

# Cook County Advocate

News for Chicago Metro Area Families

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## SOAR into the new year with art and recreation

Youth flourish when art, music and recreation are in their lives. Those endeavors are invaluable, and usually come with a high price tag. However, young people in foster care or receiving adoption or guardianship subsidies can explore a variety of free cultural and recreational activities that will enhance their lives.

Project S.O.A.R. (Statewide Opportunities for Art and Recreation) is sponsored by DCFS to bring free classes to youth throughout the Cook County regions. Classes include music, art, media, dance and drama, and are conducted weekly to coincide with the school calendar. Youth ages 3 to 18 who are currently under DCFS care or who left through adoption or guardianship arrangements can enroll in classes.

"It is important that our children have the same chance to experience art and recreation, just as any other child would. Being in care is by its very nature tough. This is one way caregivers can help normalize the situation and bring some good out of it," said DCFS Director Erwin McEwen.

Beyond DCFS, educators and legislators believe in the power

of the arts to transform children's lives. The National Governor's Association in 2002 said in a workforce report: "For at-risk youth, that segment of society most likely to suffer from limited lifetime productivity, the arts contribute to lower recidivism rates; increased self-esteem; the acquisition of job skills; and the development of much needed creative thinking, problem solving and communications skills."

Over several years, the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services has forged relationships with art, cultural and recreational programs to bring families educational opportunities through S.O.A.R. Top-notch instructors from respected arts organizations present a wide range of engaging programs to build excitement for the arts. Youth can register for one course each session from the offerings below:

- After-School in the Arts
- Ballet
- Percussion
- Black Ensemble/New Directions
- Photography
- Clarinet
- Piano
- Children's Choir
- Chorus



- Drum Classes
- Dance
- Teen Program
- Clarinet
- Tumbling
- Dance Forms
- Violin
- Discover Music/Discover Life
- Visual Art
- Flute
- Arts = Smarts Program
- New Way Learning Center Youth After School Program

A new session begins the week of January 19 and runs until May 15 for most courses. Registration is by phone only (no voice mail) at 312-814-4145, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. The registration period continues until classes are full. Transportation is provided based on need, availability, class location and transportation guidelines. Upon registration, please ask for details.

## From the Cook Central RA



*As the Regional Administrator of the Cook Central Region, I continue to be amazed and delighted to observe the actions of our caregivers who go so far to meet the needs of our families that we serve.*

*This holiday season is one of the most special times of the year. Yet, it can evoke stressful as well as positive memories and feelings. You have demonstrated the ability to help our youngsters through the anxious feelings and longings due to their separation from birth families and friends. I applaud our Cook Central caregivers who make personal sacrifices to ensure that our children don't lack for the material, as well as the extra emotional support that they might need during this time. You do an excellent job of meeting the needs of children who often can't even articulate their needs.*

*In my role as Regional Administrator, I have the responsibility of responding to issues, complaints, and even trivial matters. But, I am pleased to say that our Cook Central caretakers are known for putting children first.*

*I applaud you for that and desire the best for you during this holiday season.*

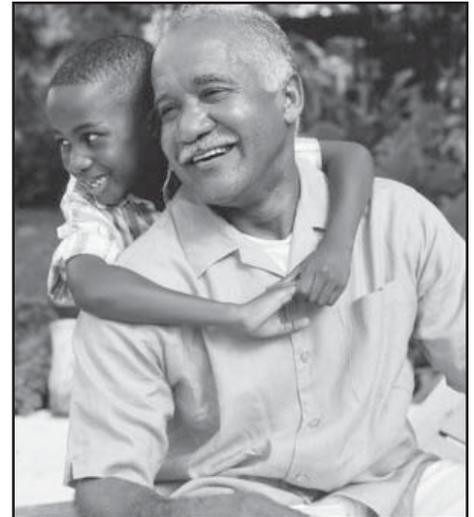
*Joyce E. Hall, LCSW, Cook Central Regional Administrator*

## Cook Central grandparents find support

Family Focus, located at 3517 W. Arthington, has an ongoing support group for grandparents raising grandchildren. This group meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month from 12 to 2 p.m. for lunch and discussion. Each meeting has a topic and or guest presenter. However, as a support group the discussion often revolves around an issue one of the grandparents is encountering. For example, much of the talk centers on the newer and more difficult challenges of raising a teen in today's society.

To make it easier for caregivers to attend, the group provides lunch and child care for any infants and preschoolers who accompany the grandparents. There is a supervised room for infants and a separate supervised room for toddlers. Irma Canales and Gloria Tanksley are the leaders of the group. Tanksley is also a grandparent raising a grandchild.

In addition to the discussion, the group enjoys a lot of camaraderie through trips and special events around the holidays. Family Focus sponsors a yearly Thanksgiving Dinner, a large Mother's Day Luncheon and a Christmas toy give-away. Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's hospital has an annual Adopt a Grandparent Program, which gives Christmas gifts to some of the families in this group. Each month Family Focus receives food from the Food Federation which they share with the Grandparent Group.



The group enjoys "field trips Fridays." So far they have had a luncheon cruise on Lake Michigan on The Spirit of Chicago, a City of Chicago sightseeing tour on a double-decker bus, a visit to Navy Pier, and visits to several different restaurants. They also had their first annual two-day retreat at the Embassy Suites.

Additional planned future events include a movie theater-lunch program, another sight seeing tour and a repeat of many of last year's favorite programs. A popular one-day workshop teamed a grandparent with a young mother from The Moms Group. The grandparent helped mentor and offer insight and advice on raising young children.

All the programs and events are free. Cook Central region grandparents who are raising their grandchildren can get information on joining the support group by calling Irma Canales at 773-722-5057.

## Cook Central adolescent girls have mentoring opportunity in Maywood

The Butterfly Girls is a mentoring program in Maywood for young women from ages of 10 to 17. The purpose of the group, according to director Barbara Cole, is to provide life skills and information to help girls develop critical-thinking abilities. This in turn will assist them in making better decisions in life. As they learn, they also get to have some fun. Some of the past activities included a fashion show in November. The three-hour evening show featured the girls modeling some of their own clothes as well as clothes provided by local businesses. They went on a weekend field trip to Memphis, Tennessee and visited the Civil Rights Museum. On another weekend they traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio to visit the Underground Railway Museum. Last summer they went to Washington DC for four days. Among the many sites they visited were the U.S. Capitol, the Mary Cloud Bethune House and Howard University. They learned about and viewed many buildings that were influenced by the ancient Egyptian architects.

Closer to home, they are involved in community service projects which have included park clean-ups and



*The Butterfly Girls mentoring program visited the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee*

helping an elderly woman pack her belongings in order to move to Senior Citizens Housing. In the future they will attend a college fair to gather information on schools including the Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

The twice monthly Saturday meetings are held from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 840 S. 17th Ave, in Maywood. A snack is included. To register call Barbara Cole at 708-344-3577.

For information about other programs, call the Maywood Youth Mentoring Program at 708-343-9600. That umbrella organization also has groups and activities for boys ages 10 to 18 and for young men age 18 and older.

## Cook Central council update

The Cook Central Regional Advisory Council gives caregivers a chance to meet with the regional administration and discuss how DCFS practices and policies affect families. Most meetings also offer an educational component that is eligible for training credit hours.

The council meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 9:30 a.m. in the DCFS office at 3518 W. Division Street. All caregivers who are licensed with DCFS and private agencies are welcome.

In October, the council presented the final draft of the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan. The Foster Parent Law requires that all DCFS regions and private agencies with foster care programs submit an Implementation Plan that outlines how it will uphold the Foster Parent rights and responsibilities in the Law. All DCFS-supervised homes will receive a copy, and it is on file at the regional office.

Caregivers also learned about the computer-based tutoring that is available through Education Online. Representatives from the Chicago Children's Museum also came to present. In November two busloads of parents and children traveled downtown to enjoy the interactive and educational exhibits. The council is on break in December so the next meeting will be on Tuesday, January 26. Call the Foster Parent Support Specialists at 773-292-7879 with questions.

### Some Cook Central staff offices change

In an effort to better utilize resources, DCFS recently announced that the office on 4909 W. Division is closed. The DCFS staff from that office has moved to new locations. Calls are being handled by the switchboard at 3518 W. Division at 773-292-7700.

## From the Cook South RA



*As the spirit of the holiday season casts its light on the world, we take the time to reflect that there are no thrown away persons. A pastor I know speaks of many people being "expectation bankrupt." To counter that deficiency, he says we need to see people who have not yet reached their potential. Then we must have an expectation of them and be willing to do our part to help them get to their destined outcome.*

*You can be the hand of support that helps a dormant talent emerge. You are the heart of patience that strengthens the resolve of a discouraged abandoned soul. You are the believer of miracles walking through your home, out your front door into a world of expectations.*

*I respectfully offer my thanks to you with these words from the Precious Blood Book of Prayers: May God bless you with the discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live well, deep within your heart. May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people so that you will work for justice, equity, and peace! And may God bless you with the foolishness to think that you can make a difference in the world, so that you will do the things which others tell you cannot be done! Amen.*

Michael Byrd, Cook South Regional Administrator

## Cook South support groups keep caregivers talking about the issues

The Cook South Region hosts two monthly support groups for caregivers in Chicago and in the South suburbs. All foster, adoptive and guardianship parents are welcome to attend.

### Cook South Support Group – Emerald

The Cook South Support Group for caregivers recently had a unique presentation on communicating with children using sign language. Rev. Donald L. Bester, CEO and Founder of Stop! Look! Listen! gave a presentation on services to the deaf, including interpretation.

He explained that sign language is easy to learn, but can convey many levels of communication through the hands, eyes and facial expressions. Learning sign language can also be beneficial for those who are not hearing impaired. Children with autism can use it to help them talk to others more fluently. It is good for children without disabilities, as becoming fluent in sign builds their self esteem and opens doors of opportunity to them. His own children now earn money as interpreters.

The support group plans on following up with Rev. Bester on the topic of communication for future meetings. Caregivers to children who are hearing impaired can contact Marsha Northrup of DCFS at 312-814-4117 with questions about hearing-related services. The Cook South Support Group meets on the

second Tuesday of the month at 6201 S. Emerald at 10 a.m.

### South Suburban Group

The South Suburban Support group in Harvey had fathers at the heart of their last meeting. The group convened a panel discussion as an offshoot of the DCFS Fatherhood Initiative. On the panel were a father to a youth in DCFS care, a former DCFS youth who is now a father and representative from organizations that serve fathers. As caregivers support reunification efforts, it is important to explore how the child welfare system supports the fathers of children in care.

"As a system, we tend to be very matriarchal. We have to open our minds up to supporting fathers' involvement and to seeing them as a viable family resource," said Regional Administrator Michael Byrd, who moderated the panel.

The panel prompted serious discussion as caregivers had a chance to ask the "tough" questions that could hamper the relationship between the foster caregiver and the child's father. The group also considered the impact of the father's extended family on the child's development while in foster care and afterwards.

The South Suburban Support Group meets on the fourth Thursday of the month at DCFS 15115 Dixie Highway in Harvey at 10 a.m.

## Cook North early childhood mental health program for youth age 0 to 5

The Bridge Youth and Family Services in Palatine, is a non-profit youth agency that has been providing mental health services in the northwest Chicago suburbs for the past 40 years. One of the newest offerings is an Early Childhood Program started in September, 2006, to provide mental health services for children aged 5 and younger. Therapists work with these youngsters and their families, and deal with behavior modification, social-emotional development, and parenting techniques. Many of the children come to the Early Childhood Program by a referral from local schools, day care centers, and pediatricians. This program provides counseling and therapy services that treat the emotional and behavioral problems that pre-school children and their families face, such as:

- Explosive or Emotionally Reactive Behavior
- Family Conflict
- Behavioral Problems
- Attention Deficit Problems
- Post Traumatic Stress
- Anxiety/Depression/Mood Disorders
- Anger Management
- Transition (divorce, death of a loved one, etc.)

The first step for a family entering the Early Childhood Program is a comprehensive assessment, done by a trained therapist. This therapist then works with the family to create an individualized plan

that includes treatment, referrals, and follow-up. Play therapy is used to create a non-threatening, fun environment where the child can feel comfortable with the therapist and the therapeutic process. It is also effective in working with children who aren't able to use traditional talk therapy to explore and resolve internal conflicts.

Working with the entire family is very important to the young child's on-going success in the Early Childhood Behavioral Health Program. Since behavioral and emotional problems affect the entire family, parents and siblings of pre-school children also have family counseling available to them at the Bridge, where they can get the help and support that they need.

The Bridge also offered a group parenting course called "Parenting through the Early Years" this past year to the parents of pre-school children and kindergartners. Parents learned some of the same skills that child therapists use with children, such as reflective listening, structuring, and therapeutic limit-setting.

The Bridge's Early Childhood Program can serve families living in Palatine Township, Rolling Meadows, Barrington, Arlington Heights, South Barrington, and Schaumburg. Fees are based on family income and financial situation. For more information call 847-359-7490.

## From the Cook North RA



*The Christmas holiday season represents a time of celebration and connection with family and friends.*

*It is also a period of reflection on events and achievements made throughout the year. As foster parents and caregivers, your greatest achievement is the willingness to open your hearts and your homes to children in need.*

*I would like to extend a special thanks to our caregivers for your ongoing commitment to our children and youth. Throughout the year I've had the opportunity to work with the Regional Foster Parent Advisory Council, and I've heard your concerns. Together we were able to address your issues through training and collaboration with Department staff and the community. I'm looking forward to continuing our relationship and growing together in 2009, as we focus on building a stronger network that will support families and children in the community.*

*Wishing you and your family an enjoyable holiday season and prosperous New Year!*

*Jackie Bright  
Cook North  
Regional Administrator*

## Get ready to celebrate the holidays in Chicago and beyond

The holiday season in Chicago is offering many events to keep children busy and excited. Among the fun, you can also sneak in education and health. Here are just a few of the free and low-cost activities your family might consider.

### Find the perfect tree

Take the family out for a winter adventure as you seek the perfect live Christmas tree. The University of Illinois Extension maintains a list of tree farms throughout the state, into Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin. Check the Web site [www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/trees](http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/trees) to search the directory and also find many fun holiday ideas.

### Chicago Park District Holiday Programs

Look no further than the nearest Chicago Park District for cheer throughout the city. From holiday concerts and theatrical performances, to holiday crafts, ice skating and dinners with Santa, families will delight in sharing in the season's joy at their neighborhood park. Check the events page of the Website at [www.chicagoparkdistrict.com](http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com) for information on these and other celebrations happening near your home.

- **Kwanzaa Celebration**  
**December 27**  
**Kennicott Park**  
**4434 Lake Park Ave.**  
Enjoy singing and dancing

performances. There will be displays of holiday gifts and cultural vendors of arts, crafts and clothing. There is no cost to attend. The program runs from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

- **Three Kings Day**  
**January 6**  
**Humboldt Park**  
**1400 N. Sacramento**  
Join the parade on Division and Western to the Field house. Celebrate with music and gifts. The free event starts at 4 p.m.

### Holiday Flower Show

**November 28 - January 11**  
**Garfield Park Conservatory**  
Celebrate the holidays where fir trees decorated in holiday lights hold court surrounded by bold splashes of color from hundreds of poinsettias. Other featured plants include ornamental peppers, plumbago and Jerusalem cherries. Free admission 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily with late hours until 8 p.m. on Thursdays. For more information, call the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance at 773-638-1766 or visit its Web site at [www.garfieldconservatory.org](http://www.garfieldconservatory.org).

### Winter Flower and Train Show

**December 6 - January 4**  
**Lincoln Park Conservatory**  
Several model trains, including an old-fashioned steam engine, freight train and trolley, wind their way through a miniature village

set in a field of vibrant red, delicate white and soft pink poinsettias. The village, comprised entirely of natural materials including willow, spruce and birch woods, features a variety of Chicago style homes and famous buildings such as the neighborhood bungalow, Chicago Theatre and Chicago Water Tower. Admission is free from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day.

### DuSable Museum's Coca-Cola Children's Penny Cinema

- **Tuesday, December 30**  
**10:30 a.m.**  
Film: Kwanzaa Kewest
- **Wednesday, December 31**  
**10:30 a.m.**  
Film: Rugrats-Kwanzaa

Reservations are required and can be made by calling 773-947-0600 ext.225 Admission: one penny.

### City of Chicago Christkindlmarket



Embrace the warm sounds of holiday music, enjoy a visit with Santa Claus, and shop at the

Christkindlmarket, all at Daley Plaza during the holidays. Families can get an up-close view of Chicago's massive 90-foot-tall holiday tree, which is comprised of more than 130 smaller Balsam Fir trees illuminated with thousands of lights and hundreds of ornaments.

Christkindlmarket is open every day starting November 27 through December 24 from 11 a.m. – 8 p.m. on Sundays through Thursdays; and 11 a.m. – 9 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays.

The 13th Annual Christkindlmarket is inspired by German Christmas traditions. It offers exquisite hand-made gifts, unique ornaments, rare European fabrics and textiles and the opportunity to devour German delicacies like brats, goulash, potato pancakes, cookies and Gluhwein (a warm spiced wine). Admission is free. Prices for food and products vary.

## Holiday Sports Festival



Mayor Daley's Holiday Sports Festival is a free, all ages event during the holiday break. Children can enjoy interactive zones with air hockey, golf, climbing walls,

football, skills area, chess, obstacle course, tot's zone, bowling, martial arts, table tennis, inflatable tumbling, tennis, badminton, boxing, fishing ponds, footbag, giant slide, 50-Yard dash, skateboarding/blading area, cheerleading clinics, and open courts for volleyball and basketball. Chicago Public Schools will host an all-ages chess tournament and there will be instructors on site for beginners. CPS will also host the Holiday Hoops Basketball boys and girls sophomore tournament.

Certified fitness instructors will lead classes in cardio kickboxing, salsa aerobics, pilates, yoga and more! There are fitness demos, lectures on nutrition, bike safety, and family fitness. Essential health screenings will also be available, including body fat composition measurements. Personal trainers can guide you through a personalized fitness regime.

The complete schedule of activities will be available on the city's Web site in December. Admission to interactive zones and the biggest indoor gym is free. Activities take place daily, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, December 27 through Monday, December 30 at McCormick Place in Halls A & B (2301 S. Martin Luther King Drive).

## New Year's Eve Fireworks at Buckingham Fountain

Bring the New Year in with a bang and have an up-close look at

the City of Chicago's spectacular fireworks display. The plaza at Buckingham Fountain (Congress at Columbus) will be the best spot to view the fireworks against the city sky, along with a fountain light show. Crowds begin to gather after 10 p.m. and the fireworks begin at 11:40 p.m.

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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

The DCFS Office of Training is currently realigning the locations used for Cook County training offerings. This will allow more classes for caregivers in Cook County. A revised schedule was not available at press time. For the most up-to-date schedule, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center anytime at [www.DCFSTraining.org](http://www.DCFSTraining.org). or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during regular business hours.

All foster, adoptive and guardianship caregivers can attend courses. Advance registration for all classes is required. Training dates, times and locations may change based on enrollment and other circumstances. Caregivers should look to the Virtual Training Center (VTC) for the most accurate information.

### Learning and earning credit hours also available outside the classroom

Classroom training is the preferred method for training caregivers. Interacting with instructors and other caregivers brings a unique richness to the training experience. Still, there are other methods of learning that can take advantage of technology and flexible scheduling. DCFS is pleased to offer caregivers the options of computer-based training and the DCFS Lending Library of books and tapes.

The in-service PRIDE training modules are now available as an interactive CD-ROM format in addition to the traditional classroom format. The digital format provides anytime, anywhere use, allowing caregivers to receive training, while working around the other responsibilities that compete for their time.

The nine in-service modules in PRIDE Digital Curriculum use the same combination of co-trainers that are featured in all the PRIDE classroom training programs. A child welfare professional and a foster parent professional guide at-home learners through each module. Using video and an easy-to-use computer format, the computerized course presents the information and recorded discussions from other caregivers, adopted individuals and agency staff

with knowledge of Illinois' child welfare system. The digital system takes learners through exercises to test their understanding of the material. It saves exercises so caregivers can document their work.

To order a CD set for one of the PRIDE in-service modules, contact Benjamin McDaniel in the DCFS Office of Training at 217-785-5689.

The DCFS Lending Library can also be used as a convenient alternative for obtaining approved training credit for license renewal. Licensed foster and adoptive parents can borrow materials for a two-week period at no charge. The Lending Library catalogue highlights a multitude of books, audio cassettes and videos for self-directed training in parenting and family life, spanning 17 categories.

To borrow these or one of the myriad titles in the Lending Library, simply fill out the order form at the back of the catalogue. Send it to the DCFS Office of Training, Station 122, 406 E. Monroe, Springfield IL 62701. To request a catalogue, call 877-800-3393. The catalogue is also available on the DCFS Web site: <http://www.state.il.us/DCFS/docs/lendinglibrary.pdf>.

#### Lending Library Categories

- Child Sexual Abuse
- Children with Sexually Aggressive Behaviors
- Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Children with Behavioral Disorders/Emotional Disturbances
- Disciplinary Strategies for Difficult Children
- Separation and Visitation
- Drug-Affected Infants and Children
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effects (FAS/FAE)
- The Medically Complex Child
- The Child With HIV/AIDS
- Promoting Educational Success Through Improved Learning Skills
- Building A Healthy Self-Esteem in Kids
- From Foster Care to Adoption
- Child Development and Parenting
- Parenting Adolescents
- Families and Diversity-Parenting with Greater Understanding
- Children With Mental Health, Language and Physical Challenges