms such as headaches, backaches or stomach problems
- Doubts about competence
- Impaired effectiveness
- Inability to balance empathy and objectivity
- Chronic feelings of anger

Participants in the training were encouraged to share their experiences so they could understand what compassion fatigue might look like for them or others under a variety of circumstances. In sharing the information and their stories, caregivers were able to identify some of the ways that they are affected by the child welfare system and children that they care for. They also discussed how they can support themselves in dealing with compassion fatigue.

Some suggestions are:

- Take time for yourself
- Take care of yourself by getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising regularly
- Identify what’s important to you
- Choose your battles
- Develop hobbies or interests
- Understand that the pain or emotion you feel is normal
- Find someone to talk to

Some foster parents who attended have been involved in fostering for 30 years and others were recently licensed. All of the caregivers who participated in the training found



Charles Saunders led the discussion on compassion fatigue for caregivers at 1911 S. Indiana.

it very beneficial. They were reminded that everyone who cares for children has undertaken an important and challenging task. Fostering can be very hard on caregivers, but also equally as rewarding. Caregivers were reminded that no one does this work alone and if they should need assistance, additional supports are available through their agencies, local foster parent associations and the regional foster care advisory councils.

After the training, caregivers enjoyed a buffet lunch of salad, pasta, roasted chicken, meatloaf, mashed potatoes and cookies provided by Janek’s Catering. The festive atmosphere over a good meal drove home the importance of eating right and relaxing.

Good-bye and hello for the Cook North Regional reporter

Sari Rowitz served as the Resource Development manager for nine years, working with licensing staff and recruiting families. Most recently she had responsibility for foster parent support services, the Foster Parent Support Specialists Program, LANs and resources, and coordinating special events. On top of that she served as the newsletter's reporter for the region.

In May, Rowitz joined the DCFS Division of Clinical Practice & Professional Development as the regional Clinical Manager for the DCFS Cook North Region.

"I was provided with many challenges and some wonderful opportunities to work with

incredible children, foster parents, and relative caregivers, as well as DCFS and private agency staff. I am excited to take and share what I have learned to continue to support our caregivers and staff," said Rowitz.

Her office is still located at 1911 S. Indiana and she can be contacted at 312-328-2501.

Jackie Bright is the new reporter for Cook North. She is looking forward to bringing the region's foster and adoptive families news about trainings, policies and resources. Contact Bright at 312-328-2505 with information about upcoming events, community services and suggestions for stories.

Cook North thanks parents for plan input

The Cook North Region would like to thank all of the foster parents, staff and managers who participated in the focus groups and review of the region's 2007 Implementation Plan for the Foster Parent Law. Through the collaborative efforts, the region was one of the top five scoring plans in the state. The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council invited our staff and two of our foster parents to its May meeting where we accepted our award. The Cook North Region received congratulations for its efforts from Acting Director Erwin McEwen.

This is the fourth time that the region's implementation plan scored among the top five. That is due in large part to the valuable contributions from the foster parents.

The region's administration looks forward to working with you again this fall as we continue to enhance our practice and support of the Foster Parent Law. Caregivers will have an opportunity to review the plan and suggest revisions for the 2008 plan.

New Clinical Staff at Cook North



Linda Kelly

The DCFS Cook North Region and the Division of Clinical Practice and Professional Development is pleased to announce Linda Kelly, MSW, LSW, has accepted the position of Clinical Coordinator in the Cook North Region. Kelly is located at 1911 S. Indiana, and can be reached at 312-328-2483.

Kelly has both a Bachelor and Master's degree in Social Work from Jane Addams School of Social Work, as well as being a Licensed Social Worker. She began working with the Department in 1998 and left in 2000 to complete her degree. During her time away from the Department, she worked at the University of Chicago Hospital on their Pediatric and Adolescent HIV Care Team and in the Social Work Department at Loyola University Medical Center. Additionally, Kelly conducted interviews with youth as part of a longitudinal research study for Northwestern University that is looking at services to youth involved with the Juvenile Justice System.

Since returning to the Department in 2004, she has worked as a permanency worker at Cook South and most recently as an investigator in the Joliet Field Office. Kelly is looking forward to using her clinical skills in a different capacity to work with and support caregivers and staff so that clinical decisions are made in the best interest of children.

Cook Region Training Calendar

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All licensed foster parents and adoptive parents are welcome to register for PRIDE In-Service Training.

Cook North

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

Chicago DCFS Indiana Office
Sept. 10, 12, 17 6:30-9:30 p.m.
& 19 (Mon & Wed)

Cook South

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

Matteson Aunt Martha's
Sept. 11, 13 & 18 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Tue & Thurs)

Module 5 - Supporting Relationships between Children and their Families (9 training hours)

Matteson Aunt Martha's
Aug. 14, 16 & 21 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Tue & Thurs)

Module 6 - Working as a Professional Team Member (9 training hours)

Chicago DCFS Emerald Office
Sept. 17, 19 & 24 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Mon & Wed)

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

Chicago DCFS Emerald Office
Aug. 18 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

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

Chicago DCFS Emerald Office
Aug. 27 & 29 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Mon & Wed)

Harvey DCFS Harvey Office
Sept. 17 & 19 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Mon & Wed)

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.

Cook Central

Oak Park Hephzibah
Aug. 18 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Cook South

Chicago DCFS Emerald Office
Aug. 11 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Harvey DCFS Harvey Office
Sept. 4 & 6 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Tue & Thurs)

Child Trauma

This four-hour course helps caregivers recognize the signs of trauma and understand how to work with children who have experienced traumatic events.

Cook North

Chicago DCFS Indiana Office
Aug. 25 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Sept. 29 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Cook South

Harvey DCFS Harvey Office
Aug. 28 & 30 (Tu/Th) 6:30-9:30 p.m.
Sept. 5 & 12 (Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Chicago DCFS Emerald Office
Sept. 5 & 12 (Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

**To register to attend
any of these
training classes,
Call the DCFS
Office of Training**

**877-800-3393
toll free**