

Cook County Advocate

2011 • Vol. I

News for Chicago Metro Area Families

Cook Youth Advisory Board advocates for all kids in care

The Statewide Youth Advisory Board has the mission to advocate and educate all youth in care. At the core of the statewide board is the regional board network. In Cook County, the three DCFS regions form one combined board. The combined regional board meets at 1911 S. Indiana on the 3rd Thursday of the month from 5:45 to 8 p.m.

The meetings are a way for youth to get advance knowledge of policies, provide input to new policies and learn valuable leadership skills. All meetings are run according to Robert's Rules of Order. From the meeting discussions and subsequent committee work, the regional and statewide boards make specific recommendations to the DCFS Director that cover positive outcomes in: education, sibling rights, mental and physical health, youth employment and training, juvenile delinquency, lifetime connections and group home monitoring. The board also plans and hosts activities such as the Youth Summit, graduation celebrations, and financial aid workshops.

The DCFS Director's Office oversees the youth boards and its coordinating organization, The Chicago Area Project. While there is adult involvement, youth are

encouraged to take the lead on setting their own agenda. They learn to collaborate on solutions and to implement the changes they seek.

"One of the board's biggest accomplishments last year was the research we did on Independent Living Programs," said Asia Thompson, president of the Cook County Youth Advisory Board.

Concerned about varying degrees of services and benefits among different transitional programs, the board conducted surveys to determine what provisions are available and what is needed. From there, youth made recommendations to the DCFS Director. Members will go forward by conducting presentations of their findings to agency providers and decision makers.

The Cook Regional Youth Advisory Board welcomes input from more youth as it tackles other agenda items. The board has asked that caregivers encourage their teens



Asia Thompson, the Cook YAB president, and DCFS youth board coordinator Lynda Swan-McClendon work together to prepare for board meetings.

to join the board. It is a rewarding and fun way to learn life skills and earn community service hours. A recent recruitment push brought attendance at the October meeting to a high of 89 youth.

Membership is open to youth 14 to 21 who are or were in DCFS care. Transportation is available to members if the RSVP is made one week in advance. Potential members must attend one meeting before transportation can be arranged.

For details, contact Tony Lawlor of The Chicago Area Project by phone at 312-588-3842 or by E-mail to chicagoareaproject_tony@yahoo.com.

College Goal Sunday does a full blitz on college financial aid questions

Families can take advantage of a free, nationally-recognized seminar that can clear up the mysteries around college financial aid. The College Goal Sunday program usually is offered on a Sunday afternoon. College Goal Sunday is open to all college-bound students regardless of age. Whether a traditional student right out of high school or an adult who is returning or pursuing higher education for the first time, College Goal Sunday will help students complete the all-important FAFSA financial aid form, accurately and on time.

College Goal Sunday events are scheduled for several locations in Cook County. At each location, students, parents and caregivers will be able to:

- Get free, on-site professional assistance completing the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)
- Talk to financial aid professionals about financial aid resources and how to apply
- Get information regarding statewide student services, admission requirements, and more

Parents and students should bring their latest tax information and/or last pay stub from the previous year in order to complete the form. All information reviewed by the College Goal Sunday volunteers will be kept private and confidential and will not be used for any purpose other than helping the students and families apply for financial aid. Students' and family' identities will be protected to the best extent possible and none of the information being requested will be sent to vendors for other purposes besides applying for aid.

Be sure to bring:

- Social Security Number (can be found on Social Security card)
- Driver's license (if any)
- W-2 Forms for the previous year and other records of money earned
- Student's most recent Federal Income Tax Return
- Parent's Federal Income Tax Return for the previous year (if the student is a dependent student as defined by federal criteria)
- Untaxed income records for the previous year: Social Security, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, welfare, or veterans benefits.
- Current bank statements
- Current business and investment mortgage information, business and farm records, stock, bond, and other investment records
- Documentation that you are a U.S. permanent resident or other eligible noncitizen.

For students who are currently or were in DCFS care, the question of dependent/independent status is important. If after the 13th birthday, a youth was in foster care or a ward of the court, he or she can apply for financial aid as an independent student. The parents' income (adoptive or birth parent) will not factor in the aid decision.

02/12/2011

1 p.m. - 3 p.m.
South Side YMCA
6330 S. Stony Island
Chicago
tlopez@ymcachicago.org

02/13/2011

1 p.m. - 3 p.m.
Al Raby High School
3545 W. Fulton Blvd.
Chicago
Laurie Park
lmpark@cps.k12.il.us

02/19/2011

9 a.m. - 12 p.m.
Northeastern Illinois University
Carruthers Center for Inner City
Studies
700 E. Oakwood Blvd.
Chicago
Trena Wady-Jones
773-268-7500 x120
Financial-Aid@neiu.edu

02/20/2011

10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Illinois Institute of Technology
3300 S. Federal Street
Chicago
Norma Castrejon
312-567-3027
ncastrej@iit.edu

02/20/2011

1 p.m. - 4 p.m.
Everest College
1101 W. North Avenue
Melrose Park
Marilynn Singleton
masingleton@cci.edu



Introspect offers Cook students personalized help to enter college

Cook County students who are looking forward to entering college can turn to Introspect for one-on-one assistance. Introspect Youth Services, Inc. is a post-secondary placement readiness agency that is community-based and not-for-profit. Introspect has developed outreach services that encourage at-risk students to not only graduate from high school but create post-secondary plans.

DCFS has a contract with Introspect so Cook students can receive services at no charge including:

- career counseling and educational guidance
- assistance with admissions

into college, trade, technical or vocational institutions

- financial aid advisement
- access to a resource library that contains a vast assortment of information on after high-school programs
- locations and services
- campus and college tours
- test preparation
- enrollment seminars and workshops.

The Introspect FOCUS Talent Search Program has assisted thousands of young adults to achieve their dreams of entering a post-secondary institution. Services provided under the

Facilitate Occupational, College and University Studies (FOCUS) Talent Search Program are designed to link the specific career goals of each youth with the appropriate post-secondary institution. Assistance is geared to youth who are in need of academic counseling to further their education; need assistance to enroll in a college; need assistance with the admission process or financial aid; or need information on career planning and preparation.

Youth and/or care providers that desire additional information and want to access these services can contact Introspect at 773-287-2290.

Cook County adoption event gathers many resources in one spot



Adoption was the focus at an event that brought all three DCFS Cook County regions together at the Emerald Street field office in November. Caregivers earned three training credits for attending an event that was informative and a fun

way to celebrate National Adoption Month. Statewide Adoption Coordinator Ursula Angielski and adoption staff organized the event, which included presentations and an information fair.

Adoptive parents, new and experienced, and foster caregivers alike learned about the resources provided by:

- Adoption Information Center of Illinois
- Adoption Preservation Services
- Cook County Post-Adoption Services Unit
- Center for Law and Social Work
- DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services
- DCFS Education Advisors
- Midwest Adoption Center
- Wendy's Wonderful Kids

Caregivers also enjoyed a presentation about creating a life book for a child that covered supplies, examples and a hands-on demonstration. All of this was done with much consideration for the caregivers. There were refreshments, and staff provided child care so more people could attend.

DCFS-supervised foster caregivers who have adoption questions or would like more help with the process should call their Foster Parent Support Specialist. Other caregivers should reach out to their adoption worker or the DCFS adoption specialist in the DCFS regional office.



Foster care advisory council commits to meeting caregivers' needs



The Cook North Foster Care Advisory Council is responding to the needs of caregivers by designing specific trainings on requested topics. Recently, caregivers benefitted from a presentation on "Coping with Holiday Stress." They also learned about the effect of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. These trainings are open to all Cook North caregivers and rotate among the offices. The region will mail a schedule to caregivers. For more details, contact Iris Cuevas at 312-808-5000

During the fall, the region held several focus group meetings regarding the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan. All the changes that caregivers recommended were taken into account. The final draft of the plan, which details how the region's foster care program adheres to the Foster Parent Law, was submitted and is under review.

Caregivers can request a copy of the plan by contacting Kathy Cook of DCFS at 312-808-5000. This implementation plan only covers the DCFS foster care program. Homes that are licensed by private agencies can contact the individual agency for a copy of their agency's plan.

The Cook North Regional Advisory Council welcomes all caregivers who live in the area (both DCFS and private agency supervised homes) to join the council's monthly meetings.

First Tuesday of the month
10 a.m.
1911 S. Indiana, Chicago
Contact: Iris Cuevas at 312-808-5000

After 3 decades of service, Cook North says farewell to support specialist



After almost 29 years with DCFS, Lead Foster parent Support Specialist Mattie Brown has decided that it is time to leave her DCFS family and spend more time with her other family—her

three children and five grandchildren. She retired on December 31, 2010.

Mattie and her husband became licensed foster parents in 1979 and provided care for several children with special needs. Mattie joined DCFS on February 2, 1982, as a Foster Parent Advocate and in 1986 became the Lead Foster Parent Support Specialist at Cook North region. Mattie was an integral part of the region and was instrumental in promoting a partnership between foster parents and DCFS in order to achieve permanency for children. She was always available to DCFS foster parents 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, helping them with whatever problems that they might have. She helped foster parents when children were placed in their homes,

working with DCFS staff to find children that would work out well in a particular home.

Throughout the years, Mattie served as a liaison for foster parents and Advisory Council and brought important issues to the table for resolution. Even before the DCFS Advisory Council, Mattie saw the need for foster parents to voice their issues and concerns and to provide support for each other. She initiated the East Area Foster Parent Association, later named the Northeast Foster Adopt Parent Association, which is still active today. During the Christmas season, she worked closely with staff and donors through the Christmas Gift Wish Program to provide Christmas gifts to grant specific holiday wishes for gifts especially selected for Cook North children. She also encouraged children to write thank you notes for what they received.

The impact of her work was proven by the retirement celebration attended by nearly 100 people. Many members of her family were there, along with colleagues. The African music group Atiba YJali T. B. U.S.A. Family also added a festive note to the bittersweet but joyful sendoff.

Cook South support groups bring valuable information every month



Cook South caregivers who attend the foster parent support groups at the Emerald or Harvey DCFS Offices can learn or be reminded of valuable information to assist the children in their homes. They learn what they can do and cannot do. They learn “who is who” in the various DCFS divisions. They learn which agencies have contracts to aid in the typical and in the especially complicated situations. As an added value, caregivers who attend support group meetings can also find out what other experienced caregivers do or have done in a similar situation.

During a recent meeting at Harvey, one of the DCFS Education Advisors spoke to caregivers about how to handle difficult school situations. DCFS Education Advisor Diane Fitzhugh answered questions such as What expenses

do you have to pay and which ones do you not have to pay? What are school discipline procedures? She recommended that caregivers not wait until a crisis breaks out. DCFS Education Advisors can answer those and many more questions.

Fitzhugh cleared up one important point of confusion when she gave a handout that listed which consents a foster caregiver can sign and those consents that a caseworker needs to have signed. For instance, caregivers can sign permission slips for:

- field trips within Illinois,
- routine social events (picnics, school parties, etc)
- enrollment in school
- attendance at sporting events
- participation in extra-curricular events other than athletic participation
- attendance at cultural events
- case study evaluations and reevaluations for services and Individual Education Plans.

For all other consents for children still in DCFS foster care, the caregiver must contact the child’s caseworker. That list would include athletic participation, media events or coverage, video/photo or voice reproductions, research projects, field trips outside of Illinois, liability releases, medical exams or treatment, physical restraints, car ownership or driver’s licenses.

To follow up on education matters, caregivers whose children attend Chicago schools can contact DCFS Education Advisor Diane Fitzhugh at Emerald at 773-371-6029. Cook suburban residents can contact Rebecca Lawrence in the Harvey office at 708-210-3051 for assistance.

Each month the support groups address topics that can inform and enhance caregiver’s parenting and home life with children. All caregivers in Cook South are welcome.

Cook South Support Groups

Foster Parents, Our Greatest Resource Support Group

Contact: Elise Worrell
773-371-6114
Info line at 773-371-6113
Meets 2nd Tuesday
10 a.m. to Noon
DCFS Office
6201 S. Emerald, Chicago

For DCFS and private agency families. Training credits offered.

Cook South DCFS Regional Foster Care Advisory Council

Contact: Angela Barber
773-578-0079 or
Gloria Orange-Long
773-371-6115
Meets 3rd Wednesday
10 a.m.
DCFS Office
6201 S. Emerald, Chicago

DCFS Cook South Suburban Support Group

Contact: Adrienne Taylor
at 708-210-3578 or Sandra
Montgomery at 708-210-3594
Foster Parent Info Line:
773-371-6113
Meets 4th Thursday (January,
March, May, July, September
and November)
9 a.m. to Noon
DCFS Office
15115 Dixie Highway, Harvey

Cook regions multiply holiday spirit at Payton Foundation party



Cookie decorating was just one of the fun activities at the Payton Foundation holiday party.



Santa granted wishes for children with the help of Director McEwen and the party sponsors.



DCFS staff volunteered countless hours to collect and distribute gifts to families.

For 17 years the Walter and Connie Payton Foundation has supported DCFS in providing gifts to children in foster care programs. It also gives to young people in residential centers, independent living programs, the Armed Forces and the DCFS Youth in College Program.

Foster caregivers whose licenses are supervised by DCFS programs and the children in those homes had an opportunity to celebrate on Saturday, December 18. This year the three Cook regions came together for a giant party at the University of Illinois at Chicago Gymnasium. The gym was filled with gifts, games and food for more than 1,600 children and caregivers. This year, the guests included many families who receive intact services as well.

Like every year, in memory of Chicago Bears legend Walter Payton, Connie Payton-Strotter and her adult children Jarrett and Brittney attended the party to greet the families and help hand out gifts. The foundation has helped collect and distribute more than 800,000 gifts to DCFS youth throughout Cook County and, for the last four years, in parts of Northern Region.

“This is something we do every year because it is so important. It is our honor to be here with you who give so much,” said Payton-Strotter.

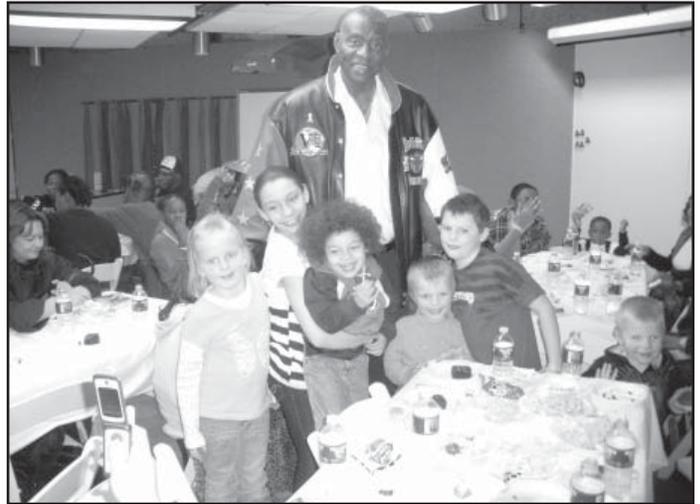
Families look forward to seeing the Paytons, who through the years have become familiar and friendly faces. Dominick’s Finer Foods is another long-term partner in the parties, contributing food and drinks. This year the children could also work off holiday excitement by learning how to putt with a golf pro and how to improve their baseball swing with a renowned college coach. There were family photos, cookie decorating and many games to keep everyone happy right up to the time for gifts.

It takes months of advance work to compile the lists, collect gifts and prepare to distribute them on time. Volunteers from DCFS and other individuals logged countless hours before, during and after the party to ensure that every child had a reason to smile.

Chicago Bulls keep the holiday spirits high for intact families

On Monday, December 20, Chicago Bulls players hosted a holiday party for the families that receive intact services from DCFS.

More than 200 parents and children joined the Chicago Bulls at the Shedd Aquarium to ring in the holidays. Bulls legends Bob Love and Sidney Green and new Bulls player John Lucas were also on hand for the afternoon event. Players helped serve food, handed out gifts and signed autographs. With an assist from Hinkley Springs, Edy's Grand Ice Cream and Country House Restaurant, families enjoyed food and fun.



Kids had fun and food after spending time exploring the Shedd Aquarium.



Director McEwen and Chicago Bulls' "Goodwill Ambassador" Bob Love welcomed families to the Shedd Aquarium for the annual holiday party.

DCFS Director Erwin McEwen said, "This party shows families that 'the system' can bring something positive to their families. We know we ask a lot of parents so it is good for them to see us give back in this real way."

In addition to the party, children and families enjoyed the hospitality of the Shedd Aquarium and all the fun that it offers.

"We thank the Bulls organization and the players for making this possible again," said McEwen.

Cook County Advocate Regional Reporters

Anyone can call the regional reporter with story suggestions about:

- Foster parent association news and schedules
- Local training notices
- Features on foster families and community members working for children
- Ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

Cook North ~ Joann Niemuth
847-745-3048 office
847-745-3066 fax
Joann.Niemuth@illinois.gov
8140 N. McCormick
Skokie, IL 60076

Cook Central ~ Merrylee Guge-Jorgensen
773-292-7700 office
773-292-7861 fax

Merrylee.Guge-Jorgensen@illinois.gov
3518 W. Division
Chicago, IL 60651

Cook South ~ Rod Mulford
773-371-6402 office
773-371-6409 fax
Rod.Mulford@illinois.gov
6201 S. Emerald
Chicago, IL 60621

Cook Region Caregiver Training

For the most up-to-date and complete schedule information, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center anytime at www.DCFStraining.org or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during regular business hours. In addition to the slate of classroom courses, caregivers can take advantage of these other options.

Learning and credit hour earning options 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 can offer caregivers the additional 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 cotrainers 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, call 312-328-2828.

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 and/or 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