



# Illinois Families Now and Forever

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship®

## State celebrates Foster Parent Appreciation Month

### From the DCFS Director



May, Foster Parent Appreciation Month in Illinois, comes near the half-year point in my tenure as Director. When I look back on what has taken place so far and what we face, my respect and gratitude for our foster caregivers goes even deeper. I hope all of our families will take some time this month to reflect on the many good things that come from the hard job you perform.

Governor Quinn's proclamation for Foster Parent Appreciation Month stated that, "foster parent caregivers tirelessly tend to children's physical, emotional, material and educational needs, providing them the opportunity to move from the child welfare system to safe and successful lives."

Official acknowledgements are important, but they only go so far. Perhaps the most valuable reward would be the sentiments from someone who can sincerely speak to foster care in a very unique, personal way. This letter from Carissa gets to the heart of Foster Parent Appreciation Month. I pledge to take her experiences into account as we move DCFS forward.

— Richard H. Calica

Carissa Wesley, age 22, described in a letter how she felt when she and her sister were taken into DCFS care. The excerpts that follow speak to the girls' traumatic entry into the system, their placement in foster care with Jeff and Robin Simpson and Carissa's gratitude for a positive foster care experience.

#### Initial shock

"My name is Carissa Wesley. On December 16, 2005 my world was flipped upside down. Sitting in Spanish class, my teacher gets a call from the office, letting her know to let me know to grab my things... Well, I get to the office and there sits my principal and a police officer... They go on to say that my biological mother was taken into custody... Anyway, they told me that if family couldn't take me, then we would be placed in foster care. The sad thing was that I had a place to go, but they couldn't separate siblings. So after a failed attempt, they had me ride in the police car to the junior high where my younger sister went to school.

#### Welcoming family

When we left the office [the caseworker] took us to the family's home. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know where Odin was, and it was dark, plus we were out in the country. As we pulled in the driveway there was [sic] cars and lights and a lot of movement. Walking up to the front door, we were greeted by a house full of people. But, from the moment we walked through that door the Simpsons did nothing but make us feel like part of the family.

#### Lifelong impact

Yes, I may be out on my own and no longer in care, but they are more of a family than my own has been. I keep in contact with the Simpsons. In fact, Jeff said that when the day comes for me to get married that he would give me away.

My point to all of this is that a good, loving, caring foster home can impact a child's life. Had they not cared the way they did for us then, I'm not sure I would be here writing this letter to you. I've had so many more chances in life, met new people, learned new things, advocated for other youth.

Had I not been placed in a good home the first time, I would have been in a group home waiting for the day I could age out.

You may not see things from our point of view, but I have seen good foster parents lose kids because the real parents "cleaned up," but that rips not only the kids up but the foster parents too. They get attached and it's as if they were losing their own kids. I guess what I'm asking is that you truly see what is going on and see what is best for not only the kids, but the foster parents as well."



# MOVIN' ON UP: SAVE THE DATES

*News for youth as they transition to adulthood*

Older youth are about to embark on a busy season with DCFS. The end of spring brings several special events designed to educate and encourage teens and young adults who are involved with DCFS.

The Division of Service Intervention is celebrating academic accomplishments with a graduation celebration in each DCFS region. Those youth in care or

those formerly under DCFS care who earned a high school diploma or GED or completed a vocational program are invited to attend.

There will also be four Youth Summits that will provide teens skills to help them successfully achieve self-sufficiency.

Save the date for the events listed below. More information will be

sent directly to families with youth ages 14 to 21 who are still in care. Youth who are adopted or in guardianship can also take part in the events by calling one of the support staff below.

**Cook/Northern regions**  
Tony Lawlor, 312-401-5462

**Central/Southern regions**  
Leshonda Rogers, 217-789-2908

### Central Region

*Graduation Celebration*  
June 8, 10a.m. - 3p.m.  
Executive Mansion  
Springfield

*Youth Summit*  
June 28, 8a.m. to 4p.m.  
Miller Park Pavilion  
Bloomington

### Cook Regions

*Graduation Celebration*  
June 29, 12 to 4p.m.  
Location TBA

*Youth Summit*  
June 14, 8a.m. to 4p.m.  
IL Institute of Technology  
Chicago

### Southern Region

*Graduation Celebration*  
June 22 (time TBA)  
Splash City  
Collinsville

*Youth Summit*  
June 21, 8a.m. to 4p.m.  
Kaskaskia College  
Centralia

### Northern Region

*Graduation Celebration*  
June 18, 1 to 4p.m.  
Brunswick Zone  
Aurora

*Youth Summit*  
June 15, 8a.m. to 4p.m.  
Kishwaukee College  
Malta

## Caregiver families invited to State Fair August 10-19 in Springfield

DCFS continues the annual tradition of offering caregivers a special invitation to attend the Illinois State Fair.

Complete and return this page by June 22 and in July you will receive by mail:

- A pass that includes parking and admission for all passengers in the car for one \$3 fee.
- 1 refreshment ticket for each family member, worth \$3 in food or drink.
- One ride ticket for each family member that provides unlimited rides for \$15 (during designated hours ONLY on August 13-17)

### MAIL OR FAX NO LATER THAN JUNE 22, 2012

**DCFS Office of Communications**  
406 East Monroe Street, Station 65  
Springfield, IL 62701-1498  
Fax: 217-524-0014

*Tickets may not be requested by telephone. Nothing will be sent to you unless you return this coupon. This is the only invitation to the state fair. Please act NOW if you wish to attend.*

There will be \_\_\_\_\_ family members in our party.

Number of vehicles \_\_\_\_\_ (limit 2)

(If requesting more than 8 tickets, please print the name and phone number of your licensing or subsidy worker.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Foster Home supervised by:  DCFS  private agency

Post Adoption/Guardianship:  yes  no

Name of Agency/DCFS Region: \_\_\_\_\_

Worker's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

*We are a licensed foster family, relative caregiver, a guardianship family or have adopted a child through DCFS, and we would like to attend the 2012 Illinois State Fair. We understand that only our foster, adopted and guardianship children and family members who live in our home consistent with DCFS licensing regulations are eligible for these special offers.*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



# Illinois Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Bulletin

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council traveled to Effingham for the March meeting.

**Foster Parent Law:** The council concluded the evaluation process for the 2012 Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans. Several plans were nominated for special honors. Representatives from three foster care programs will join the June meeting to receive awards. Meanwhile, council members continued the on-site reviews at agencies to gauge the plans' impact on caregivers and staff.

**Television campaign:** The council had an opportunity to weigh in on the next installment of the public service commercials for the "Foster Kids Are Our

Kids" television campaign. Anne Klassman of Voices for Illinois Children said that the organization would consider recommendations the council made as it prepares for public roll out.

**Priority issues:** At the start of the year, Director Calica asked the council to look into ways to enhance the relationship between caregivers and the staff that support their efforts. The council formed a committee to address that need and will also develop a set of other critical issues.

**Elections:** Council members set the ballots for chair and vice chair. Results from the vote will be announced in June 8 meeting so terms can start in July.

*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 June 8 at 9 a.m. in Downers Grove.*

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



## *New phone line for post-adoption info calls*

Caregivers who have moved to permanency through adoption or guardianship can find answers to questions and information about services by calling a new phone line that serves the entire state.

The new phone line to the Call Center is 1(888) 96 ADOPT. 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 centralized system was first piloted in Cook County and many

**Post-Adoption & Guardianship  
toll-free phone line  
1-888-96-ADOPT  
(1-888-962-3678)**

benefits came to light early in the process. Calls can be directed to the right subsidy worker who can respond. Calls are also tracked to improve response time and to ensure that the matter is resolved.

"We are very pleased with the level of service and responsiveness that the new system provides our caregivers," said June Dorn, DCFS Statewide Adoption Administrator.

The direct line phone numbers for the subsidy workers are still in place. However, the new central number will come in handy if you do not know the exact individual who may be of help or if you have a general question about services after the adoption or guardianship.



*The DCFS Office of Caregiver and Parent Support and the DCFS Office of training presented the 2012 Caregiver Institutes. The theme was "I've Been Through Some Things," and focused on helping caregivers support children affected by trauma.*

*The six-hour sessions included panel discussion with youth, interactive presentations and time for networking. The four institutes served hundreds of families throughout the state.*

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# Foster Parent Law defines caregivers' rights and responsibilities

Before 1995, the rights and responsibilities for the individuals providing foster care were not clearly defined. Without a clear job description, caregivers, agencies and DCFS had struggled in placing caregivers' rights and responsibilities within child welfare policy. It took a lengthy, coordinated effort from individual caregivers, foster care advocacy organizations, legislators, and child welfare personnel to bring about the Foster Parent Bill of Rights. That document provided the foundation for the Foster Parent Law, signed on June 3, 1995.

The Foster Parent Law clearly defines 15 rights and 17 responsibilities for all Illinois families who provide foster care to children in DCFS care. The statement of rights helps foster caregivers, agencies and DCFS regions know what role caregivers will play on the child welfare team and the consideration they should receive. The statement of responsibilities helps caregivers know what will be expected of them and gives a clear understanding of the general expectations they should have of the foster care agency or DCFS regional foster care program.

The Foster Parent Law also established the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council to advise DCFS about foster care issues. The council also has the responsibility to oversee the implementation of the Foster Parent Law.

Details and the full text of Foster Parent Law are included in the Foster Family Handbook. Caregivers can also request their foster care program's annual Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan to see how it upholds the Law. The DCFS Office of Caregiver and Parent Support at 217-524-2422 can provide further information.

## Caregivers have the right to:

1. Be treated with dignity, respect and consideration
2. Be provided pre-service and appropriate ongoing training to improve skills
3. Be informed on how to receive supportive services from the agency
4. Receive timely financial reimbursement commensurate with child's service plan
5. Be provided a clear, written understanding of the plan concerning the child's placement and how it will support his family relationship and cultural identity
6. Fair, timely and impartial investigations of licensing complaints
7. Receive additional information to assist in the care of a child while in placement
8. Receive specific information from DCFS and private agencies listed in Children and Family Services Act and the Child Care Act of 1969
9. Be notified of scheduled meetings and staffings in order to participate in case planning and decision-making
10. Be provided, before placement, with any information a caseworker has that is pertinent to the child's care and the permanency plan
11. Receive written notice of any change in a child's case plan or of plans to terminate the child's placement, along with the reasons for the change or termination
12. Timely notification of court hearings and right to intervene or request mandamus
13. Be considered as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the foster parents re-enters DCFS care
14. Access the existing appeals process with the assertion that the appeal will be free from acts of harassment and retaliation.
15. Be informed of the Foster Parent Hotline and the rights for foster parents when reporting misconduct by child welfare personnel

## Caregivers have the responsibility to:

1. Communicate and share information with the child welfare team
2. Respect the confidentiality of information about the child and his family
3. Advocate for children in the care of the foster parent
4. Treat the child and his or her family with dignity, respect and consideration
5. Recognize their individual and family strengths and limitations and to utilize appropriate supports as appropriate
6. Be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent associations
7. Assess their ongoing training needs and take action to meet those needs
8. Strategize with agency representatives to avoid placement disruptions and support the child if disruption occurs
9. Recognize the impact of foster care on relationships and take steps to minimize stress as much as possible
10. Positively promote the benefits of foster parenting
11. Know the role, rights and responsibilities of foster parents, other professionals in the child welfare system, the child, and the child's own family
12. Know and fulfill their role as a mandated reporter and know policies regarding allegations that foster parents have committed abuse or neglect
13. Know the purpose of and to participate in Administrative Case Reviews, client service plans and court proceedings
14. Know the child welfare agency's appeal process
15. Maintain accurate records
16. Share information about the placement with subsequent caregivers/parents
17. Provide care that respects the child's cultural needs supports the relationship between the child and his or her own family

# Cook County Advocate

News for Chicago Metro Area Families

## Family Reunion for youth formerly in DCFS care on June 23

**Family Reunion  
June 23**

**8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

**University of Chicago**

**School of Social Service Administration  
969 E. 60th Street, Chicago**

**Free event with breakfast  
and lunch included**

**Call Luvenia Sims at 312-421-5200 x124  
for more information. To register online:  
[www.familyreunion2012.eventbrite.com](http://www.familyreunion2012.eventbrite.com)**

Youth who emancipate from DCFS care face daunting odds as they seek self-sufficiency. The families that they encounter through foster care can help ground them. Strengthening Families of Illinois will celebrate those positive connections with its first Family Reunion.

The Family Reunion will be a full day event that will:

- present a full slate of workshops
- create positive relationships
- connect families with service providers and resources

The all-day event will offer breakfast and a Family Reunion Cook-out. Registration information is at [www.familyreunion2012.eventbrite.com](http://www.familyreunion2012.eventbrite.com).



## Message from Jackie Bright, DCFS Cook North Regional Administrator

Although the month of May is designated for acknowledging our foster parents, I'm sure everyone reading this message can agree that foster parents are to be appreciated every day for their commitment to our children. You have partnered with Cook North Region to achieve the purpose and mission of protecting our children and strengthening families. As Regional Administrator, I find comfort in the work we are doing together.

Through teamwork, we have made numerous accomplishments. As our population of children in care has shifted to older youth, you've joined us in facing the challenges and addressing the need to provide necessary services and supports for that segment. We have provided you with training and tools that will support you, giving you a better understanding of how trauma affects children's behavior, and you've provided stability in your homes. You have also played a significant role by ensuring that permanency of either by reunification or

adoption is achieved for our children and youth. You've embraced our reunification model by supporting families and assisting with visitation. Finally, let's not forget the impact of your involvement to address their educational needs. Your presence in the schools has impacted their success.

In conclusion, I would like to extend a special thanks to you, our caregivers. Cook North Region will continue to support your endeavors to ensure that the needs of our children are met. Please be assured that you can contact me when you experience any difficulties, and we can work together to reach resolution.

You are indeed a part of our team and we treasure your commitment to our children and youth in care. **HAPPY FOSTER PARENT APPRECIATION MONTH!**



## News from the Cook North foster care advisory council

Caregivers who attended the March meeting of the foster care advisory council got to meet Felicia Bradley, the new Foster Parent Support Specialist for Cook North.

The training committee has responded to caregiver needs to provide training sessions on gang awareness and involvement. There are plans to repeat the presentation on Effective Behavior Techniques. Caregivers who are part of the Cook North foster care program will receive notice in the mail. Homes that are supported by other agencies can attend and should contact Kathy Cook at 312-328-3800.

The Cook North Regional Foster Care Advisory Council meets the second Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. at 1911 S. Indiana in Chicago.



## Message from Joyce Hall, DCFS Cook Central Regional Administrator

The month of May is already famous for the children's verse: "April Showers bring May flowers." May also is famous because some years ago it became the official month for showing appreciation for our caregivers.

In the Cook Central Region, we want you to feel special. As the Cook Central Regional Administrator I have the pleasure of working with a very active local foster parent association that encourages open discussion and new ideas. It is recognized as a vital part of the mechanism of the Cook Central Region.

The collaboration with caregivers inspires our staff to come together to plan events that celebrate what you do. Because you are the focus, we did surveys to get insight into ways we could sincerely show our appreciation. The responses are always interesting and sometimes

humorous. Each survey is always treated with respect and given the greatest consideration.

This year we have planned a celebration with "spa activities" to help you unwind and recharge. We won't forget the children that are at the center of what you do. At our family event we can keep them entertained with games and face painting, while staff and caregivers can get to know each other.

Even under the financial constraints that most Illinoisans face, Foster Parent Appreciation Month is a great time of celebration. The Cook Central Foster Caregivers are appreciated beyond measure or words. Your contributions are invaluable.



## Cook Central Regional Advisory Council

The Cook Central 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.

Fourth Tuesday of the month  
9:30 a.m.

3518 W. Division, Chicago  
Contact: Denise Spires  
773-292-7879

This office is tentatively scheduled to relocate this summer. After May, caregivers should call in advance to confirm the meeting location.



## Message from Dianne Bradie-Baskin DCFS Cook South Regional Administrator

During the first quarter of 2012 Cook South Region put in motion several projects and initiatives to offer meaningful support to our care providers. It is essential that our care providers continue to enhance their knowledge base through seminars, workshops, and programs that help them stay one step ahead of our children.

In a written survey South Region conducted during the last quarter of 2011 we learned what interested our parents most and have begun to facilitate their request. For example, technology is changing the face of the world we once knew. I need not describe to you how complex it has become and our children have adapted quickly. In February ten of our foster parents were enrolled in a free computer class. This eight-week program is offered while the children are in school and will help them become more comfortable with the Internet and emailing. Please think about signing up for our next set of classes.

To further our efforts to bring you what you need, where

you need it, in partnership with the National Kidney Foundation we had free Health Screenings on March 21 for our parents and staff. Also in March, we sponsored a workshop on the culture of gangs by the Chicago Police Department. A large part of the discussion included information on bullying, and how to offer a child alternatives to aberrant behavior.

I hope that you will get involved in the events and trainings that we develop for our caregivers. Additionally we host two support groups and a regional foster care advisory council. The council meets the second Tuesday of each month at our Chicago office. I look forward to you joining us.

Best wishes to your family for the entire Foster Parent Appreciation Month.



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# Families find strength in numbers with support groups in Cook

DCFS, private agencies and community organizations sponsor many support groups and associations to assist foster and adoptive parents. The following list can help identify a group that may suit your family.

## **Cook Central DCFS Regional Foster Care Advisory Council**

Billie Ray Lewis at 773-968-6572  
Meets 4th Tuesday at 9:30 a.m.  
DCFS Office, 3518 W. Division, Chicago  
No December meeting. Training credits offered.

## **Cook North DCFS Regional Foster Care Advisory Council**

Iris Cuevas at 312-328-2535  
Meets 2nd Tuesday at 10 a.m.  
DCFS Office, 1911 S. Indiana, Chicago

## **Cook South DCFS Regional Foster Care Advisory Council**

Foster Parent Line at 773-371-6113  
Meets in conjunction with Foster Parents, Our Greatest Resource.  
Meets 2nd Tuesday at 10 a.m.  
DCFS Office, 6201 S. Emerald, Chicago

## **Foster Parents, Our Greatest Resource Support Group**

Foster Parent Line at 773-371-6113  
Meets in conjunction with the Cook South Regional Advisory Council.  
Meets 2nd Tuesday from 11 a.m.  
DCFS Office, 6201 S. Emerald, Chicago  
For DCFS and private agency families. Training credits offered.

## **DCFS Cook South Suburban Support Group**

Adrienne Taylor at 708-210-3578  
Meets 4th Thursday of odd numbered months at 9 a.m. to Noon

DCFS Office, 15115 Dixie Highway, Harvey  
For DCFS and private agency families. Training credits offered.

## **Grandfamilies Program of Chicago**

Linette Kinchen at 773-651-8800  
Agency hosts several groups in Chicago: Abbott Park, Englewood, Far South, West Englewood. Call for details on dates and locations.

## **Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Training and Support Group**

Cara Siebert at 773-884-2211  
siebert@metrofamily.org  
Meets 1st Wednesday 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. Metropolitan Family Services - Midway  
3843 W. 63rd Street, Chicago  
Open to any grandparent or older caregiver raising a child.

## **Hispanic Association (combines with Northeast Foster Adopt Parent Association)**

Edith Cruz at 312-328-2064

## **Hull House Association Foster Parent Support Group**

Debra Whitted at 773-374-9451x 155  
8753 S. Greenwood, Chicago  
Call for meeting schedule.

## **Jewish Child and Family Services Advisory Council**

Noelle Folden at 312-673-2765  
Meets every other month on the 4th Thursday at Noon  
Alternating locations: 216 West

Jackson or the Avalon Library, Chicago

## **Lutheran Social Services of IL Foster Parent Advisory Council**

Shawanda Dixon or Ernestine Robinson at 312-949-4340  
Meets 1st Monday every other month from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m 10 W. 35th St., 15th Floor, Chicago

## **Lutheran Social Services of Illinois - South Open Arms**

Beth Novotney at 773-371-2700  
Meets 3rd Wednesday at 6 p.m. 11740 S. Western, Chicago  
Childcare provided with reservations. Open to adoptive families and pre-adoptive families.

## **Metropolitan Family Services Parent Support Group**

Cara Seibert at 773-343-4280  
Meets 2nd and 4th Wednesdays at 6 p.m. 3843 W. 63rd. Street, Chicago  
Refreshments served. RSVP preferred.

## **New Beginning Foster/Adoptive Parent Association**

Regina & Gladys Boyd at 708-385-6263  
Meets 1st Monday, 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. 10436 S. Wallace at Fernwood Park

## **Northeast Area Foster and Adopt Parent Association**

Cecil Garner at 773-241-0821  
Meets 3rd Thursday at 10 a.m. Sherman Park Library  
5440 S. Racine Avenue, Chicago

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## Cook County Training

MAY/JUNE

Caring for Children who have Experienced Trauma (15 Hours) Chicago

Module 1: The Foundation for Meeting the Development Needs of Children at Risk Chicago

Attachment and the Teen in Family Foster Care (6 hrs) Chicago

*DCFS Office of Training has scheduled sessions of in-service training modules and other courses in locations across the Southern region. To get specific dates and locations, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center (VTC) anytime at [www.DCFstraining.org](http://www.DCFstraining.org) or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during business hours. In addition to classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of videos, books and online training.*



## Illinois Families Now and Forever

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Purpose: To help busy families more effectively parent children currently or formerly in DCFS care. To bring them the best information from the most knowledgeable sources. To promote statewide teamwork in finding permanency for children.

Address Changes: Families must notify their licensing representative, who will notify DCFS. Agencies should change office addresses or request staff copies through the Editor.

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Department of Children and Family Services©

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### Inside this issue:

- Page 1** Illinois Celebrates Foster Parent Appreciation Month
- Page 2** Movin' on Up: Upcoming Events
- Page 3** Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Bulletin
- Page 4** Your Foster Parent Law Rights and Responsibilities
- Pages 5-6** Cook County Advocate: Regional News
- Page 7** Cook County Foster Parent Group Directory  
Cook County Training Information

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