

# Cook County Advocate

News for Chicago Metro Area Families

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## Students have alternatives to dropping out

Sometimes, despite even the best efforts, many young people decide to drop out before receiving a high school diploma. DCFS is harnessing its resources to ensure those students who want to return to school can have another chance. The Alternative Schools Network reaches out to youth who have dropped out of school, been expelled or are at risk of missing out on their diploma.

In Chicago, the Alternative Schools Network maintains 17 neighborhood schools with curriculum targeted to help students get back on track. Youth who have been adopted can also apply to the schools in the network. However, for youth who still have open DCFS cases, the Alternative Schools Network offers the Youth Scholars, Skills and Service (YS3) program. This program is open to young people ages 16 to 21 who are in DCFS foster care, group homes or independent living programs. The YS3 program combines in-class instruction with after-school courses in life skills, leadership, financial literacy and social/cultural development. On top of the instruction are added layers of support through mentoring, tutoring and counseling.

As students work their way toward diplomas, they can also earn money to continue their education. For each computer-assisted course a young person completes in the after-school program, they receive \$250, of which \$200 goes into a scholarship account. Students earn \$2 per hour for the time they spend in the after-school programs, which also is deposited into their account. After the student graduates and enrolls in college or some type of vocational training, they can withdraw the funds accumulated in their scholarship account, plus an additional \$600 award.

"Because of the many moves these young people made, they often have deficiencies. But when they finally have stability and incentive, they can do well," said program manager Christine Garza.

Typically, Network schools are small schools in neighborhood settings that operate like independent mini-communities. Students attend classes during the school day and participate in the after-school activities. Adult mentors are available to assist youth. The mentors are more than role models; they accompany youth to court, go to doctor's appointments

and help with schoolwork. There are also services for students who are parents.

Alternative Schools Networks have 250 openings for DCFS youth. A caseworker must complete the referral for the DCFS programs; however, caregivers, counselors and others can start the process. Enrollment is on a rolling basis so there is no need to wait. Contact Ray Fleming at 773-401-7221 for more information.

### Alternative Schools Network

Ada S. McKinley  
2929 S. Wabash 60616

Antonia Pantoja (Aspira)  
3119 N. Pulaski 60641

ASA Academy  
4651 W. Madison 60644

Bronzeville  
4622 S. Dr. Martin Luther  
King Dr. 60653

CCA Academy  
1231 S. Pulaski 60623

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## Alternative schools, con't.

Community Youth  
Development Institute  
7836 S. Union 60620

Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos  
2739 W. Division 60622

Howard Area Community Center  
7647 N. Paulina 60626

Jobs For Youth  
17 N. State, Suite 600 60602

Latino Youth  
2001 S. California 60608

Olive Harvey  
10001 S. Woodlawn 60623

Prologue Learning Ctr.  
1134 N. Cleaver 60622

Sullivan House  
8164 S. South Chicago Ave.  
60617

West Town  
2021 W. Fulton 60612

Westside Alternative  
4909 W. Division 60651

Charles Houston  
9035 S. Langley

Winnie Mandela  
7847 S. Jeffrey 60649

## Partnering with Parents hosts institute

The three Cook County regions united to provide resources to the parents of children in DCFS care at the second Partnering with Parents Institute on June 20. The institute offered parents a full day of informative workshops around the theme "Making it Happen Through Self-Empowerment... Keeping Our Kids."

Assistant Director Velma Williams set the tone for the day with her remarks to parents and child welfare staff in attendance. This, the second annual Parent Institute, was tangible evidence of the DCFS commitment to providing information and resources that parents need to help themselves and their children.

Parents attended workshops focused on:

- Caseworker and Parent Relationships
- Parents Rights and Responsibilities
- Substance Abuse: Impact on the Family
- Role of the Guardian and Public Defender
- Administrative Case Review (ACR) and Service Plans

The presenters not only shared information, but also encouraged parents to advocate for their families. They described self-empowerment as making good decisions and positive changes.

Between the formal presentations, parents stopped at the information tables where representatives



*Community providers shared program information with parents at the Partnering with Parents institute day.*

from numerous community organizations waited to be of service. This made for one-stop shopping for guidance on topics such as housing supports, health care, education, home safety, and other resources.

At the closing session many parents stood up and shared what they took from the day. One member of the Partnering with Parents Council reminded other parents that "If you want to get help, you have to want to help yourself." Another parent was encouraged by what she had learned and stated that "you have uplifted my spirit and given me hope."

DCFS staff from the Division of Clinical Services and Professional Development developed the event with support from several divisions, external agencies and the Partnering with Parents Councils in Cook County. The Institute Day is an outgrowth of the DCFS Reunification Initiative.

## DCFS Education Advisors on call to help with school issues

Caregivers and caseworkers working together can advocate successfully with schools for the children in their care. However, when families need additional expertise to work through school issues, it may be time to contact an Education Advisor. They can support DCFS-supervised foster families and families who adopted or have taken 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.

DCFS Education Advisors are part of the Northern Illinois University Educational Access Project. They work with families in which children may have learning, discipline or behavioral concerns at school. They can take part in meetings for special education. The advisors will

help caregivers and caseworkers determine the best strategies to help youth make successful transitions through school.

The Education Advisors who cover the three Cook County DCFS Regions offer the following reminders to help families prepare for the expenses that come with education:

- ALL schools provide free lunches, required textbooks and instructional materials to qualified families. Youth in foster care qualify. (Free and Reduced Lunch forms must be completed with a Medical Card number or other proof of income.)
- School districts have individual policies regarding the waiver of other school fees.

- School clothes are to be purchased from the clothing allowance that is part of the monthly foster care payment to caregivers.
- Private agencies have individual policies regarding routine school supplies. Foster parents through DCFS receive \$50.00 per school-age child placed in their home during the month of July on their August check.
- Transportation is free for students living more than 1-1/2 miles from school or 1 mile from public transportation, experiencing hazardous traffic conditions or receiving special education services and needing transportation. Ask your school.

### Contact an Education Advisor in Cook County:

#### **DCFS Cook North Region**

Robena Morgan (Lead Advisor)  
1911 S. Indiana  
312-328-2673  
robena.morgan@illinois.gov

Donnis Briscoe  
(Cook North/Chicago)  
1911 S. Indiana  
312-328-2673  
donnis.briscoe@illinois.gov

Yasmina Safiane-Johnson  
(Cook North/Suburbs)  
8140 N. McCormick, Skokie  
847-745-3008  
yasmina.johnson@illinois.gov

#### **DCFS Cook Central Region**

Dawn Overend  
(Cook Central/Chicago)  
3518 W. Division  
773-292-7731  
dawn.overend@illinois.gov

Yasmina Sefiane-Johnson  
(Cook Central/Suburbs)  
1701 N. 1st Ave., Maywood  
708-338-6637  
yasmina.johnson@illinois.gov

#### **DCFS Cook South Region**

Diane Fitzhugh  
(Cook South/Chicago)  
6201 S. Emerald  
773-371-6029  
diane.fitzhugh@illinois.gov

Rebecca Lawrence  
(Cook South/Suburbs)  
15115 S. Dixie Hwy., Harvey  
708-210-3051  
rebecca.lawrence@illinois.gov

## Free Early Education resources

The Chicago Center for Early Education (CCEE) houses educational resources for parents and professionals. Caregivers can visit the CCEE to check out books, backpacks, theme boxes, and music CDs at no charge by applying for a library resource card.

The Center has a wide variety of resources and materials about children ranging in age from birth to eight years old. Topics include: physical growth, discipline, language development, nutrition and health, effective parenting skills, and much more.

While grown-ups explore the kid-friendly center, young learners can visit the children's area to play with books, toys and computers. Parent or early childhood groups can also use the facility for meetings. There is a computer lab and workspace area with a laminator, die-cut machines, and other equipment.

CCEE is conveniently located in Chicago's West Loop neighborhood inside Malcolm X College, at 1900 W. Van Buren, Room 2611. For more information visit the Web site at [www.uic.edu/educ/ccee](http://www.uic.edu/educ/ccee) or call 312-773-3134.

## Cook regions help chart path to permanency at symposium

In the last decade, Illinois has implemented initiatives to increase the potential for youth in DCFS care to be in permanent homes. There has been a dramatic drop in the number of children left in the limbo of long-term foster care, "aging out" to unfortunate outcomes. However, further work is needed to support paths to permanency for every child. On June 18, stakeholders from the three DCFS regions in Cook County joined together to discuss the barriers to permanency and map out solutions. This forum brought together foster/adoptive caregivers, parents, youth in DCFS care, judges, attorneys, law enforcement officials, child welfare professionals, and community service providers.

Caregivers and other key stakeholders formed action planning work groups to create and identify new strategies to support struggling families, increase reunification rates, and improve adoption and subsidized guardianship outcomes. They explored questions including:

1. What can DCFS, court personnel, community members, caregivers and parents do to keep children in their homes?
2. What are the barriers that keep children from returning home sooner?

3. What can communities do to increase and stabilize adoption and guardianship and what are some of the factors that contribute to this?
4. What contributes to the overrepresentation of African-American youth in foster care in some communities and how can we reduce these numbers?

The long-range goal of the symposium is for each community to develop a local action plan and identify resources for families. The diverse range of participants presented an opportunity to explore ways to engage the courts, law enforcement and community leaders to address barriers that exist in the community.

In the movie "The Wiz," a modern musical based on the Wizard of Oz, Glenda tells Dorothy and her fellow visitors to Oz that "If we know ourselves we're always home, anywhere." The participants demonstrated their commitment to help youth find the security that comes from having a stable home in or after foster care.

The Permanency Symposium in Cook County was an important step down the road to more positive permanency outcomes for children under the care of DCFS.

## Cook South caregivers and parents transform with Project Butterfly

Gwen Luster and Niambi Jaha-Echols of Project Butterfly recently presented a new initiative designed to assist in reunification efforts to the Cook South Advisory Council. Their proposal allows foster caregivers and parents to attend family-related classes together while indulging in relaxing social times.

Project Butterfly, Inc. has been successfully transforming girls ages 11 to 17 by providing a fun atmosphere while learning about life and independence. The symbol of the butterfly represents change from an original form to a more beautiful one. However, staff realized that the wonderful girl butterflies often had to return to a "caterpillar" home life, in which the adults did not have the same learning opportunities that transformed the girls.

"It is a fact that stronger families and stronger children are the essential foundation of strong societies. So Project Butterfly designed a program to empower parents and caregivers to work together for the good of the children," said Luster.

The program is based on interactive workshops with focused conversations on relevant topics. The Project Butterfly leaders guide parents and caregivers toward answering questions that include: Is change needed? and What is required to make the changes to strengthen the bonds with their children?



*Gwen Luster and Niambi Jaha-Echols of Project Butterfly offer courses to strengthen relationships between girls, their parents and foster caregivers.*

"By bringing parents and caregivers together in a non-threatening environment of fun, support and parental respite (no kids come to the classes), you develop a community in which the child is not forced to choose one mom over another," said Luster. She cited an old African proverb that extols the virtues of working together: when spider webs unite; they can tie up a lion.

Project Butterfly also offers relaxing spa facilities on the top floor of its office, located at 3543 S. Indiana in Chicago, as well as other services for both the mother and the caregiver. The workshop groups are small and have flexible hours. This supportive and educational program is open to parents of children whose goal is reunification, foster caregivers, adoptive parents or subsidized guardians. For more information, call 312-328-0886 or visit the Web site at [www.projectbutterfly.com](http://www.projectbutterfly.com).

## Cook South tutors have openings

More Cook South Region families will have the opportunity to help their struggling students find success at school thanks to recent openings within the Project Learn tutoring program.

Diane Fitzhugh, the DCFS Educational Advisor at Cook South, attests to the benefits of tutoring for students who have fallen behind in their daily schoolwork. Additionally, students with problems in areas such as reading or math can benefit from tutoring. The tutor may initially perform an evaluation to diagnose the problem, discover possible learning disabilities and determine the goals of the tutoring.

The benefits of tutoring go beyond receiving passing grades. Tutors can help with organizational skills and test-taking techniques, as well as build confidence for students whose low self-esteem makes learning difficult. These one-on-one sessions can also work wonders for a youth who needs a little extra attention to succeed.

Project Learn tutoring is available at no charge to children with open DCFS cases. For other families, the program will arrange a sliding scale discount. For more information, contact the program director, Ms. Hagan, at 708-798-7470 or by e-mail to [teach@besteducators.org](mailto:teach@besteducators.org).

## Cook Central residential program wins two national awards

La Casa Norte's Solid Ground Supportive Housing Program in Humboldt Park was one of four organizations nationwide to win a 2007 Maxwell Award of Excellence from the Fannie Mae Foundation and the Partnership to End Long Term Homelessness.

La Casa Norte, which provides 16 transitional housing units for youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, received the first place award in the category of "Supportive Housing for Homeless Youth." The distinction awarded a grant of \$75,000.

The program also received the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Award for Architectural Excellence in Community Design, as part of the 14th Annual Chicago

Neighborhood Development Awards. Landon Bone Baker Architects redesigned an unused masonry building into a space that demonstrates a commitment both to the youth it serves and to environmental sustainability.

"We saw the enormous potential of La Casa Norte from the beginning," said DCFS Director Erwin McEwen. "They deserve our deepest thanks for the commitment and compassion they have brought to the lives of DCFS clients and their communities."

DCFS has funded La Casa Norte's housing advocacy program since 2002. La Casa Norte was cited for its distinctive approach in the youth service provider arena—male-focused, bilingual and multicultural



*Youth at Solid Ground enjoy their newly designed living spaces.*

services for homeless youth who are predominantly Latino and African-American.

The Solid Ground housing facility is now fully occupied, with 16 young men living together and working toward bright futures. Referrals to Solid Ground come from the Child and Youth Investment Team (CAYIT) process.

## Cook Central youth find employment help in the Austin area

The mission of Eyes on Austin, a non-profit job center which serves individuals age 14 and older, is to provide services and programs that raise the employability and educational levels of Austin community residents.

Job search assistance is available to any Chicago resident, but only Austin community residents will have an assigned case manager. The center keeps a job lead book that is updated weekly. It includes new job listings with addresses, phone and fax numbers, as well as contact names for each listing. In addition, six computers are avail-

able for job applicants to write and update their resumes. Two job developers are on hand to offer advice and consultation for resume writing.

Tara Monthly, who works with teens on job searches and interview preparation, is integral to the counseling process at Eyes on Austin. There, she teaches job applicants how to fill out an application, prepare a resume, dress for the interview and manage their interview experience.

Plus, many training programs are available for young adults age 17

and older. They include: a GED preparation class, with individual attention and tutoring offered during morning and afternoon classes; the Handy Man program, which teaches home repair, construction and rehab work; the food-related Business Management Program, which includes a culinary arts class that teaches cooking; and the food handling and management program, that upon completion, awards a food-handling certificate.

Eyes on Austin is located at 5519 W. North Ave. For more information, call 773-479-1569.

## Cook North region offers school help to North Side students

Family Centered Services are available to families throughout the Cook North Region. In general, Local Area Network (LAN) providers target services to children who are experiencing school difficulties, specifically those who are at risk of suspension or expulsion, or have documented issues with truancy. In the portion of the DCFS Cook North region that serves families on the North and Northwest sides of Chicago there are four LAN programs that provide educational support. While they have the common goal of helping youth succeed in school, each has a unique program plan and service area. These programs are open to all families, including foster care, adoptive and guardianship homes.

There are additional education programs available in LANs other than those listed here. Contact Joann Neimuth, DCFS LAN Liaison at 847-745-3048 for more information.

**Metropolitan Family Services** offers its program Making the Grade for students ages six to 18. It provides support to children and their parents, including individual/family counseling when appropriate. Case managers will assist with advocacy at the school and with linking families to additional resources. The emphasis will be on providing knowledge, skills and ability to problem solve to help families and their children reduce truancy, suspensions and expulsions.

Contact Karen Allen at 773-371-3707 or [allenk@metrofamily.org](mailto:allenk@metrofamily.org). Metropolitan Family Services is in LAN 63 and is located at 3249 N. Central Ave, Chicago.

**Youth Outreach Services** targets its Academic Support Program to youth in grades 5 to 8, but it will work with older youth. It is located at 6417 W. Irving Park Rd. The program provides home-based services aimed at supporting families of children who have been targeted for school performance issues.

Contact Liz Dinsdale at 773-777-6377 or send an e-mail to [Elizabethd@yos.org](mailto:Elizabethd@yos.org);

**Uhlich UCAN** offers its Homeworks Program for youth in grades 7, 8 and 9 who are facing difficulties in school. They will consider younger children on a case by case basis. Uhlich's approach is to work with the student taking into account what may be happening personally, at home and at school. Uhlich offers many programs that can help stabilize the student and get him or her ready to succeed in school.

Uhlich UCAN serves families who reside in LAN 65. It is located at 939 N. Mohawk. Contact Ezell Smith by phone at 312-742-3763 or by e-mail to [smith@ucan-chicago.org](mailto:smith@ucan-chicago.org).

**Community Counseling Centers of Chicago** focuses its support through the Parent Education Program. Parents of students

ages seven to 16 can participate in an eight-week series of positive parenting courses. They also offer three specialized home visits including case management services, and an on-going support group. The program is designed to improve parent-child interactions and to increase parents' access to information and services, while reducing school delinquency.

Community Counseling Centers of Chicago (C4) is located at 4740 N. Clark in Chicago in LAN 65. Contact Katherine Bensinger at 773-765-0829 or send an e-mail to [katherine.bensinger@c4chicago.org](mailto:katherine.bensinger@c4chicago.org).

### Cook County Advocate reporters

**Cook South ~ Rod Mulford**  
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**Cook Central ~ Merrylee Guge-Jorgensen**  
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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.

# 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. Detailed address information will be provided with registration.

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

*This workshop provides practical information 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.*

**Chicago** **DCFS, Cook North**  
Aug. 5, 7 & 12 (Tue/Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

### 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.*

**Chicago** **Hull House**  
Aug. 12 & 14 (Tue/Thu) 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. They also learn about the supports that are available.*

**Oak Park** **Hephzibah**  
August 23 (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 fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.*

**Chicago** **DCFS, Cook South**  
Sept. 23 & 25 (Tue/Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

**Matteson** **Aunt Martha's**  
Aug. 19 & 21 (Tue/Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

### The Teen in Family Foster Care: Supporting Attachment (6 training hours)

*This training will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand how early attachment experiences have impacted the teen's development.*

**Chicago** **DCFS, Cook South**  
Sept. 2 & 4 (Tue/Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

**Matteson** **Aunt Martha's**  
Sept. 9 & 11 (Tue/Thu) 6:30-9:30 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.

**Chicago** **Kids Hope United**  
Sept. 4 & 9 (Thu/Tue) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

**Chicago** **DCFS, Cook South**  
Sept. 20 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

**Harvey** **DCFS, Cook South**  
August 30 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

**Oak Park** **Hephzibah**  
Sept. 19 & 24 (Wed) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

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