

Cook County Advocate

News for Chicago Metro Area Families

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S.O.A.R. offers free park district summer camp to children in DCFS and post-adopt care

This year, the DCFS S.O.A.R. program has opened the free summer camp program to include children in foster care and, for the first time, those with open adoption or guardianship subsidies. DCFS has made arrangements to pay for day camp programs with the Chicago Park District and several suburban park district camps in Cook County. Children age 6 to 12 are eligible. The DCFS Division of Service Intervention, which runs S.O.A.R., has already identified eligible youth and contacted caregivers by mail with instructions on how to register for programs. The DCFS regional offices will be the hub for distributing further information on summer camp.

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 in the camp program at the park of their choosing. 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 parks across the city. Before and after care is available in many sites. Registration begins April 26 and continues through the first week of camp. See www.chicagoparkdistrict.com for more details. 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 several suburban camps throughout Cook County. Suburban program locations include:

- Bellwood
- Blue Island
- Burbank
- Chicago Ridge
- Dolton
- Franklin Park
- Evanston
- Flossmoor
- Harvey
- Hazel Crest
- Hoffman Estates
- Homewood



- Maywood Park
- Oak Lawn
- Orland Park
- Rosemont
- Tinley Park
- University Park

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, if applicable, are not included. For more information on day camp, contact the S.O.A.R. Program at 312-814-4145.

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In addition to the park district programs in the local communities, DCFS also has contracts with several specialty camp programs.

Ailey Camp

Ailey Camp offers dance classes in ballet, modern dance, jazz, West African dance, along with personal development instruction and field trips. The group meets in Chicago at the Garfield Park Field House. It is open to boys and girls in grades 6 through 8 (ages 11 to 14). Registration information will be announced at a later date.

Little Black Pearl's Creativity Camp

Little Black Pearl's Creativity Camp leads youth through artistic activities including painting, drawing, ceramics, creative writing, dance and theater. The summer program runs June through August for youth age 7 to 18. Little Black Pearl is located at 1060 E. 47th St. in Chicago.

New Way Learning Center Summer Camp

New Way Learning Center summer camp includes academic instruction plus games, sports, cheerleading, music and dance. The program, located at 321 E. 84th St. in Chicago, serves youth ages 4 to 14. It runs June through August. Contact DCFS S.O.A.R. at 312-814-4145 to register.



Action for Children helps to find early learning programs

Pre-Kindergarten programs lay the social and emotional foundation children need to learn the reading, writing and math skills taught in Kindergarten. Under the DCFS School Readiness Initiative, all children at age three or older should be enrolled in a Head Start program, state pre-Kindergarten program or an accredited child care center. All children in DCFS care are automatically eligible for Head Start and state pre-K programs, regardless of household income. DCFS and Action for Children can help caregivers in Cook County identify, evaluate and enroll in a Head Start or state pre-K program more easily.

As a child approaches his or her third birthday, the caseworker should begin the process for enrollment in pre-Kindergarten. Action for Children is the local organization that provides referrals to connect families with child care providers. DCFS and Action for Children have set up an enhanced referral process so children in DCFS care receive special service.

Caseworkers will contact Action for Children on the designated enhanced referral phone line. The agency will confirm the child's information and then call the foster parent to discuss the type of program the child needs.

"Our role is to provide resources and educational consultation to the parent," said Shanta Payton-



Scott. "We go over what caregivers should look for in a program and the questions they may want to ask."

Action for Children will find programs that match the family's criteria and confirm openings. Next, they provide the foster caregivers a profile sheet of applicable programs. The caregiver can then contact the providers, make a decision and enroll the child.

Caregivers to children who are three years old and not enrolled in a Head Start or Pre-Kindergarten program should contact their caseworker right away. Quality preschool gives children academic readiness and also helps them learn to play, make friends, and receive positive attention from adults. Youth in foster care especially need the stability of an early educational program that can help them "catch up" from any educational and developmental setbacks due to problems in their family life. Then, when they reach kindergarten, they will understand how school works and will be ready to perform well.

BOOC gives S. suburban youth new skills

Building Our Own Community (BOOC), located in Dolton, is a new resource for youth living in the South suburbs. BOOC can provide educational advocacy, social skill development, mentoring, as well as employment skills development for youth age 8 to 18. BOOC works with families residing in the following townships: Bloom, Bremen, Calumet, Lemont, Orland, Palos, Lower Stickney, Rich, Thornton and Worth (Local Area Networks 53 and 56).

Their services include tutoring, mentoring, sports activities, community service work, caregiver collaboration, school advocacy, and rites of passage outings; all designed to mitigate against truancy and support student advancement to graduation.

BOOC has programs during the school year at its Dolton site. Students also can take part in off-site adventures. Program participants blow off steam and learn social skills through events such as Summer Fun swimming party, Team Building Youth Conference and

the Girls Just Want to Have Fun Weekend Retreat.

"My experience on the trip I went to was really inspiring. It was a very emotional time as we opened up to one another. But besides that, we stopped at the mall to shop. If I could, I would do it all over again," gushed one of the girls after her retreat.

BOOC bases its practices on a Positive Youth Development Framework. The program supports youth and the important adults in their lives. BOOC staff members are committed to working in conjunction with educators, child welfare workers, therapists, foster caregivers and, when appropriate, parents in order to assist the youth in reaching their goals.

BOOC is currently hosting their school-year program, which is held Monday through Friday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., at their facility located at 14200 Chicago Road in Dolton. Contact Dea Johnson at 708-849-3237 in order to register youth. Space is limited and slots are filling quickly.

Chicago announces earlier youth curfew

Effective March 14, the Chicago curfew for youth under 17 is 10 p.m. on any Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday until 6 a.m. of the following day; and 11 p.m. on any Friday or Saturday and until 6 a.m. of the following day. Children under the age of 17 must be at home before curfew unless accompanied by an adult, guardian, or other proper companion who is 21 years or older. Exceptions include youth on a parent-ordered errand, going to or from work or an adult-supervised recreational or religious activity or exercising their First Amendment Rights.

Cook North offers school help in north suburbs

In recent years, the contracts between DCFS and the Child and Adolescent Local Area Networks (LAN) service providers focused on creating programs to stabilize children in the current educational settings. These programs are available to all families, including foster, adoptive and guardianship families, concerned about students at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion

LAN 40 in Evanston Township offers the Student Empowerment Program. Specific educational support services will be provided, such as assistance with transportation, attending Individualized Education Plan meetings, resource planning and enrollment in academic enrichment programs. The program is run by the Youth Organization Umbrella. Contact Rafael Rivera at 847-866-1200 ext. 4.

When a student receives an out-of-school suspension from District 219, a Community Coordinator will work closely with the two high schools in LAN 41, community agencies and the villages of Skokie, Niles, Lincolnwood and Morton Grove, to turn the situation around to something positive. After an initial assessment, students will provide community service at these sites and receive time to complete academic work. Jewish Child and Family Services administers this program to all families in Niles Township. Contact Angelo Militello at 847-568-5110 for details.

Cook Central and Cook South share life book memories

A life book is an account of a child's life in words and pictures. It is similar to a scrapbook and should be continued throughout the child's life. It can help a child cope with feelings of grief, loss, and separation from family and his former home. It can help answer the extremely important questions that every child will ask: "Who am I? Where did I come from?"

The adoption teams from Cook Central and Cook South regions each offered trainings in creating life books for caregivers in their respective regions. In Cook South at the Emerald office, the group Mocha Scrap Booking Divas donated scrap booking supplies to the DCFS adoption team to help them develop life books for youth. Members of the group also served as co-instructors.

Life books will help a child walk down memory lane. Caregivers should record developmental milestones such as: first tooth,

first words, first steps, riding a bicycle, first day in school, or braces on their teeth. The book is also a place for information about injuries like a broken arm, copies of immunizations, or hospital photos. Caregivers can document special days like graduation and birthdays with photos, invitations, announcements and lists of who was there. You can also note favorite toys, pets, and friends. Events and activities such as a school plays or baseball games make for fond memories later.

Ursula Angielski, DCFS Adoption Administrator stated that pictures of birth parents and siblings, as well as pictures of foster parents and their birth and other foster children are important additions to the book.

Marikay Jarit, a Cook Central adoption worker, pointed out that it is very important and helpful to have the foster parents involved in the process. Caregivers can reach out to therapists, caseworkers and birth parents for more contributions to add to the book. The caregivers at Cook Central went home with supplies and a few lucky winners took home door prizes donated by the Cook Central Foster Parent Advisory Council.

Both Cook Central and Cook South regions are planning future life book events. Call Marikay Jarit in the Cook Central office at 708-338-6716 or Carol Williams



of the Cook South adoption team at 708-210-2800 for more information.

Adoption Learning Partners on-line life book course

Adoption Learning Partners developed an on-line course to instruct caregivers in creating lifebooks. The course is designed with short answer and fill-in-the-blank pages that can be added, saved and printed to be included in a life book. The course also contains sample layouts with narrative text, a related adoption story to provide inspiration and content specific questions and answers to help the caregiver add to the life book.

The course is available at no charge to families caring for children currently in DCFS care or adopted through DCFS. Go to www.adoptionlifebooks.com for details.



Caregiver Katina Winters works on life books for the four children in her home.

Cook South Learning Network promotes education at the youngest ages

Cook South Region has partnered with Strengthening Families Illinois to organize the Cook South Learning Network. The network will focus on the Department's commitment to making sure every child in care age three to five is enrolled in Head Start, pre-kindergarten or an accredited early learning program. Enrollment in an educational program is the cornerstone for Strengthening Families' approach to reduce child abuse and its effect on children. Early learning programs help keep families strong in six ways:

1. Enhance Parental Resilience
2. Develop Social Connections
3. Build Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
4. Offer Concrete Support in Times of Need
5. Foster Social and Emotional Competence of Children
6. Promote Healthy Parent-Child Relationships

A second priority of the Cook South Learning Network will be to cultivate communication between the parent, foster caregiver, teacher, and caseworker around the issues and benefits of early learning. Each of the individuals play an important role and will participate in educational conferences to discuss the child's progress and needs. Forming a link between the most important individuals in a child's early learning experience and home life will build protective factors around children to counter the impact of

abuse and neglect. The program will also connect families to effective resources. Children with challenging behaviors will receive expert intervention that will help keep their development on track while keeping them safe.

At the end of 2007, representatives of Strengthening Families Illinois, DCFS, several suburban school districts and others came together to learn about the features and opportunities of this program. They also had a time of brainstorming about how the issues and policies will affect families. DCFS Regional Administrator Michael Byrd and Deputy Director Cynthia Moreno of the Division of Service Intervention kept the discussion anchored in the needs of children in DCFS care. Several DCFS caseworkers and the DCFS Education Advisors were also there to offer their perspective from working directly with families caring for young children.

Sharifa Townsend, Principal of the ECHO Family Enrichment Program, has agreed to be the Coordinator of the Cook South Learning Network. The next step will be to conduct cross-training sessions for DCFS staff and Head Start personnel. Caregivers to children age three to five can contact their caseworkers for more information on enrolling youth in educational programs.

Cook South's Emerald office has new parking plan

Cook South Region has implemented a parking lot regulation plan at its 6201 S. Emerald office. Anyone coming to the office by car and parking in the lot must display a permanent pass or temporary parking pass in the car's front window.

Caregivers or other visitors who utilize the parking lots at Emerald are to enter the building, sign-in at the Security Desk and obtain a temporary parking pass. Then return to your car and place it on the dashboard of your vehicle to make it visible for monitoring. Temporary parking stickers are good only for the date officially stamped on them.

Security personnel periodically will walk through the parking lots to check for cars that do not have an official sticker or a temporary day pass displayed. Those vehicles that do not have a pass can be towed at the owner's expense. DCFS will not be responsible for any expense incurred.

There is reserved parking for those who display the official handicapped parking sticker or plate on their vehicle. Also, management at the Emerald site will make every effort possible to accommodate visitors with children, the elderly, the physically challenged and any other condition that may arise. Those individuals can request assistance from Security personnel as they enter the building.

Cook County teen job hunt

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 Denise Coleman at 312-793-1289.

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.

City of Chicago Kid Start provides summer employment and pre-internships, introduces young people to the world of work and creates relationships with mentors. Applicants to KidStart Jobs must be aged 14 to 21 and live in Chicago. Go to www.chicagokidstart.org for details.

The DCFS Education and Transition Managers are available to help. Call 312-814-5959.

Cook Central region is home to West Side Technical Institute's job training program

West Side Technical Institute, located at 28th Street and Western Avenue in Chicago, is one of several City Colleges of Chicago that offer vocational programs. Many of the programs can be completed in less than six months. Employers are waiting to interview and hire the students as soon as they complete the program. The schools offer programs that Illinois has highlighted as critical shortage areas, where businesses desperately need new employees.

Youth who are still under DCFS guardianship can take classes at West Side with tuition paid by the DCFS Youth in College program. The job training programs require a high school diploma or GED and a qualifying exam. If the student does not qualify, the school offers a free 16-week program to bring the reading, writing and math skills up to the level needed to enter the program. Their credo, according to Jean Johnson from West Side Technical Institutes, is "to support the student." Upon entering the program, each student is assigned a support person to offer help and guidance.

The 13-week bank teller class begins with an individual orientation and assessment of each student. Bankers conduct a pre-interview with students before the classes begin. At the end of the program, the bankers return for another interview with the graduating students. A recent class of 23

had 19 of the students hired by graduation at a starting salary of \$22,000.

West Side Technical also offers other certificate programs:

- Business Advance Certificate
- Certified Nursing Assistant
- Criminal Justice/Private Police
- Criminal Justice/Public Police
- Industrial Maintenance
- Manufacturing Technology/Maintenance Mechanic
- Medical Office Technology
- Nursing Assistant
- Office Assistant (Spanish and English)
- Office Technology
- Pharmacy Technician
- Phlebotomy Technician
- Precision Metal Working
- Real Estate Broker Program

GED classes are offered in Spanish and English three times a year. The classes begin in spring, summer and fall. They also offer ACT test preparation classes beginning in September. The seven-week class meets two nights a week for two hours each night.

Caregivers or youth with questions can contact the Cook Central DCFS Education Advisors Dawn Overend at 773-292-7732 and Carlos Alverio at 773-292-7731 for information about this and other City College programs.

Licensing visits go more smoothly with preparation

As foster caregivers, you can sometimes feel like it would be easier to replace your front door with one that revolves. The children that come in and out can be outnumbered by the child welfare staff that come for regular visits. Sometimes it's welcomed, other times it can be inconvenient. Yet, monitoring visits required for licensing can go smoothly with a bit of preparation.

DCFS regulations require that twice a year, a licensing representative, family development specialist or worker by another name (depending on your licensing agency) will come to your home for a monitoring visit. The purpose is to confirm that the home continues to meet licensing standards for safety. The licensing worker must do a physical check of the home, completing a list of safety items and compliance with agency rules. These items need to be checked and documented. Newly licensed homes will have the first monitoring visit at 60 days. After that, everyone gets a visit every six months as long as they keep their license open. This can seem redundant, particularly for long-term caregivers who have received countless monitoring visits. Yet, there is more to the licensing visit than a checklist.

"I would like to see staff work more closely with the people who are currently fostering our youth and be more of a support to them," said Steven Minter, DCFS Licensing Administrator.

Licensing staff help make sure that caregivers can meet children's needs. When the physical aspects of the home are settled, they can help support the family through other licensing aspects such as training and placement issues. Since DCFS moved to a placement model to match youth to homes nearest their schools, open foster homes go into a foster home availability database. Foster caregivers should have discussions with their licensing representative about their capacity for potential placements.

To work though the necessary items more efficiently, caregivers can prepare for an upcoming monitoring visit with the following simple steps:

- Have driver's license and proof of auto insurance available
- Confirm that your home has working smoke detectors and a carbon monoxide detector
- Check that there are no flammable materials near the furnace and hot water heater areas
- Make sure that you still have dangerous household chemicals, cleaning products and medications stored appropriately in areas inaccessible to young children
- For pets, have proof of up to date inoculations available
- If possible, re-check your hot water temperature before the visit. Licensing standards require hot water to be no higher than 115 degrees
- If you have foster children in your home, have updated

records available such as personal allowance and clothing logs and receipts, medication and behavior logs.

Completing these activities prior to your bi-annual monitoring visit will not only make things go more quickly, but will prevent your licensing worker from having to re-visit your home to ensure compliance at a later date. If your home is found out of compliance with licensing standards during the monitoring visit, you will be placed on involuntary hold. Your licensing worker will explain what you need to do to meet the regulations and have the hold removed.

Cook County Advocate reporters

Cook South ~ Rod Mulford

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

Cook North ~ Amie Joof

773-866-5522 office
312-328-2688 fax
Amie.Joof@illinois.gov
2550 W. Bradley Pl. Chicago, IL 60618

Cook Central ~

Merrylee Guge-Jorgensen

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

Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

Cook Region Training Calendar

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Training. Advance registration is required. Training dates, times and locations are subject to change.

Module 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.

Chicago *UCAN*
April 10, 15 & 17 (Tue) 6:30 -9:30 p.m.

Matteson *Aunt Martha's*
April 1, 3 & 8 (Tue/Thu/Tue) 6:30 -9:30 p.m.

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 before and after visits with the birth family and how to share the parenting role with birth parents.

Harvey *DCFS Office*
April 14, 21 & 28 (Mon) 6:30 -9:30 p.m.

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 and the supports that are available.

Chicago *DCFS, 6201 S. Emerald*
April 12 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Module 11 - *The Teen in Foster Care: Supporting Attachment* (6 training hours)

Chicago *Hull House*
April 7 & 9 (M/W) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Chicago *DCFS, 6201 S. Emerald*
May 3 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

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

This new course will assist 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 to understand the teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use while fostering teenagers.

Chicago *SOS Children's Village*
April 15 & 17 (Tue/Thu) 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

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 North

Chicago *Association House*
June 7 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Cook South

Chicago *DCFS, 6201 S. Emerald*
May 10 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Harvey *DCFS Office*
May 3 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

June 28 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Child Trauma

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

Cook North

Chicago *Association House*
April 5 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Cook Central

Chicago *UCAN*
April 8 (Tue) 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Cook South

Chicago *DCFS, 6201 S. Emerald*
April 5 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Harvey *DCFS Office*
April 19 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.

Call the DCFS Office of Training

**877-800-3393
toll free**