

Illinois Families Now and Forever

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship®

“Safe at home” starts with preventing household injuries

Home can be a haven for children, where you focus on protecting them from past emotional or physical hurts. However, in your home there can be common items and everyday circumstances that could cause unintentional harm. Every month, the federal government announces major product recalls on cribs, strollers, clothing and children’s toys that have caused injuries and even fatalities.

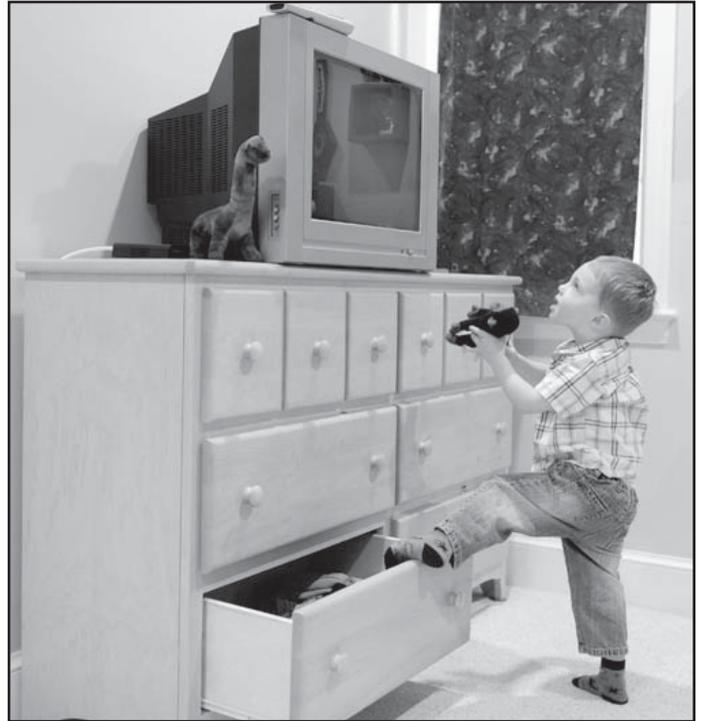
Find out about unsafe products

While the media announcements can help families react, caregivers also have to be proactive to ensure that youth are safe at home. DCFS rules require foster caregivers of children age six or under to check their homes for products listed as unsafe by the Children’s Product Safety Act. There are several resources that make it possible for caregivers to stay informed about products that have been recalled because of safety concerns. The complete list of unsafe products is available from the Illinois Department of

Public Health at 217-782-4977. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission maintains a product list along with helpful information at www.cpsc.gov. The site offers a subscription service where caregivers can sign-up for automatic e-mail updates. The commission also maintains a telephone hotline with a wide variety of recorded messages on product recalls, consumer products and product safety. The toll-free line is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 800-638-2772.

Do a clean sweep

Caregivers should check the lists and remove any recalled items already at home. It is also important to make informed choices about new items that you purchase or accept as gifts. Be on the look out for small pieces that could cause choking or long strings that might strangle. The website for the national Safe Kids Campaign (www.safekids.org) has a list of recommendations and tips to judge what toys and products may cause harm.



Check TVs and furniture for stability

In a four-month period from last October to February, four Chicago-area children died when television sets toppled over and crushed them. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reported 242 deaths from furniture, television or appliance tip-overs between 2000 and 2008–199 involved children under the age of 9.

The interesting sounds and sights of a television can easily catch the interest of a child who may reach or pull, without realizing the harm. Caregivers should be certain that TVs are on a stable base and that cords are safely positioned. Also be careful not to place items that children might want on top of the television. Appliance stores sell “anti-tip” straps that can secure items. It would also be wise to consider removing older, heavier televisions from the home altogether.

Another category of instability injuries includes tables, dressers, bookshelves and entertainment centers. It is important to test these items for worn or weak joints and to be certain that they are positioned on a flat, sturdy surface. Install drawer locks so open drawers don’t become a child’s “ladder.” Take a few minutes to anchor shelving units to the wall. Tip-over injuries can be prevented.

Message from the DCFS Director

One of a child's worst nightmares is to lose a parent in childhood. Even when that parent has been hurtful or harmful, most of the children I have worked with over the years still love their abusive and neglectful parents and long to return to them. Likewise, most of the parents I have worked with, even those who have done horrendous damage to their children, did not wake up that morning saying, "how can I torture my child today?"

You have the most difficult and most important job in our agency. You have opened your hearts and your homes to care for children who are both angry and sad. They long for their missing family, they are confused about why they are with you, and they blame themselves for how their parents treated them. They may be very difficult to care for and their response to your offers of love, kindness and protection are usually not what you hoped for or expected. It may take a very long time for you to be able to gain the trust and respect that you hope for; and these children may test your resolve to help them. Add to all

"You have the most difficult and most important job in our agency..."

Thank you for your willingness to be the caretakers of our children."

of this the fact that you, the child and the caseworker may have no definite idea of how long that child will stay with you.

The good news is that you can provide these children with the experience of being safe, well fed, and admired. You can help them manage their anxieties about being separated from their families by explaining to them, in a language they can understand, that their parents love them but are having a difficult time figuring out how to let them know that. You can also tell them that people will try and help their parents to get better at being able to keep them safe. You can support your worker in helping a child maintain their connections with their parents and their brothers and sisters – regardless of whether they will be returning to that family soon or not.

Every child needs to be able to find something about their parents that they can admire and love so that they can learn to love themselves as well. Every child needs to remain as connected as possible to their family of origin as long as this connection is not a threat to their safety or well being. Every child who has been abused or neglected will have to struggle to come to terms with "Why Me?"

Please do not confuse a child's anger, disappointment, sadness or misbehavior as disrespect. We are sending you children who have had difficult lives and many disappointments in their relationships with adults. Each child has to come to their own unique solution in understanding why they have been abused or neglected and how to interpret and react to adults who both love



Richard H. Calica

them and disappoint them. What you interpret as ungratefulness or disrespect may just be their way of protecting themselves from another hurtful experience with an adult. These children may misinterpret your intentions based on their previous life experiences. Your reality is not their reality. Besides, falling in love with you may threaten their relationship with their own family and make them feel like they are abandoning all hope of reuniting with their own.

Thank you for your willingness to be the caretakers of our children. I look forward to working with you. I hope that we can be as helpful to you in figuring out how to work with the children we send to you as you are to us and the children you take into your homes.

Richard H. Calica was appointed DCFS Director by Gov. Quinn in December. Previously, he spent more than 30 years as Executive Director of the Juvenile Protective Agency. He is a clinical social worker, researcher and advocate for children and families.

Remember: “Back to sleep, tummy to play” for infant development

The back to sleep campaign continues to educate parents and caregivers about the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). For many years the public has heard that the back is best for sleeping. There is also time for the front—when babies are awake.

“Supervised tummy time is what we need to have for proper growth and development,” said Nancy Maruyama of SIDS Illinois. Every time we put them [infants] down to sleep, we put them on their back. But when they’re awake, we need to hold them and play with them, and love them and put them on their tummy to play.”

As the experts continue to research SIDS, there are steps that caregivers can take to reduce risk:

- Place infants to sleep on their backs, even though infants may sleep more soundly on their stomachs.
- Place infants to sleep in a baby bed with a firm mattress. There should be nothing in the bed but the baby - no covering, no pillows, no bumper pads and no toys.
- Do not over-clothe the infant while he/she sleeps. Keep the room at a temperature that is comfortable for you. Overheating an infant may increase the risk for SIDS.
- Avoid exposing the infant to tobacco smoke. Don’t have your infant in the same house or car with someone who is smoking. The greater the exposure to tobacco smoke, the greater the risk of SIDS.
- Avoid exposing the infant to people with respiratory infections. Consider using home monitoring systems (apnea/brady-cardia monitors) in an attempt to prevent SIDS in high-risk infants.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission announced new crib safety standards. The new rules address deadly hazards previously seen in cribs with traditional drop-side rails, requiring more durable hardware and parts and mandating more rigorous testing.

Cribs purchased before June 28, 2011 may not comply with new regulations. Owners of an older crib can check with the CSPC to see if it is compliant. The CSPC recommends that owners dispose of older, noncompliant cribs in a way so that they cannot be used again. They should not be donated or resold. Details are at www.cspc.gov

Excerpted from the website for the National SIDS/Infant Death Resource Center (NSIDRC) at www.sidscenter.org.

Computer savvy kids need adult help to stay safe on the Internet

The Internet is an exciting tool for people of all ages. Unfortunately, children and teens may run into information and people online that they are not sure how to handle. It is important that you talk with your kids about their Internet use and let them know they can come to you for help. Setting a good example online is also a great way to show your children how to use the Internet responsibly and stay safe.

The following are some online safety tips for parents:

- Keep the computer in a room—other than the child’s—with frequent foot traffic, so all household members can monitor times of use and material viewed.
- Set up agreements and guidelines about the use of the computer.
- Understand the functions of the software programs your child uses. If you do not understand these functions, ask your child to teach you.
- Be aware of what Internet sites your child is visiting. Investigate blocking or screening services provided by various Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and software programs.
- Learn about everyone your child meets online and discuss these relationships with your child.
- Spend time online with your child and discuss their online experiences just as you would ask them about their day.
- Set a good example for your children with your own Internet use. Do not respond to any threatening or offensive messages and encourage your child to resist as well. Never give out any personal information and encourage your child to do the same.

This information sheet and other materials on Internet Safety and cyber-bullying are at the website for the Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan at www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov.

WATER-WISE: Smart ways to keep children safe from water risks



In 2011, there were 19 accidental drowning deaths of children in Illinois. Adult supervision could have prevented these deaths. Children cannot be left unattended around water even for one moment without the possibility of something tragic happening. Drowning can occur in seconds and with as little as two inches of water in pools, bathtubs, buckets, and even decorative garden ponds.

It is up to the adult caregivers to be diligent about water hazards. Lock access to pools, empty buckets when they are not in use, and make sure there are enough adults to adequately supervise the number of children around water. It is also important to teach children to stay away from water until an adult is present. Following are some safety tips to help protect children from water-related tragedy:

Swimming pools

- Keep ladders, patio furniture and toys away from above-ground pools. Toddlers are better climbers than you think!
- Fence in the pool and lock the gate. Pool covers and alarms provide added protection.
- Young children should wear or use personal flotation devices, but they do not replace adult supervision.
- Remind babysitters and other caretakers not to leave children unattended near or in water.
- Appoint an adult who can swim to watch kids during pool parties.
- Learn CPR and keep rescue equipment, a phone and emergency numbers near all pools.

Baby pools

- Don't be lulled into a false sense of security because of the shallowness of baby pools. Children should always be supervised when in a baby pool.
- Empty the pool immediately after use and store it upside-down.

Bathtubs

- Never leave a young child alone in a bathtub or rely on a bathtub seat for safety.
- Don't allow children to play alone in the bathroom.

Buckets

- Five-gallon buckets of water pose a threat to babies and toddlers who may topple into them and be unable to get out.
- Empty and store all buckets out of children's reach.

Toilets

- Secure the toilet lid. Curious toddlers could tip headfirst into a toilet, risking drowning.

Ponds, fountains and retention pools

- Be aware of access to water hazards and be prepared in case an emergency response is required. Children require constant supervision around these outdoor hazards.

Rule 402 Licensing Standards for Foster Family Homes sets new requirements for homes that have pools or hot tubs. Those homes have to have 5-foot high fences, covers and locked gates to help prevent drowning. Homes licensed before January 2009 with existing fences that are 3 1/2 feet or higher will be considered in compliance.

Also, caregivers with pools, ponds, fountains or other water hazards now must be certified in CPR. DCFS and agencies will work with caregivers to identify homes with water hazards and to ensure CPR training.

As part of the monitoring visits, licensing representatives for DCFS and private agencies will go over the form CFS 452-5 Safety Plan for Pools, Hot Tubs, Ponds and other Potential Water Hazards. Caregivers will complete and sign the form, which states the safety measures they will employ to keep children in the home safe.

MOVIN' ON UP: News for youth transitioning to adulthood

DCFS scholarship application due March 31

DCFS annually provides 48 college scholarships to youth who are currently under guardianship of the Department or who left DCFS guardianship through adoption or private guardianship arrangements.

Scholarship recipients receive up to four consecutive years of tuition and academic fee waivers to be used at participating Illinois state colleges or universities, a \$471 monthly stipend and a medical card up to age 23.

Applicants must have a high school diploma or GED by the end of the current school year. Scholarship Program Student Applications (CFS 438) are available now. Applications must be turned in by March 31. A review committee will evaluate the applications and make selections based on academic accomplishments, community service and a personal statement.

Contact the youth's caseworker or call the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services at 312-814-5959 for more information.



Graduation fees covered in foster care

Before long, students will be filing down the aisle toward the graduation

stage. This happy occasion comes with costs that go beyond the many hours of homework help and teacher conferences. There is help available for caregivers to make this event a memorable one for the child without breaking the bank. For a student in DCFS foster care, policy covers payment for graduation expenses such as yearbook, pictures, cap and gown rental, class ring, new clothing for the graduation ceremony and other related fees. However, there are some important details in the language.

The student must be in their junior or senior year for payment of the class ring. He or she must be in the senior year of high school to obtain payment for other graduation items. The total of all items purchased cannot exceed \$512.50. As an example, if a youth wishes to purchase

a class ring, the foster caregiver could submit the bill to the caseworker, who would then secure direct payment to the vendor.

The specific procedures may differ for families caring for children whose case management is assigned to a private agency. Private agencies receive an administrative fee per child to take into account such non-recurring expenses like graduation. The agencies are expected to purchase the approved items and not expect caregivers to cover the costs. Be sure to talk to the child's caseworker in advance about what is allowable, especially before making any purchases out-of-pocket.

DCFS does not have any stated policy regarding expenses for eighth grade graduation. Again, talk to the youth's caseworker if you have questions about those expenses. Make plans now so there are no delays to dampen what should be a wonderful day.

Regional Youth Advisory Boards need your teens

The DCFS Regional Youth Advisory Boards are all looking for more members to help plan the annual Youth Summits and regional graduation celebrations. The Youth Advisory Boards are open to young people age 14-21 who are or were in DCFS care. The Boards meet each month by region. Transportation can be arranged where needed.

Central - Champaign

3rd Wednesday, 6 to 8 p.m.
1010 W. Nevada
Champaign School of Social Work

Central - Peoria

3rd Monday, 6 to 8 p.m.
DCFS, 2001 NE Jefferson, Peoria

Central - Springfield

3rd Tuesday, 6 to 8 p.m.
Primed For Life
816 S. College, Springfield

Cook Regions

3rd Thursday 6 to 8 p.m.
DCFS, 1911 S. Indiana Chicago

Southern - Carterville

1st Monday, 6 to 8 p.m.
700 John A Logan Dr., Carterville

Southern - E. St. Louis

1st Tuesday, 6 to 8 p.m. (following week if month starts on Tuesday)
ESTL Community College
602 James R Thompson, E. St. Louis

Northern Region

3rd Tuesday, 6 to 8 p.m.
DCFS, 8 E. Galena, Aurora

Contact: Cook/Northern

Tony Lawlor, 312-401-5462

Contact: Central/Southern

Leshonda Rogers, 217-789-2908

DCFS offers FREE scholarships for National Foster Parent conference in Illinois

The National Foster Parent Association (NFPA) will hold its 42nd National Education Conference in the Chicago area from June 15 to June 18 at the Marriott Oak Brook Hills Resort. The Illinois Foster Adoptive Parent Association will host four days of learning, networking and fun.

To encourage caregivers to further their education and understanding DCFS will provide a limited number of scholarships. The scholarships cover the conference registration fee and will offset lodging at the hotel. Accommodations will require shared rooms with a spouse, self-selected individual or a roommate assigned by the DCFS Office of Training. The conference provides participants two breakfasts and two lunches. For

other meals, there are many options nearby, ranging from fast food to fine dining. Caregivers will be responsible for transportation costs and child care arrangements as children are not part of this training opportunity.

This educational conference will cover many facets of foster care and adoption, ranging from parenting to advocacy. Caregivers who take advantage of this opportunity can receive approximately 18 hours of DCFS-eligible training credits. Attendees will learn from top-notch speakers and from the experience of fellow caregivers coming from across the nation. The 2012 NFPA National Education Conference will offer everything needed for caregivers to return home informed, inspired and refreshed.

Registration for the free conference scholarship opens APRIL 1. Space is limited. Register online at www.dcfstraining.org or call 877-800-3393.

NFPA National Education Conference 2012



EDUCATE. ADVOCATE. CELEBRATE!

The DCFS Office of Training is in charge of registration for caregivers using the DCFS conference scholarship. The scholarships will be granted on a first-come, first served basis and will be allotted among all the DCFS regions. Register online at www.dcfstraining.org or call the DCFS Registration Line at 877-800-3393, starting April 1.

Caregivers who do not receive a scholarship can still register online for the conference at the National Foster Parent Association website www.nfpainc.org. The registration fee is \$200 for NFPA members and \$250 for non-members. The hotel rate for the conference is \$80 per night, plus tax.

Check out tax breaks for foster and adoptive families by April 15

There is still some time left to file 2011 federal income taxes. A family that adopted a child in 2008, 2009, or 2010, may be able to file an amended tax return to claim the credit. Foster caregivers should be sure to check out the Child Tax Credit for youth who were in placement for at least half of 2011. For caregivers who moved to adoption in tax year 2011, the federal Adoption Tax Credit is again refundable. The credit amount for someone who adopted a special needs child in 2011 is the entire \$13,360, regardless of the amount of adoption expenses, even those covered in the subsidy agreement. A family who adopted a child in a prior tax year and has a carryover adoption credit may get an additional refundable credit for 2011.

For more information, consult a tax professional or look to these free IRS publications at www.irs.gov.

- Pub. 17, Tax Guide for Individuals
- Pub. 501, Exemptions, Standard Deduction and Filing Information
- Form 8839, Qualified Adoption Expenses
- Topic 607, Adoption Credit

Additionally the Center For Economic Progress offers tax preparation assistance to families with household income less than \$50,000. To find locations go to www.economicprogress.org or call 312-252-0280. The National Foster Parent Association offers a tax guide free to members. Find it at www.nfpainc.org. The North American Council on Adoptable Children provides handouts on the Adoption Tax Credit at www.nacac.org.



DCFS Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Bulletin

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council held its first meeting of the new year on January 20 in Springfield.

Council briefs new DCFS Director

Acting Director Richard H. Calica came to the meeting to gain an understanding of the council's recent accomplishments and the critical concerns they are tackling on behalf of families. Calica told council members that he thought caregivers "have the hardest job of all. You are the recipients of all the pain

children feel." He assured the members that he will be available to the council and will return for future meetings.

Calica suggested that the council compile a report that prioritizes the issues and concerns that affect the relationship between caregivers and the agencies that support their efforts.

Update on Implementation Plans

The Council reported that all 62 foster care programs turned in the required Foster Parent Law Implementation

Plans. As of the January meeting, the group was on track to complete all scoring on time. Notification letters with each program's results and recommendations will go out in March.

New members join council



Andre Marshall joined the council in the fall. He oversees the foster care program at Lakeside Community Committee. Marshall has been in child welfare for

20 years and is looking forward to working with the council as a child welfare professional member.

Regina Parnell represents Central Region. She has



been licensed for 13 years, focusing on teen girls who require specialized services. She is also a social worker with experience in investigations, licensing and intake.

Council confirms Foster Parent Law at on site reviews

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council received and scored Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans from all of the foster care programs in the state. These plans describe how agencies and DCFS regional programs will uphold foster parent rights and assist them in their responsibilities.

In addition to judging the plans on paper, each year the council, working with the DCFS Agency Performance Teams, actually visits one third of the agencies for reviews. The Council also requires telephone surveys with a set number of randomly selected foster caregivers to give another perspective on how the implementation plan translates into the agency's interaction with caregivers.

This year the council members will conduct reviews at the following private agency and DCFS foster care programs:

- Ada S. McKinley Community Services
- Allendale
- Alliance Human Services/Illinois Mentor
- Arden Shore Child & Family Services
- Association House of Chicago
- Aunt Martha's Youth Service Center
- Catholic Charities - Peoria
- Centers for New Horizons
- Child Link
- DCFS-Central Region
- DCFS-Southern Region
- Easter Seals Joliet Region, Inc.
- Family Core
- Family Service Center of Sangamon County
- Jewish Children and Family Services
- Kemmerer Village
- Lutheran Child & Family Services
- Lutheran Social Services of Illinois
- Our Children's Homestead
- The Children's Place Association
- The Youth Campus
- Webster-Cantrell Hall
- Youth Outreach Services

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council was founded in conjunction with the Illinois Foster Parent Law. Membership consists of caregivers, agency representatives and other experts in child welfare, who are appointed by the DCFS Director. The mandated positions for caregivers are spread among the DCFS regions.

The council holds open meetings at least six times a year, and more as needed, in locations around the state.

The next meeting of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council will be on April 20 at 9 a.m. via teleconference.

Call the Office of Caregiver and Parent Support at 217-524-2422 for details.

Start planning now to guarantee a great summer camp experience



It may seem too soon to make plans for summer. However, since the best summer day camps and overnight camps tend to fill fast, now is the time to make plans. Caregivers to youth in foster care should talk to the child's caseworker about the best type of summer program for the child and family. DCFS-supervised foster families should ask about the financial assistance available, the approval process and the reimbursement procedures.

For private agency foster families, the policy can differ from agency to agency. Every agency receives funds for "non-recurring expenses" such as camp for some children. Ask the child's caseworker about the camp policy for children at that agency.

Adoptive and guardianship families typically have to cover these expenses within the household. Some camps do

offer income-based financial assistance.

With funding cleared, the search for the right camp for a child can take off. When evaluating camps, inquire about the counselor-to-camper ratio and the counselors' skills and certifications. Many camps do serve special needs children. Be sure to ask about provisions for medication, accommodations for disabilities and behavior management procedures.

Finding the right camp

- Check the community park districts. In Chicago, youth in foster care or with open subsidy cases can participate with a fee waiver. Contact the DCFS Office of Service Intervention at 312-814-5959 for more details.
- Area churches may have a youth camp or a youth group that plans summer activi-

ties. (Be sure to ask about parent permission for a religious program).

- Ask your child's caseworker for information on special needs camps focusing on ADHD or physical and developmental disabilities.
- Check organizations like the YMCA, Girl Scouts and

Boy Scouts for local camps.

Start making plans now. It is not unheard of for parents to wait for hours (even overnight!) in line for coveted spots at popular camps. Also, the paperwork to approve funding and consents for travel all take time, so it is best to get started early.

File the proper paperwork when planning the big trip with the kids



Before taking off down the highway for a vacation adventure or family reunion, make sure you have everything in order. Foster parents planning overnight trips should be sure to let the caseworker know where you will be and when you are leaving and returning. If travel will take your family across state lines, you must notify the caseworker to obtain consent. The casework staff has been given authority to consent for travel within the continental United States for up to 30 days. This requires staff to fill out the form CFS 432, Consent of Parent/Guardian for Out-of-state Travel. Copies of the consents should be included in the child's case file.

Consent for out-of-country travel or travel for more than 30 days can only be executed by the guardian or authorized

agent. This travel must also be agreed to by the court that has jurisdiction for the child's case. In Cook County, the Juvenile Court has generally approved travel on the North American continent. However, the court should still be notified in writing. If the child will need a passport, start planning early. The application process can take at least 15 business days or longer during peak travel times. Procedures for obtaining a passport have been prepared for casework staff.

Whether traveling out of country or closer to home, don't forget to take the child's medical card and any prescribed medication. With a bit of advance preparation, the only thing left to worry about is how to keep every in the backseat happy until the next rest stop.

Contact your post-adoption worker with subsidy questions



The Cook County Post Adoption and Guardianship Unit has a new phone number. Caregivers should call 855-548-5505. This is the number to use

with questions about the subsidy, to get approval for additional services and to provide updates to contact information or other changes.

The new phone number will be maintained by staff at a central location who can track the caller's request, ensure it goes to the appropriate individual and track the responsiveness.

Contacting Subsidy Workers at the Cook County Unit

Call new toll-free number 855-548-5505

Contacting Subsidy Workers outside of Cook County Northern Region

Supervisor Don Vasich 630-844-8496
Joliet: Norma Napper 815-730-4086
Aurora: Deirdra Davis 630-844-8966
Rockford: (pending) 815-967-3763

Central Region

Supervisor: Kevin Hauser 217-278-5535
Peoria: Deborah Hawkins 309-671-7944
Springfield: (pending) 217-557-2668
Urbana: Elois Drake 217-278-5417

Southern Region

Supervisor: Bernice Stallings 618-583-2184
East St. Louis: Carol Teague-Douglas 618-583-2189
Mt. Vernon: Wendy Manna 618-244-8424



Illinois Adoption Advisory Council update

The Illinois Adoption Advisory Council meets six times a year to discuss issues and make recommendations to the Department regarding the concerns of adoptive and guardianship families. The Council is made up of adoptive parents, professionals in the child welfare field and individuals who were adopted.

During the February meeting, June Dorn, DCFS Statewide Post-Adoption Coordinator provided an update. In fiscal year 2011, 1030 children moved to permanency with adoptive families. The Post-Adoption/Guardianship Unit oversees the subsidy agreements for those families and coordinates services to them. Two programs that cater to adoptive families are the Adoption/Guardianship Preservation Services and the Respite Program. Dorn and her staff recently conducted reviews with the providers that have those contracts to be certain they meet the goals and are effective in how they work with families. Adoptive and guardianship families can get connected to either of these programs by contacting Cook County Subsidy Unit or the subsidy workers located in the DCFS regional offices outside of Cook.

The next meeting of the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council will be on April 13 in Springfield at 10 a.m.

Call the Office of Caregiver and Parent Support at 217-524-2422 for details.

New adoption certification class

The DCFS Office of Training recently launched an online Adoption Certification course, "From Foster Care to Adoption." Either the classroom or online course is mandatory for families that are moving toward finalizing an adoption after a foster care placement. The adoption certification training is designed to support families in making the transition from parenting under foster care to adopting.

The 9-hour course covers the process to finalize an adoption; the differences between foster care and adoption; the importance of maintaining and managing family connections; the impact of culture; and post-adoption services and support.

The new online version of the course presents video clips of several different family scenarios as examples of what families might encounter as they move toward adoption. It is designed to be more interactive and reflects recent changes in law and policy.

The adoption worker must make a referral for families to attend this class. The schedule is available on the Virtual Training Center. However, if families cannot attend an in-person training, the entire course can be taken online. For more details, contact the adoption worker or the DCFS Office of Training at www.dcfstraining.org or 877-800-3393.

Subsidy agreements end on 18th birthday



As youth approach 18, they often look at that birthday as a beginning. But, practically speaking, adoptive and guardianship parents should realize it is often an end to the adoption or guardianship subsidy agreement.

To help parents plan for the transition, six months before the youth's 18th birthday, the family will receive a letter from DCFS titled Notice Of Intent to Discontinue Subsidy Payments on 18th Birthday. On the youth's 18th birthday, the many benefits in the subsidy, including the medical card, may also end. There are only two specific circumstances where the subsidy could continue beyond 18. Both require preparation and necessary documentation from the family, before the child turns 18.

The only two conditions that could qualify for extending the subsidy past the 18th birthday are:

1. Youth with a physical or mental disability that existed prior to the adoption or transfer of guardianship, which affects the child's ability to ever live independently, could with proper documentation be approved for an extension until the child turns 21.
2. Youth who don't have a disability, but who are still in high school at age 18 could have payments continue until graduation, but not past the 19th birthday.

Complete form to request extension: 30 days to respond

DCFS redesigned the letter and response form to make the information easier to understand. Parents should first watch the mail for the initial notice and respond within 30 days. If a caregiver believes their youth is eligible for an extension of their subsidy, select the appropriate extension option and return the form to the subsidy worker listed on the letter. DCFS subsidy workers will make attempts to reach adoptive and guardianship families by phone and mail if the initial letter goes without a response.

If the youth is eligible for a subsidy extension, it is crucial to get the proper coding done early and correctly. For example, parents should be aware that a youth cannot be granted the extension for high school graduation or age 19 and then also receive a further extension to 21 due to a physical or mental disability.

Document the need for an extension: Gather materials early

The disability extension only applies to a condition that affects the individual's major life activities. If a child is eligible for SSI (Supplemental Security Income from the Social Security Administration) due to a condition that existed prior to the adoption, documentation of that eligibility is sufficient to meet requirements for extension to age 21. In other cases, acceptable documentation would include a copy of a report or letter from a duly licensed or credentialed professional within the last year.

Youth without disabilities who

Requests to extend a subsidy until high school graduation or for a mental/physical disability require documentation, early.

have not graduated at 18 can ask the high school to provide a letter confirming enrollment and the anticipated graduation date.

At 60 days before the youth's 18th birthday, DCFS will send another letter to the family that confirms the subsidy termination date. It will also include instructions in case a family decides to appeal the decision.

As a young person approaches adulthood, the changes come swiftly and they can be quite complicated. There are many details to sort out. By looking ahead and planning early, the end of the subsidy agreement can be a smooth transition. Parents or guardians seeking an extension should begin gathering documentation well before the child turns 18. All documentation needs to be turned in to the subsidy worker with enough time to confirm the end date and have the case coded correctly before the youth's 18th birthday. Otherwise, the subsidy agreement automatically ends if it has not been approved for an extension.

Caregivers can contact the worker with any questions. The youth's subsidy worker's contact information will be clearly listed on the notification letter.

Cook County Advocate

News for Chicago Metro Area Families

DCFS arranges free summer camp in Chicago and several suburbs

The S.O.A.R. (Statewide Opportunities for Art and Recreation) program has a full slate of free summer activities for children in foster care and for those with open adoption or guardianship subsidies. DCFS has arranged to pay for day camp programs with the Chicago Park District and many suburban park district camps in Cook County. Children age 6 to 16 are eligible. The DCFS Division of Service Intervention, which runs S.O.A.R., has already identified eligible youth and will contact caregivers by mail in March with instructions on how to register for programs.

The DCFS regional offices will be the hub for distributing further information on summer camp. The regional offices will arrange times when caregivers can come to pick up registration packets. DCFS will provide caregivers with forms confirming that the Park District registration fee will be paid by DCFS. Transportation costs are not covered. Caregivers can enroll children at the park of their choosing, as long as there is space.

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.

Chicago Park District camps

The Chicago Park District has day programs running all summer in 190 parks across the city. Before-care and after-care is available in many sites. Parks may offer different programs for different ages, so caregivers should identify in advance the program that they would like. For more details, go to the website www.chicagoparkdistrict.com.

To use DCFS funding, registration must be done in person. In-person registration begins April 14 and continues through the first week of camp. Camp starts June 25 and most programs run at least six weeks through August 3. DCFS does not guarantee slots at any particular program, so caregivers should promptly handle registration for their children. Many popular programs close out quickly.

Cook suburban camps

DCFS is also making payment arrangements



for youth day camp programs at some suburban camps throughout Cook County. Caregivers in suburban communities should first inquire if their park district will accept the DCFS voucher. Then they can take the DCFS-provided forms to the park district program when they register.

Additional summer programs

Creativity Camp

Little Black Pearl Art and Design Center will offer a summer program. Students will do painting, drawing, ceramics and performing arts. The creativity camp, located at 1046 E. 47th Street in Chicago, is for youth age 7 to 18. It runs weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Labor of Love Academy

This program combines a morning of academics, Bible study and character-building with recre-

ational activities in the afternoon. The Camp is located at the Third Baptist Church at 9901 S. Winston in Chicago.

Ailey Camp Chicago

Ailey Camp offers dance classes in ballet, modern dance, jazz and West African dance, along with developmental instruction and field trips. The group meets weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Fuller Park Field House, 331 W. 45th Street. It is open to boys and girls ages 11 to 14.

For more information on summer programs, contact the S.O.A.R. Program at 312-814-4145. Also, caregivers who use the vouchers should be certain that children will actually attend the camp. If plans change before the session starts, contact the S.O.A.R. office as soon as possible.

Early childhood education investment has big payoff later in life



Pre-Kindergarten programs lay the social and emotional foundation for learning. Preschool readies a young child for academic growth, but equally important is the social and emotional development. In early childhood, the youngest of students learn lessons about trusting teachers and making friends. For youth dealing with the trauma of being involved in the child welfare system, these can be difficult lessons to grasp.

Under the DCFS School Readiness Initiative, all children in foster care at age three or older should be enrolled in a Head Start program, state pre-Kindergarten program or an accredited childcare center. All children in DCFS care are automatically eligible for Head Start and state pre-K programs, regardless of household income.

Illinois Action for Children is the local organization that provides referrals to connect Cook County families with child care providers. DCFS and Action for Children have set up an enhanced referral process so foster caregivers in Cook County can identify, evaluate and enroll children in a Head Start or state pre-K program more easily.

As a child approaches his or her third birthday, the caseworker will contact Illinois Action for Children.

The agency will confirm the child's information and then call the foster caregiver to discuss the type of program the child needs. Illinois Action for Children will find programs that match the family's criteria and confirm openings. Next, they provide a profile sheet of applicable programs. The caregiver can then contact the providers, make a decision and enroll the child.

Caregivers of children who are three years old and not enrolled in a Head Start or Pre-Kindergarten program should contact their caseworker right away.

The DCFS School Readiness Team has the ultimate goal of ensuring that every child in DCFS care receives a solid preschool education. Each DCFS region has a School Readiness worker assigned to troubleshoot and oversee the preparedness for the young children in that geographic area. In Cook County the School Readiness Workers are:

Cook South and Cook North
Michael Stripens 708-210-2800

Cook Central
Nubia Rodriguez 708-338-6720

Statewide Coordinator
Marybeth Corrigan
312-814-5509

*Screenings at age
0 - 5 can identify
concerns in time
to help*

DCFS has resources in place to ensure that all young children in care receive developmental screenings. Children entering care for the first time under the Integrated Assessment Program received these important screenings as part of their assessment. If the child needs services for a developmental delay or a social/emotional disorder, DCFS will make a referral for intensive services. Alternatively, the screenings could find that the child would benefit from a referral to an enrichment program.

Even children who show no developmental concerns will later receive a follow-up screening, as required for their age. The service providers often contact foster caregivers directly. When this happens, caregivers should respond and make the child available for all follow-up services. Caregivers should continue to watch for potential signs of developmental delay and discuss their concerns with the child's caseworker. Each DCFS Cook region has a developmental screener to work with children from birth to age three. Youth ages three to five receive screenings through their school district.

Cook County also has two Early Childhood Coordinators who support families and staff on developmental issues: Lynnare Deutsch-Claudio focuses on children up to age three. She can be reached at 847-745-3065 or e-mail at lynnare.claudio@illinois.gov. Robin York specializes in youth age three to five. Contact her at 312-328-2748 or by e-mail at robin.york@illinois.gov.

Cook North Council update

 The Cook North Regional Foster Care Advisory Council meets monthly to keep caregivers informed of new policies and local resources.

In January the Council invited Marybeth Corrigan and Michael Stripens of the DCFS School Readiness Team to kick off the new year. They are responsible for making certain every child in foster care between the age of three and five years old is enrolled in the appropriate pre-school program.

After that presentation the group tied up old business with a report on the holiday party toy drive. Participants then looked ahead to set a list of training topics for the remainder of the fiscal

year that includes:

- Gang Awareness
- Jump Start Your Child/Youth into Summer
- Creating Safe Visitation & Trust with Parents
- Foster Parent Appreciation Month activities
- Strengthening Families Parent Café

All caregivers in the Cook North foster care program will receive notice of monthly trainings by mail. Caregivers whose licenses are with private agencies are also welcome to attend. Contact Iris Cuevas at 312-328-2535 for details.

The council meets the first Tuesday each month at 10 a.m. at the DCFS Office at 1911 S. Indiana, Chicago.

Cook Central Council update

 The Cook Central Regional Foster Care Advisory Council started the year by determining the topics on which it will provide training in 2012. Stephanie Holifield of DCFS presented information to help youth exposed to domestic violence. In February, the group enjoyed what has become an annual presentation on tax benefits available to foster and adoptive families. Caregivers typically receive credit hours for their license renewal.

All DCFS and private agency supervised caregivers, adoptive parents and guardians are invited to participate on the advisory council. Caregivers lead the group to create a setting where caregivers can interact with others and share concerns or ideas. Meetings are held on the 4th Tuesday of each month at 3518 W. Division Street. Contact Denise Spires at 773-292-7879.

Cook South families join in support

 Each month the two DCFS Cook South support groups offer caregivers a way to receive training and to draw on the experiences and camaraderie of other caregivers.

Foster Parents, Our Greatest Resource

In Chicago the group Foster Parents, Our Greatest Resource resumed meetings in January. John Kasper of the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services was available to discuss education and employment resources for older youth.

The support group meets at 10 a.m. on the second Tuesday of each month in the DCFS office at 6201 S. Emerald in Chicago.

South Suburban Support Group

Caregivers who live in the suburbs south of Chicago can gather with other families to discuss child welfare issues that affect their households. In January the topic was parenting across cultures. The participants discussed practical ways to support children who come from backgrounds different than the caregiver.

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

Both support groups are open to all licensed DCFS and private agency caregivers living within the Cook South Region. Call the Foster Parent Information Line at 773-371-6113.

Get all the news without the paper

Illinois Families Now and Forever is now available for digital download. Caregivers who prefer to enjoy the newsletter electronically can participate in a pilot program.

Households that opt for the online version of the newsletter will still have access to all the information contained in the mailed copy. However, the digital version will be more convenient, more timely and more eco-friendly.

DCFS is committed to providing families the information you need in a way that is efficient, preserves resources and safeguards future funding.

To sign up for the electronic newsletter, send an email to the Editor at vanessa.james@illinois.gov.

Cook County Caregiver Training

DCFS Office of Training has scheduled sessions of in-service training modules and other courses in locations across the Central Region. The listing below can help caregivers plan for their training needs. To get specific dates and locations, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center (VTC) anytime at www.DCFStraining.org or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during regular business hours. In addition to classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of videos, books and online training.

APRIL

Adoption Certification	Blue Island, Chicago
Educational Advocacy	Blue Island, Chicago
Module 1	Chicago
Module 2	Harvey
Module 4	Chicago
Reunification	Chicago

MAY

Child Trauma (4 hours)	Harvey
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The Office of Training would like to remind all foster caregivers and adoptive parents that when requesting approval for training credits, the TCAF (Training Credit Approval Form) used must be the one dated 3/11. Earlier versions of the TCAF form will no longer be accepted.

This form is used to document hours from trainings that were developed outside of those offered by the DCFS Office of Training. Contact your licensing worker with questions.

In-service Training Modules (scheduled in classroom sessions and available on DVD)

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

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

Module 4 – The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (9 hours)

Module 5 – Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families (9 hours)

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

Module 7 – Promoting Children’s Personal and Cultural Identity (6 hours)

Module 8 – Promoting Permanency Outcomes (9 hours)

Module 9 – Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family (6 hours)

Module 10 – Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children and Families (15 hours)

Module 12 – Understanding & Promoting Pre-Teen and Teen Development (6 hours)

Who Do You Call When....?

...A child in your home is having a psychiatric crisis that may require hospitalization? Call the CARES line at 800-345-9049. However, if a child is a danger to himself or others, call 911 first. The CARES line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

...You want information on becoming a foster parent or on adoption? The Adoption Information Center of Illinois (AICI) can answer your questions and connect you with a licensing agency. The toll-free number is 800-572-2390. AICI also maintains information about the children who are featured on the back page of the newsletter.

...You have questions about your board check? Call the DCFS Central Payment Unit at 800-525-

0499 if your check comes from DCFS. If your check comes from a private agency, contact the agency.

...You feel you aren’t being treated fairly by DCFS or a private agency? If you’ve already tried to resolve the issue by going up the chain of command with the caseworker and supervisors, then call the Advocacy Office at 800-232-3798.

...You have questions about your child’s medical card? Call 800-228-6533.

...You need to report a child missing or have information about a youth who has run away? To report information on missing youth call 866-503-0184. The toll-free number is available 24 hours a day every day of the week. If you feel the

child is in danger, call 911 first.

...You are having extreme family problems with your adopted child? The Adoption/Subsidized Guardianship Preservation Program can provide in-home counseling and case services to help hold a family together. To find the program that serves your area call Cook County Post-Adoption/Guardianship Unit at 855-548-5505 or the subsidy worker in nearest DCFS regional office.

...You have an idea for an article in the newsletter? Each region has a regional reporter to help gather local news. The names and contact information are listed in the regional section of each edition. Or you can contact the Editor, Vanessa James, at 312-814-6824 or send an e-mail vanessa.james@illinois.gov.

A family for me: Call 1-800-572-2390 for more information



Ashley (C7919)

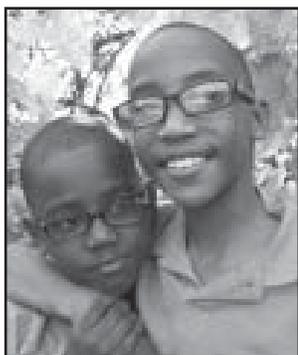
Ashley [C7919] Ashley, 15, may appear shy at first, but in fact she is expressive, articulate, and deeply creative. Like many teenagers, Ashley looks for ways to express her individuality. She enjoys reading and writing poetry, and hopes to have her work published in the future. She seeks emotional stability in her life, and is eager to join a family that will provide unconditional love and support.



Sherece (C7943)

Ashley's teachers say she is intelligent, articulate, and likable. She earns good grades by applying herself and staying on task in school. She is also a strong advocate for herself, and wants very much to be adopted.

Potential parents to Ashley can provide a patient, loving, permanent home for her. You can also work with professionals who can help you understand and meet her emotional needs. Ashley asks that her adoptive family be "careful of boundaries, honest, loving, careful of the words they use, and respectful." She adds that her ideal family would be African-American, Christian, and 40 years of age or younger. She would consider living with older parents, however, as long as they were "young at heart."



Jeremiah & Joshua
(C7899-900)

Sherece [C7943] This young lady loves to be social! Sherece, 12, has made lots of friends at school, and enjoys spending time with them. She has also expressed a desire to join the Girl Scouts as a way to spend even more time with her peers. In addition to being friendly, Sherece is very neat and

organized; she maintains her room and cleans up after herself. She enjoys shopping and getting her hair done. In her spare time, she enjoys singing, listening to music, and playing video games on her Nintendo Wii.

Sherece's teacher says she is a "bright, excited, fun-loving student" with an "inquisitive mind." Sherece's foster parent says she is "strong, and she will make it in life."

The right family for Sherece would provide her lots of nurturing and reassurance. You can also be patient with her as she adjusts to her new, permanent family. Sherece wants to be surrounded by people who will love her unconditionally. She says she would like "a mom, a dad, and brothers and sisters to care for me, give me the stuff I need, and not put too much pressure on me." Other children in the home should be older than Sherece.

Jeremiah & Joshua [C7899-900] These brothers love to spend time outside. Whether they're playing basketball, riding their bikes, or finding other ways to be active, they simply can't be confined to the house. Jeremiah, 12, is a playful child who enjoys positive attention. He can be impulsive at times, but responds well to structure. Ten-year-old Joshua, is a sweet, playful child. He also responds well to structure in his day-to-day activities. Jeremiah's teachers say he is one of the highest functioning students in his class. Joshua's worker says he is sweet, loveable, and engaging.

To be a forever family for these two you can provide a supportive, structured home, redirecting their behavior when necessary. You can provide plenty of love and affection for these boys, while giving them ample time to adjust to their new, permanent family. You can also help Jeremiah and Joshua maintain relationships with their siblings. Other children in the home should be older than Jeremiah and Joshua.

Briana [C7769] Briana, 12, is a smart, expressive young lady who loves spending time with her friends. She enjoys conversation, and is able to clearly articulate her thoughts and feelings. She also enjoys being active, and is interested in sports such as volleyball. In her quieter moments, she likes to draw or delve into her favorite school subject, math.

Briana's worker says she is a smart, talented young lady who does well in school. Her foster parent says she can be very helpful around the house.

Potential parents for Briana can provide a loving home, with lots of one-on-one attention and plenty of fun activities to enjoy. You can also work with professionals who can help you make sure her medical and emotional needs are met. Briana says she would like to join a two-parent, African-American family. She would like to be the only child in the home, but would also be open to a family with younger siblings.



Briana (C7769)



Please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390, or see the AICI Web site - www.adoptinfo-il.org if you are interested in adopting one of these children or learning about other children waiting to be adopted.



Illinois Families Now and Forever

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Department of Children and Family Services©

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EDUCATE. ADVOCATE. CELEBRATE!
*DCFS offers free scholarships to National Foster
Parent Association Educational Conference June 15-18.
Details on page 6. REGISTRATION OPENS APRIL 1.*

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Current and back issues of *Illinois Families Now and Forever*
are available online in English and Spanish at www.state.il.us/dcfs