

Illinois Families Now and Forever

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship®

Prepare now for high holiday emotions

Parenting challenges can become even greater than usual during the holidays. All children have the tendency to become overwhelmed by holidays, the prospect of gifts, and the let down when it is all over. Children in (or after) foster care face all of these same stressors, along with their own unique challenges. It is important that foster caregivers and even parents who have moved to adoption or guardianship be prepared for the emotional swings that may be part of the holiday package. Fortunately, there are some ways to manage the holidays to minimize problems and help children feel less isolated and confused.

This season can intensify feelings of longing for children in the foster care system because it emphasizes the separation from their birth families. Often, these children create memories of idealized parents or imagine a life before foster care that was only happy. Although this often does not match their real experiences, this type of imagination is common and serves as a kind of emotional pro-

tection for them. However, when they face the reality of their situation, some children will exhibit sadness and significant emotional distress caused by separation from their families. They may struggle with confusing feelings of wanting to be loyal to their own parents and their traditions and also wanting to be part of the fun in the home where they presently live. A child with attachment issues may sabotage any attempts to participate in enjoyable activities or may simply become withdrawn and sullen, “ruining” the holiday for others. Often, older children are more vulnerable to intense feelings of sadness and anger during the holiday season because they have more memories of the rituals and traditions of their families during the holidays.

It is important to provide a supportive environment for children who may be saddened during the time of year that brings so much joy to others. Failure to acknowledge the feelings



may cause them to be more acute. It is often helpful to create a bridge that connects the family of origin, either literally or figuratively, with the foster/adoptive family to compensate for the feelings of separation that occurs during this time.

The holidays have a way of raising the stakes. So the adults must be prepared for more than gifts and a great meal. Patience will likely become even more important than presents. Try not let the child set the emotional tone in the home. Your feelings of joy and happiness can't be dependent on the child's feelings and behaviors. You may need to schedule a break outside of the house (or a nap!) Taking care of yourself will keep you in shape to enjoy the holidays and enjoy sharing them with everyone in the home.

Urge your state lawmakers to restore funding to DCFS

DCFS needs the help of families across the state to restore \$38,048,200 in cuts to the department's budget, including \$6.6 million for adoption assistance payments to adoptive families. The department's efforts also include adding staff to improve foster parent recruitment, promote permanency, and other wide-ranging efforts to ensure children's safety, well-being and permanency.

A vote is expected in early January, and the fate of the department's funding and the lives of thousands of youth across the state is uncertain. Please call your state senator and state representative before January 1st and urge them to vote YES on restoring \$38 million in cuts to the DCFS budget, and ask your friends, family and neighbors to join you. For more information, you can “like” DCFS at Facebook.com/ProtectIllinoisKids or search for Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

From the DCFS Director

Richard H. Calica



As the holidays approach, we should all take a moment to remember all the aspects of your family that bring gratitude and hope.

The road you chose in committing your life to children is one with many twists, some hills and even the occasional rock. My job is to help the staff at DCFS and our nonprofit partners provide you with the support and road map you need to work around the obstacles that arise.

It has been almost a year since I accepted this role. During that time I have taken steps to restructure the Department into more logical functional lines, eliminating activities that didn't fit or didn't work well enough. I was able to focus on our core mission of keeping children safe.

In my last message to caregivers I spoke of the budgetary twists and turns that the Department had to work through in the new fiscal year. With your help, we will see our request for the funding needed to protect children and strengthen families restored this January. Meanwhile, you, the individuals who open your homes to children and who inspire the work we all do, allow me to pause and consider all that brings me gratitude and hope.

Have a safe and happy holiday season.

Celebrate holiday cultural differences

The Illinois Foster Parent Law states that it is the foster parent's responsibility to "Respect and maintain a child's cultural needs and support relationships with his own family." With the many religious and cultural holidays that abound in December, this can be a time to create special holiday memories while learning about new cultures and share memories with your children in ways you might not have considered.

Following are highlights of some winter religious and cultural holidays that may be significant to children in your home. There may be others, so talk directly with children about what they have experienced or may want to discover.

Kwanzaa bonds family, community and Africa

Kwanzaa is an African-American and Pan-African holiday that celebrates family, community and culture. The Kwanzaa celebration is a way to explore aspects of the African culture and build bonds within the family and the larger community. It is celebrated from December 26 through January 1 by an estimated 26 million people around the world.

The tradition centers around the Kwanzaa symbols and the seven Nguzo Saba (principles) of Kwanzaa, which each get a day of devoted attention.

To celebrate Kwanzaa, the family chooses a central place in the home for the Kwanzaa Set, or the symbols of Kwanzaa. The set includes a table covering of African cloth, the mkeka (mat) and the kinara (candleholder).

The kinara holds seven candles to represent the seven days of Kwanzaa and the seven Kwanzaa principles:

- Umoja (unity)
- Kujichagulia (self-determination)
- Ujamaa (cooperative economics)
- Kuumba (creativity)



- Ujima (collective work and responsibility)
- Nia (purpose)
- Imani (faith)

Each night of Kwanzaa during the evening meal, the family members light one of the seven candles to commemorate the principle of the day. Everyone explains what the principle of that day means to them and how they practiced it during the day. Finally, everyone makes a commitment to practice and promote the particular principle throughout the year. Families can head into the new year, connected, focused and inspired.

For more information on the Kwanzaa holiday, visit www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org

Important holiday advice

Whether your family embraces a “greeting card” traditional Christmas, explores another cultural holiday or focuses on other aspects of the holiday season, give thought to your plans in advance. Start by asking children about the holidays as they experienced them before coming to your home. If you are parenting across cultures, it is especially important to get some background on the holiday traditions that are meaningful to the child and his or her family. Remember though, even children of the same religious faith as their caregivers may have emphasized different aspects of a holiday. Some families might open Christmas presents on Christmas Eve while others wait until the morning. Still others might skip presents all together and give handmade gifts or exchange personal favors.

Straddling between two sets of family traditions can be complicated. The key is to talk about the holidays and work out ways to honor the child’s past and present family rituals while he is in your home. Patience, tolerance and compromise might be the best gifts of all.

Chanukah

In 2012, Chanukah will be observed beginning at sundown on December 8 through December 16. Families of the Jewish faith celebrate Chanukah or Hanukkah to mark the victory over Syrian rulers, who more than 2,300 years ago tried to force the Jewish people to renounce their faith and worship Greek gods. Led by Judah Maccabee and his brothers, the Jewish fighters drove the Syrians out of the land of Judea (now Israel) and reclaimed the temple at Jerusalem after a three-year struggle. On the 25th day of the Hebrew month Kislev, the Maccabees finished cleaning out the temple and rededicated it.

They found only a tiny jug of oil to use to light an eternal flame. The oil in the jar should only have lasted a day, but it burned for eight days. The modern day Festival of Lights or Chanukah lasts for eight days to commemorate the miracle of the oil.



Families celebrate Chanukah at home by lighting the menorah, eating special food and giving gifts.

Los Posadas

In Mexico the posada, which means lodging or shelter in Spanish, is celebrated every evening from December 16 to 24 to commemorate Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem. On each night of the posada, a home in the neighborhood plays host to a party with food, drinks and candy and fruit for the children. At dusk, a young child dressed as an angel leads a procession to the host home. Children dressed in silver and gold robes carry figures of Mary and Joseph. The adults and musicians follow as everyone sings aliguinaldos (Christmas carols) holding lit candles.

Arriving at the house, the group splits in two, with one half going inside as the other remains outside and begs for shelter. When the doors open, the solemn aspect of the celebration gives way to fun. To end the posada, the children take turns swinging at a star-shaped piñata, hoping to release the treats inside.



Three King’s Day

El Dia de los Tres Reyes

Three King’s Day follows the account of the Three Magi who brought gifts of frankincense, myrrh and gold to the infant Jesus. It begins at dawn on January 6. The night before, Puerto Rican children place cut grass into a shoebox and top it with a wish list. The grass is intended as a treat for the kings’ camels after their journey. The Reyes (kings) will only come if the child has been good all year.

After a night of anticipation, fortunate children wake to find gifts left by the Reyes. They spend the day playing with toys and enjoying a holiday meal with family and friends.



Holidays bring opportunities for sibling visits

The holidays are a good time to plan extended visits with siblings who are in different foster care homes. Visits can often soften the traumatic impact of separation and contribute to siblings' long-term mental health. DCFS recognizes the power of sibling connections and will provide foster caregivers assistance and payment as they do their part to facilitate visits.

Visitation requirements

While children have an open DCFS foster care case, rules require that visits occur at least two times a month for a minimum of two hours each for all siblings in other foster care placements. Exceptions to twice-monthly visits include:

- A court order requiring less frequent or no visitation
- Requests by the child for less frequent or no visitation (requires regular counseling)
- Risk of physical, emotional or mental harm from the visit (requires documentation)

If siblings are in residential care or are placed more than 150 miles apart, visits may be less frequent. However, visitation may not be reduced based on the unavailability of a visit supervisor or as a form of discipline.

These requirements only apply to youth in DCFS care. After adoption, visitation is still an important factor for the adoptive family to consider, but it is not mandated or reimbursed by DCFS. The adoptive parents have to determine what will work best for the children and families involved.

Foster caregivers who help children have visits with their siblings in foster care can be reimbursed

for supervising the visits and for providing transportation. A caregiver who hosts an overnight or weekend visit in their home can be reimbursed \$100 for supervising the visit. Supervising shorter visits is reimbursed at \$25 an hour for up to four hours. Reimbursement for supervising visits is capped at a maximum of \$100 per month. Driving a child to or from a visit is also eligible for reimbursement at the rate of \$55.5 cents per mile (as of July 1). The maximum reimbursement for travel each month is capped at \$50.

The child's caseworker can help foster caregivers complete the form (CFS 315) for reimbursement. Reimbursement for sibling visitation is only available for visits between siblings who are in foster care.

If a foster caregiver is not directly involved in hosting or transportation, their support for the workers and the youth is still important. Caregivers send a powerful and lasting message to the children under their care by how they protect and nurture important relationships. To fulfill that role, talk to the child's caseworker about potential emotional issues that may arise from visits. This could include unusual or escalated behavior before or after a visit, or disappointment upon returning home. Sometimes caregivers will notice a child "acting out" as the time for a visit gets closer. While sometimes difficult, it is important to realize that visits are often like an investment with payoffs that come later after relationships are more stable.

Safety certificate for all cribs by Dec. 28

As previously reported, since June 2011, the federal government prohibits the manufacture and sale of "drop-side" cribs. Cribs of the type where an entire side could be raised and lowered were determined to be hazardous.

In response, DCFS Rule 402.9 was updated to address cribs and includes a deadline of December 28, 2012. By that date, any foster family home with a crib must have a certificate that shows it meets or exceeds the federal safety standards. The manufacturer's certificate has to be available to show a licensing representative.

The website for the Consumer Product Safety Commission (www.cpsc.gov) has details on the recalls and how to determine if current child equipment is safe.

Get digital delivery

Many caregivers have decided to skip the paper and request electronic versions of the newsletter, *Illinois Families Now and Forever*.

When you move to the online version, you still receive all the same valuable information with more benefits. It comes faster, is easier to file, saves money and protects the environment.

To make the switch, send an email to vanessa.james@illinois.gov (there is a dot before "james") Be sure to include your name and mailing address. We will stop the hard copies and send you an e-mail each time a new issue is ready to read online.



Illinois Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Bulletin

The fall season is especially busy for the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council (SFCAC). In addition to the regular business, the council holds two joint meetings with other advisory councils and must prepare for the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan submissions on November 30.

Joint meeting with the youth

The adults on the foster care council had a very productive meeting with the Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) in September. This annual meeting set a platform for both councils to discuss overlapping topics. It also helped build bridges among the two groups when they moved into the “café” portion of the meeting. Then they could talk in small groups about more personal challenges and triumphs, using discussion prompts with a facilitator. This year’s meeting was agreed to be very successful by the leaders from both councils.



Young people on the Youth Advisory Board got to know their counterparts on the foster care council

Joint meeting with the Adoption Advisory Council

Each November the foster care council joins with the Illinois Adoption Council in honor of Adoption Awareness Month in Illinois. The joint meeting at the Baby Fold in Normal was held on

November 9. Issues on the agenda included updates on changes to Medicaid that could affect children in care, legislation on sibling visitation, and changes to the Advocacy Office.



Mike Ruppe, DCFS Regional Administrator for Central Region, addressed both councils in November

Implementation Plans

The council members completed a training update to get ready for the next cycle of Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan scoring. The plans are due each November 30 from all agency and DCFS foster care programs. The plans must explain how DCFS and the partner agencies will honor the foster parents’ rights and assist them in achieving their responsibilities as outlined in the Foster Parent Law.

All Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council members will devote additional time to review and score their share of plans to ensure that they are acceptable. They can potentially nominate plans that deserve special recognition for Organization/user Friendliness, Dignity and Respect for Caregivers and Foster Parent Involvement. The scoring will be done in early 2013 and award winning plans will be announced in May, during Foster parent Appreciation Month.

New rep for Southern Region



Joycestine Jones

The council welcomed its newest member at the October meeting. Joycestine Jones will be joining fellow caregiver Michael Simpson in representing the Southern Region. She and her husband Robert have been foster parents for DCFS for 14 years. They have cared for numerous children, including teens and sibling groups and those with special needs, and have adopted four children. Outside of her home life, Joycestine is a youth minister at the Centralia church where her husband is pastor.

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 January 18 in Joliet at 9 a.m.

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



Adoption Advisory Council Update

The Illinois Adoption Advisory Council met in November to tend to a full slate of business and to celebrate Adoption Awareness Month in Illinois. This meeting is planned annually as a joint meeting with the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council.

The adoption council raised many questions about recent changes to the Medicaid program that could impact children after they were adopted. Vince Champagne of the Office of Health Services said that youth assigned a medical card through the child welfare system are largely exempt from the changes but that there can be confusion among medical providers and local pharmacies. The office is tracking the results and working with the Department of Healthcare and Family Services. Caregivers can contact the office at 217-557-2689 with questions or concerns about the Medicaid card.

Kendall Marlowe of the Bureau of Operations attended the meeting to provide a policy update and news on recent changes at the agency. Marlowe also helped the councils present certificates to honor the efforts of key individuals and organizations that contributed to

positive adoption outcomes in the Central Region. Judge Kevin Fitzgerald of the 11th Circuit Court, Camp Take-a-Break and the Baby Fold received special tribute for demonstrating dedication and service to adoptive families. Judge Fitzgerald has established a court culture that is educated in the adoptive process and its importance as a means to bring permanency for children. Camp Take-a-Break is a program that provides short-term respite services for families, promoting stability. The Baby Fold is a child welfare agency in Normal that consistently finds ways to meet the needs of families that open their homes to children. The agency also sponsors a Adoption/Guardianship Preservation program that reaches a wide swath of Central Region families.



Kendall Marlowe of DCFS Operations with the Adoption Month honorees



Adoption Support Line now answers the call statewide

As of October, caregivers who have questions about adoption or guardianship have one spot they can call before, during and after finalizing. **The Adoption Support Line has expanded its capacity to serve callers statewide through one toll-free number 888-96-ADOPT (888-962-3678).**

During the move to adoption, a caregiver may be in close contact with the adoption worker. However, later when there is a question about a subsidy or a new need for services, caregivers may not know who to call. The Adoption Support Line takes care of that. All adoption-related calls can now come to a centralized location. Calls will be answered by staff who are Master's level Adoption Preservation staff who will have the training/knowledge to answer a wide range of questions. All calls will be assessed on an individual basis and documented to forward on to the assigned caseworker or supervisor if needed.

Staff can also handle the types of calls that do not require follow-up. These could be requests for numbers to field offices, replacement Medicaid cards, or making connections to educational advocacy resources.

When a caregiver calls about an intense issue that requires immediate attention or crisis intervention, he or she can immediately get referred to Adoption Preservation providers or connected to an adoption supervisor without delay.

The Adoption Support Line will have extended hours so caregivers can call outside of the regular business day. Operating hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Monday through Thursday) and 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Fridays. Calls requiring a normal response will be routed to the assigned worker and supervisor for follow-up to occur within 24 business hours.

The expanded capacity of the support line holds many benefits for caregivers and also DCFS/agency staff. Caregivers can continue to direct dial their adoption worker. However, when that isn't feasible, they can use the Adoption Support line. The field offices that take "cold calls" will also know to route those adoption-related calls to the support line. From there, the trained adoption staff can answer, direct and track a call to a satisfactory conclusion.



Illinois Celebrates Adoption Month

Each November is designated Adoption Awareness Month in Illinois. To honor the contributions of adoptive parents and those who provide support to children through adoption, Governor Pat Quinn issued a state proclamation. It was presented to the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council and Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council at their joint meeting in November.



WHEREAS, thanks to thousands of adoptive parents across the state, 17,639 children have found permanent loving homes over the last decade, including 1,697 children in the last year alone; and,

WHEREAS, all children need and deserve the love, nurturing, and sense of security that can only come from being a part of a loving, permanent family; and,

WHEREAS, adoption provides a unique joy and a special opportunity for individuals, whether or not they are already parents, married, in a civil union, single or divorced, to open their hearts and their homes for the rest of their lives to children; and,

WHEREAS, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and its nonprofit partners strive to reunify children with their birth families; but when that simply is not possible, they are equally committed to ensuring every child has the safe, loving family they deserve and need to reach their fullest potential; and,

WHEREAS, Illinois has made great strides in recent years in strengthening and improving the child welfare system; reducing the number of children in temporary foster care from 52,000 to 15,000; establishing a Bill of Rights for both birth parents and adoptive parents; and strengthening licensing requirements for adoption agencies to prevent the exploitation of birth parents, adoptive parents and children; and,

WHEREAS, Illinois has recently established an Adoption Support Line to provide professional assistance to adoptive families and enacted legislation to protect and maintain the critical ties between siblings whether destined for adoption or reunification with their birth parents; and,

WHEREAS, all of the progress in recent years would not have been possible without champions like State Representative Sara Feigenholtz, an adoptee herself, and State Representative Naomi Jakobsson, an adoptive parent, as well as child advocates including: Child Care Association of Illinois; Illinois Foster and Adoptive Parent Association; Illinois Adoption Advisory Council; Illinois Statewide Youth Advisory Board; Chicago Bar Association; Loyola ChildLaw Clinic of Loyola University; and many child welfare agencies, adoptive parent groups and individuals across the state; and,

WHEREAS, together we are committed to improving the child welfare system even further, including reducing the length of time children remain in temporary foster care, where Illinois ranks 47th in the nation according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; and,

WHEREAS, currently, there are 2,040 children awaiting adoption across the state across all ages, backgrounds and needs; and,

THEREFORE, I, Pat Quinn, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim November 2012 as **ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH** in Illinois, and do hereby encourage all Illinoisans to express their gratitude to the thousands of families across the state that have opened their homes and their hearts to children, and encourage others to consider joining them in making a life-changing difference to children.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Illinois to be affixed.



Deesse White
SECRETARY OF STATE

Done at the Capitol, in the City of Springfield,
this SEVENTH day of NOVEMBER,
in the Year of Our Lord two thousand and
TWELFTH, *and of the State of Illinois*
the one hundred and NINETY-FOUR

Pat Quinn
GOVERNOR

New DCFS structure leads to better adoption practices

As the Department realigns functions, there are changes in the works that will affect how staff will carry out activities that move children toward permanency through adoption and guardianship.

Previously the adoption casework, the subsidy review and support after adoption would be done by three different workers. Under the new arrangement, one worker will be able to provide all three functions for a family. Adoption staff will carry cases and will be able to support the child and families in the home. They will also be able to see a case through to adoption or guardianship and be able to support families after the case reaches finalization.

Larry Chasey, DCFS Assistant Chief of Staff, was at the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council meeting in September as the plan was described. The new structure is designed to improve the quality of adoptions, enhance customer service and decrease the amount of time it takes to complete the adoption process. Caseworkers will continue to be involved with families, but only adoption staff will perform the adoption related work in the new model.



Larry Chasey (left) describes the proposal for restructuring adoption practices to the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council.

Cook County Advocate

News for Chicago Metro Area Families

Advocacy Center offers warm welcome to children hurt by abuse

The Chicago Children's Advocacy Center looks like a fairy tale cottage, standing apart from the gritty urban buildings on Damen Avenue. The cotton candy colors of the outer walls, whimsical artwork and butterfly-chairs are a welcoming distraction from the harsh reality of the work done inside. All children in Chicago who are victims of or witnesses to sexual abuse can find a safe haven as they receive treatment and other services at the Children's Advocacy Center.

The decor is not the only unique part of the Center. Perhaps more surprising is the collection of individuals gathered under one roof to manage the nearly 24,000 cases of child sexual abuse reported yearly in Chicago. The Chicago Children's Advocacy Center is based on the premise that no one agency or professional can prevent or treat child abuse. The committed staff is joined by a team of health professionals from the Cook County Health and Hospitals System, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, Chicago Police Department and DCFS Child Protection. The Center pulls all the necessary resources

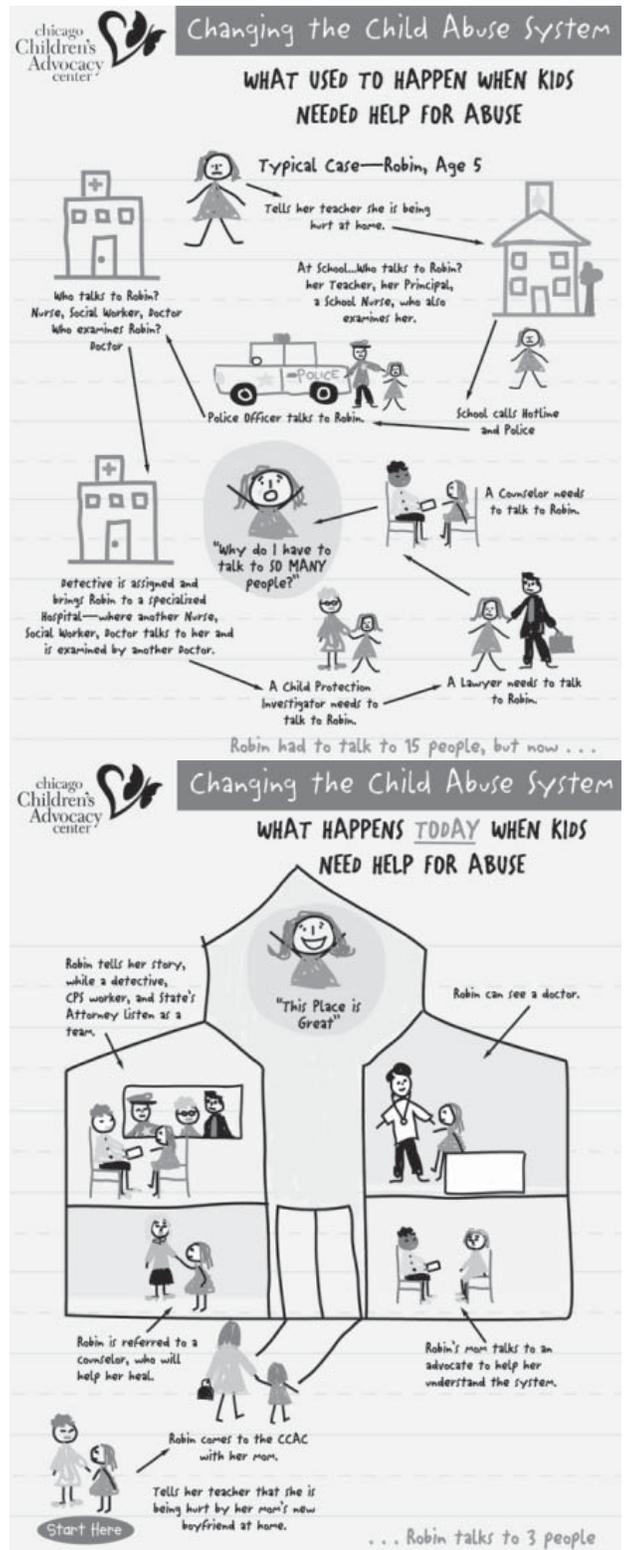
together to work as partners so families avoid shuffling between several offices. It also helps the professionals to work in a coordinated approach that can better meet the child's needs.

If a report of child sexual abuse is made to the DCFS Hotline or through the police, the Children's Advocacy Center is notified. Arrangements are made for the child and a caregiver to come to the Advocacy Center to begin investigating the charge.

From the start of the investigation, every effort is made to make the child feel comfortable. The playroom is full of toys and books to fill any wait time and help the child relax. The interview rooms have been set up with a one-way mirror so that all team members can watch the specially-trained interviewer talk with the child privately, without intruding. This also allows the child to tell what happened just one time to minimize the trauma.

If needed, the Center has medical examination rooms where physicians can use

Continued on page 9



Advocacy Center, con't.

new technology to perform noninvasive and child sensitive sexual abuse exams.

“We owe it to our children to create an environment where they can grow and develop into healthy adults. I strive every day to do my part in creating a safer world for our children,” said Char Rivette, Executive Director.

In addition to the investigative purpose, the Center provides supportive and follow up services to children and their families including counseling and other mental health services and referrals to community resources. Staff are specially trained to communicate sensitively with children.

For more information on the Child Advocacy Center, call 312-492-3700. To report suspected abuse in Illinois, call 911 or 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873).



Specially-designed exam rooms help children feel more comfortable.

Lawyers ready to lend a hand to advocate at school for kids in care

A Chicago-area legal association is on board to assist families when issues at school require intensive intervention. LAF (Legal Assistance Foundation) receives funding from DCFS to advocate for the educational needs of students who are involved with DCFS.

Caregivers play a prominent role at school, along with caseworkers and parents. They are used to handling the report cards and teacher conferences and special education concerns. Education advocacy can be done without a lawyer, but sometimes it is very helpful to have a lawyer advocate on behalf of the student's educational needs or to participate in more formalized proceedings like due process and expulsion hearings.

LAF staff are dedicated to helping families who are served by DCFS. They will advise foster parents and surrogate parents on special education law and rights, attend IEPs, informally negotiate with school districts, represent at expul-

sion hearings, and file due process cases.

Consider LAF when:

- The student is being expelled from school or when the student has received multiple suspensions.
- You think the student needs to be evaluated for eligibility for special education services, and the school has refused your requests.
- You think the student needs modifications to the IEP, but the IEP team is refusing.
- You think the student needs a different educational placement, such as a therapeutic day school, and the school is refusing.
- The school district has involved its attorney.
- The student has repeatedly been receiving poor grades and has not been making progress.
- You are generally having a hard time advocating for your student and are receiving push-back from the school district.

The Special Education and School Discipline project provides legal assistance for youth who have open foster care cases.

Caseworkers or caregivers can initiate the referral:

1. Fill out the referral form and citizenship form
2. Fax the forms to 312-612-1492 or email them to edlawreferrals@lafchicago.org
3. Referral must be made by a caseworker, foster parent or surrogate parent.

The Special Education and School Discipline Project is for youth still in DCFS care. However LAF does have a staff attorney who can handle postadoption cases and also assist youth who are aging out of the child welfare system.

Call 312-347-8392 with questions.

Alternative Schools Network offers second chance at diploma

School for some teens is an unwelcoming place that holds little incentive to get them to attend or to stay until graduation. Unfortunately, when young people drop out of high school or are forced out they may be free of the “hassle” of school, but they hamper their chances to live independently in the long-term. After they leave school they may come to feel differently, but realize their options are limited. DCFS is focusing resources to make sure those students who want to return to school can have another chance. The Alternative Schools Network reaches out to youth who have dropped out of school, been expelled, or are at risk of missing out on their diploma. The schools in the program will work with older students to get them back on track for a diploma or GED and to provide practical life skills.

In the Chicago area, the Alternative Schools Network partners with 23 neighborhood schools to provide resources for older youth who wish to restart their education. Youth who have been adopted or moved to guardianship can apply to schools in the network. However, for youth who still have open DCFS cases, the Alternative Schools Network offers the Youth Scholars, Skills and Service (YS3) program at 17 schools. This program is open to young people ages 16 to 21 who are in DCFS foster care, group home or independent living programs and are formally and officially unenrolled from the Chicago Public Schools System. The YS3 program combines in-class instruction with after-school courses in life skills, leadership, financial literacy and social/cultural development. Students can also take advantage of the flexibility that comes with self-directed, computer-assisted coursework. On top of the instruction are added layers of support

through mentoring, tutoring and counseling.

As students work their way to their diploma or GED, they can also earn money to help them move toward stable independence. The ACE program (Accelerating Creative Education) is an innovative afterschool program that rewards students for their participation. It provides counseling, tutoring or employment opportunities. Students are also encouraged to participate in clubs, cultural activities, and any other after-school activities. Their active involvement earns them money that they can use as they learn budgeting and financial planning.

Typically, the schools in the Network are small schools in neighborhood settings that operate like their own mini-communities. There are many extracurricular sports teams and clubs, along with prom and graduation activities that one expects in a traditional school. Additionally, adult mentors are available to assist youth. The mentors go beyond role models and accompany youth to court, or go to doctor’s appointments and help with schoolwork. There are also services for students who are parents.

Alternative Schools Networks have nearly 275 openings for DCFS youth. A caseworker must complete the referral for the DCFS programs; however caregivers, counselors and others can start the process. Candidates will have at least two interviews to assess whether the student will be a good fit for that school, based on skill level, credits earned and age. There is a trial period of two to four weeks. Enrollment is on a rolling basis so there is no need to wait. For more information on the program and profiles of each of the schools, go to the website www.asnchicago.org.



asnchicago.org. DCFS Education and Transition Coordinator John Kasper can also assist families in determining the right resources for older youth. Kasper can be reached at 773-371-6134.

Enrollment Criteria

Potential students must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Have been dismissed from CPS, other traditional or alternative educational program due to excessive absences/truancy.
- Have formally dropped out of an educational program
- Have been dropped due to expulsion under the Zero Tolerance Policy
- Have had a recent placement change into a new area that requires a new school to be identified
- Have insufficient credits to complete a program in a traditional educational setting by the time they are 21 years of age and are thereby in need of a program that offers accelerated credit gain.

There may be some students in DCFS who have to be excluded from enrollment in some cases.

Academy of Scholastic
Achievement
4651 W. Madison
773-921-1315

Charles Hamilton Houston
High School
9035 S. Langley
773-723-9630

Innovations High School
of Arts Integration
17 N. State
312-999-9360

Prologue Early College
High School
1135 N. Cleaver
773-935-9925

Ada S. McKinley Academy-
Lakeside Campus
2929 S. Wabash
312-949-5010

Community Youth
Development Institute
7836 S. Union
773-224-2273

Jobs For Youth
17 N. State
312-499-4778

Sullivan House Alternative
High School
773-978-8680
8163 S. South Chicago Ave.

Antonia Pantoja High
School - ASPIRA of Illinois
3121 N. Pulaski
773-252-0907

Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos
High School
2739 W. Division
773-342-8022

Joshua Johnston
1551 W. 95th Street
773-341-2260

West Town Academy
312-563-9044
534 S. Sacramento

CCA Academy
1231 S. Pulaski
773-762-2272

Howard Area Leadership
Academy
7647 N. Paulina
773-381-0366

Latino Youth High School
2001 S. California
773-648-2132

Winnie Mandela
Intergenerational High
School
773-375-0529
7847 S. Jeffrey

Olive-Harvey Middle
College
10001 S. Woodlawn
773-291-6560

Cook North foster care advisory council resumes regular schedule



While the former three Cook County regions currently are under one administrative function, the Cook North advisory council will continue to function at the area-level, for caregivers who live in the northern part of Chicago and the north suburbs.

Recently, the Cook North Foster Parent Advisory Council announced new leadership. Clemmie Banks will serve as chair, with Cathy Villa as co-chair and Kate Kinyon-Bullerman as secretary. The three took on their roles at the October meeting.



Meeting Schedule:

**Second Tuesday of the month
10 a.m.
1911 S. Indiana**
Caregivers can also participate in

the meetings by teleconference. Note the new toll-free phone line: 888-494-4032; Access code: 384-261-0151.

The advisory council is an important platform for caregivers to stay informed and to have a say in new policies and procedures that impact the foster care program.

Recent meetings included discussion of the DCFS restructuring plans, advance notice on service contracts that would not be renewed and tips on obtaining more training credit hours. In October, Latoya Champagne-Thompson from DCFS Training spoke to the council. She described a new training on youth's sexual health that will be piloted in Cook County in January. She also explained the cross-training underway for DCFS staff.

After the holiday break, the next meeting will be on January 8. Contact Clemmie Banks at 312-328-2063.

Cook North Foster Parent Support Specialists

The DCFS Foster Parent Support Specialists are experienced foster/adoptive caregivers who are able to help other caregivers as mentors, sounding boards and advocates. Where caseworkers focus on meeting the needs of the children, the support specialists are able to give direct assistance to caregivers. They are assigned to serve those homes that are licensed through the DCFS regional foster care program.

To reach a Foster Parent Support Specialist:

Edith Cruz (new number)
312-328-2064

Desiree Benbenek
773-948-6700

Clemmie Banks (Volunteer)
312-328-2063

Cook South caregivers meet at Harvey and Emerald offices



Foster Parent Advisory Council

The foster parent advisory council for Cook South meets at the 6201 S. Emerald Office in Chicago. The most recent meeting in November brought out nearly 30 caregivers. This group has spent several months in a recruiting effort, so the council members were pleased with the turnout.

The council confirmed the draft of the Implementation Plan. Yasmina Sefiane from the DCFS Education Advisors also did a training on advocacy at school. The next meeting will be in January on Tuesday, January 15th at 10 a.m. Caregivers from the DCFS foster care program as well as those whose licenses are supervised by private agencies are welcome to attend. Contact Carole Lukacek at 773-371-6119.

South Suburban Support Group

Caregivers can also benefit from the network of fellow foster parents who attend the Support Group sponsored by the Harvey Office. This group meets every other month for education and encouragement. Typically the discussion topic will be eligible for training credit hours. For more information, call Rosetta Saunders at 708-225-8004.

Meeting Schedule:

Fourth Thursday of odd numbered months

9 a. m. to Noon

DCFS Office, 15115 Dixie Highway, Harvey

Cook Central council continues after move to Maywood office



The Cook Central Foster Parent Advisory Council is now meeting at the Maywood Office, located at 1701 First Avenue. The change was due to the Division Office being closed.

At the September meeting, a representative from Family Focus did a training for foster parents on pre-school age child development. The council also distributed donated backpacks for students at the start of the year.

In October, the group had a large turnout of more than 30 caregivers. The council will continue to meet at the Maywood office since it is more accessible and has better parking.

Meeting dates:

Fourth Tuesday of the month

9:30 a.m.

DCFS Office, 1701 First Ave., Maywood

The Cook Central Foster Parent Advisory Council is open to all caregivers in the Cook Central Area. Families with the DCFS foster care program and homes served by private agencies are welcome to attend.

For more information contact the Foster Parent Support Specialists. Their new office is in Maywood, and the phone number is 708-338-6715.

Be the first to benefit from new course on youth's sexual health

Cook County caregivers have the opportunity to be the first to take a new training on the sexual health of children. So often this important topic is avoided because it can be difficult to find the right words and accurate information. This new training will make sure that caregivers, parents and staff get trained together on the factors that can affect a child's sexual health. They will learn how to talk with children about what is at stake and how to put children on a path toward long-term well being.

This training is possible through a federal grant. To design the curriculum, young people from the Youth Advisory Board, members of the Statewide Foster Care

Council and staff who work with youth offered ideas about what the course should cover.

This training will be piloted in Cook County and other parts of the state in the second half of January 2013. It will use the co-trainer model, where the instructors will be a DCFS staff trainer with a foster parent/trainer. The sessions will be open to staff and parents, who will learn together.

To register for the course, after December 7 log in to your account on the Virtual Training Center (VTC) at www.dcfstraining.org or call the Registration Line at 877-800-3393 during business hours.

Free city holiday happenings let families celebrate the season

A bit of fresh air and some free fun will keep the holidays happy for the entire family...

Lincoln Park Zoo Zoolights

The zoo will be dressed up in holiday lights, and Santa will be on hand in the Lion House for photos during the annual Zoolights Celebration. There will be crafts for kids and a spectacular musical light show on the South Lawn.

Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights: November 27-29, December 4-6, 11-13; Open every night from December 18 - January 3 (excluding December 24 and 25)
Cost: Free, refreshments and ride prices vary
Time: 5 p.m. - 9 p.m.
Lincoln Park Zoo is located off Lake Shore Drive at the Fullerton Parkway exit.

Christkindlmarket Chicago (Under The Picasso)

November 20 - December 24
Sunday - Thursday:
11 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Friday and Saturday:
11 a.m. - 9 p.m.
50 W. Washington



The Christkindlmarket Chicago is an annual holiday market featuring vendors from around the world who display hand crafted ornaments, toys and unique holiday gifts as well as traditional German foods, sweets and beverages. The market is rich in cultural tradition and includes special events, performers and activities.

Museum visits make learning fun (free) during holiday break

Many of Chicago's museums offer a weekly free day. However, in the winter months, those discounts often come more frequently. Take advantage of the learning and fun, while you save money. This winter, act like a tourist and enjoy all the fun that is so close to home.

Adler Planetarium

1300 S. Lake Shore Drive Chicago
312-922-STAR (7827)
Free: Jan 8-9, 14-17, 22-23, 28-31, Feb. 5-6, 11-14, 19-20, 25-28

Art Institute of Chicago

111 S. Michigan Avenue
312-443-3600 www.artic.edu/aic
Free: Jan 2-Feb 8 and then 1st and 2nd Wednesdays. Children under 14 always free.

Chicago Children's Museum on Navy Pier

700 E. Grand Avenue
312-527-1000 www.chicagochildrensmuseum.org
Free: Thursdays 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.
1st Sunday Each Month for ages 15 and under

Chicago Field Museum

1400 S. Lake Shore Drive
312-922-9410 www.fieldmuseum.org
Free: Dec. 2,3, 6, 7, 11, 14, 16 2nd Mondays 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Chicago History Museum

1601 N. Clark Street
312-642-4600 www.chicagohistory.org
Free: Jan. 21, Feb. 4-28.

DuSable Museum of African American History

740 E. 56th Place
773-947-0600 www.dusablemuseum.org
Free: Sundays

Museum of Contemporary Art

220 E. Chicago Avenue
312-280-2660 www.mcachicago.org
Free: Tuesdays children under 12 always free

Museum of Science and Industry

57th Street and Lake Shore Drive
773-684-1414 www.msi-chicago.org
Free: Jan. 7-11, 14-18, 21-25, 28-31, Feb. 6, 13, 20, 27

Notebaert Nature Museum

2430 N. Cannon Drive
773-755-5100 www.chias.org
Free: Thursdays for Illinois residents

Oriental Museum

1155 East 58th Street
773-702-9514
Admission is Free. Suggested Donation \$7.00 for adults, \$4.00 for children under 12

Shedd Aquarium

1200 S. Lake Shore Drive
312-939-2438 www.sheddaquarium.org
On Community Discount Days, admission to the aquarium's original galleries is free for Chicago residents. Check website for 2013 dates.

Cook Region Training

The DCFS Office of Training has scheduled sessions of in-service training modules and other courses in locations across the region. To get specific dates and locations, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center (VTC) anytime at **www.DCFStraining.org**. Click on any of the links under Training Schedule to access course descriptions, in-service training and Educational Advocacy Training or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during business hours.

The Virtual Training Center (VTC) is your tool to:

- See training news and general information
- Check and register for available trainings
- Take on-line courses
- Download training materials and resources
- View/Print your training transcript

As we move into the digital age and aim to use fewer printed resources, DCFS Training has made many PRIDE materials easily available on the home page of the Virtual Training Center at www.dcfstraining.org. Anyone may print the materials or download them onto almost any electronic device and bring their device to training class. Trainees who have no digital access should speak with their trainers when they arrive in class, so we can accommodate everyone.

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 in 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 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.

...Your adoption or guardianship is final but you have questions about the subsidy?

Call the subsidy worker assigned to the case or the Adoption Support Line at 888-96-ADOPT so you can be connected to the right individual for help.

...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 find a phone number for a case-worker?

Call the main switchboard in Chicago at 312-814-6800 or the State of Illinois Operator at 312-793-3500.

...You are having family problems with your adopted child?

Contact the Adoption/Subsidized Guardianship Preservation Program that serves your area. Call the Adoption Support Line at 888-96-ADOPT.

...You are having a hard time getting services for your child at school?

Most private agencies have an Education Liaison, and each DCFS region has Education Advisors who can help. Call your agency or nearest DCFS office to be connected to the right educational resource for your area.

...You have questions about programs for youth approaching adulthood?

Contact the Transition Manager that serves your area, by calling the nearest DCFS regional office. The Transition Managers can advise on programs such as life skills training, preparation for higher education and employment assistance. Details on these programs can also be found at the Get Goal'd website www.youthin-care.illinois.gov.

...You have an idea for an article in the newsletter?

Each region has reporters to help gather local news. The names and contact information are listed on the back page of each edition. You can contact the Editor, Vanessa James, at 312-814-6800 or send an e-mail message to vanessa.james@illinois.gov.

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



Vasha (7686)

Vasha [7686] Vasha, 13, is a considerate child who likes helping others. She enjoys attending church, participating in bible study, and visiting with her relatives. She also enjoys singing, dancing, and listening to music. She struggles with self-control at times, but usually responds well when supervised by consistent, responsible adults.

should remain patient as he adjusts to his new, permanent family. You can provide the kind of structure and routine that will put him at ease. You can also work with professionals who can help him manage his emotions. Chris would like to live in a rural area, and would like to join a family that has pets. Chris should be the youngest child in his adoptive home.

unteers to cook or do household chores. Latrice's teacher says she is an independent learner who gets along well with other students. Her foster parent says she is a good child who appreciates any opportunity to play basketball with her friends.



Chris (8008)

Vasha's teacher says she is a sweet girl who behaves well in school and tries hard to please others. Vasha's foster parent says she is capable of following rules and behaving appropriately in the home.

Jesse [7820] Jesse, 12, is an active, energetic child who likes to keep himself busy. He enjoys being out and about in the community, whether he is walking the family dog, riding his bike, playing softball, or eating at a restaurant. Jesse sometimes struggles to relate honestly to his peers, but he is trying hard to improve in this area. In general, he is a fun kid who is also smart, cooperative, and easy to talk to. Jesse's worker says he is a sweet child who loves spending time outdoors. He does well in school, and is eager to converse on any number of subjects.

The forever family for Latrice can provide her a loving home. You can also help her develop strong communication skills so she can express her feelings appropriately. Latrice should be encouraged to enjoy her childhood without taking on too many adult responsibilities. She would also benefit from ongoing visits with her siblings.



Jesse (7820)

The right parents for Vasha would be loving and supportive, while also providing clear expectations and regular supervision. Once Vasha is adopted, you can give her plenty of time to adjust to your home. You can also work closely with child welfare professionals to help meet Vasha's medical and emotional needs, and to encourage continued positive behavior. The ideal family would live in the St. Louis area, and would help Vasha maintain relationships with her siblings and other members of her birth family.

Potential parents to Jesse would be able to establish a stable, structured home environment for him. You can monitor his behavior, and redirect him in a calm and patient manner should he act out. The ideal family would live in a rural community, would enjoy spending time outdoors, and would not have children who are younger than Jesse.

Noah [7950] This young man is eager to form strong relationships with his peers. Noah, age 12, wants to be liked and accepted by others, but he sometimes struggles with his behavior. That said, he can also be loving and outgoing. Noah's hobbies include playing basketball and immersing himself in video games. He also enjoys visiting with his grandparents on a regular basis. Noah's worker says he can be likable and affectionate.



Latrice (7840)

Chris [8008] Chris, age 11, is a quiet, polite child who generally cooperates with others. He can be shy at first, but usually warms up to people once he gets to know them. Chris sometimes struggles to manage his emotions, but he has improved significantly in this area. In his spare time, he enjoys watching spots and taking care of animals. Chris' worker says he is a friendly child who is easy to get along with. He does well when interacting with other kids in his community.

Latrice [7840] Latrice, 15, is an outgoing child who enjoys playing sports and spending time with her friends. She also has a creative side, and can often be found writing poetry or practicing the guitar. Latrice has trouble following rules at times, but she is also helpful around the house and often vol-

The right family for Noah would welcome him into your home, and be patient with him as he adjusts to his new, permanent family. You can work with professionals who can help you understand his emotional needs, and who can provide guidance on how to redirect his behavior in an effective, appropriate manner. You can also help Noah maintain a relationship with his grandparents, including regular visits. Noah should be the only child in his adoptive home or, if this is not possible, the youngest child in his adoptive home.



Noah (7950)

The forever family for Chris



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