

Foster mom to teens receives Jefferson Award

Mable Flowers, from the DCFS Cook Central region, has dedicated her life to helping children experience life as part of a loving family. In a ceremony this spring, Mrs. Flowers was honored as one of only eight selected for the 2003 Jefferson Award for Public Service in the Chicago area. More than 50 children have come to know first hand what the Jefferson Award Committee discovered. Mable Flowers is dedicated to public service and the betterment of society. She embodies those same values of Thomas Jefferson who inspired the award.

It was in the 1960s that a fellow churchgoer approached Mrs. Flowers about caring for foster children. Until that moment she had never considered it, but the idea touched her heart. She and her husband Robert began taking care of children and became licensed foster parents in 1972. After his death in 1979, Mrs. Flowers continued, parenting more than 35 children on her own. She now has two grown daughters who help with the youth that come to her home. The daughters live in separate apartments above and below her, keeping everyone close to the home fires in their West Side residence.

Mrs. Flowers' experience with children has run the gamut from children as young as two, all the way up to three teen mothers and their babies. Most recently, she has been providing stability for teenaged boys. Currently, there are four boys in her home who enjoy her and each other. This did not happen by accident. The licensing and support staff of Cook Central region recognize that Mrs. Flowers makes a point of taking classes to understand the needs of teens as well as the emotional and behavioral challenges that come with the territory. She also makes sure to listen to their concerns, along with taking care of their basic needs.

"I wouldn't do it if I didn't love children. I just like being around children. My mother passed when I was three and I would ask, 'Lord, why don't I have a mother?'" Mrs. Flowers gave as one of the reasons she keeps foster parenting.



Foster parent Mable Flowers

Her proudest moment is realizing that no child has ever wanted to leave her home. Many youth still call to check on her and still call her grandma. Just recently one of her "boys" (now 22) came home from college in Aurora and surprised her while she was setting out flowers in the garden. His visit was just what she needed to keep her day bright. Throughout the neighborhood, she has become legendary as a grandma to many. Even kids who are insensitive about foster care don't dare question her role or the children she claims as family.

"We don't even use the words 'foster care' in our house," said Mrs. Flowers. "These are *my* grandkids and they came to live with me by one way or another." This is the only explanation she offers to outsiders.

Together she and her grandchildren have seen a lot. Decades ago, they rode the first DCFS bus to Springfield for the State Fair. They have seen countless shifts in DCFS structure and policy. They have weathered changes in the neighborhood and new threats that young people face in society. Throughout it all, Mable Flowers was always "grandma" to children who needed her and hopes to continue as long as they need her help.

Cook North region provides foster parent training tailored to needs

As part of the region's Implementation Plan, the Cook North Region continues to meet foster parents' needs for training. Assessing the need for training and taking action is included in the Foster Parent Law as a formal responsibility for the agency. Annually, when the region reviews its implementation plan, foster parents identify additional trainings that they would like to have.

To meet the needs, the region has developed three foster parent training teams, one at each of the regional offices. Each team works collaboratively to develop a training schedule of topics of interest as well as including trainings outlined in our implementation plan.

The training team locations and contact people are:

8100 McCormick Blvd in Skokie

contact person is Peggy Bosell at 847-745-3012

2500 W. Bradley Pl. in Chicago

contact person is Carolyn Griggs at 773-866-5706

1911 S. Indiana in Chicago

contact person is Dorothy Jarrett at 312-328-2309

We welcome your participation in the trainings and are very excited about our current plans. Future trainings include:

- Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest
- Changes in Rule 402
- Adoption and Post Adoption Services
- Teamwork
- Domestic Violence Issues with Adults and Teens
- Stress Management
- Surviving the Holidays
- Several other topics the teams have identified

To find out more about the trainings or to become involved on a local team, please contact Peggy, Carolyn or Dorothy at the numbers listed above.

Cook South Support Group meets needs and adds foster parents



One of the goals of the Cook South's Foster Parent Support Group was to increase the awareness of available

community and support resources for our foster and adoptive parents. Some of the members expressed an interest in finding out about summer activities for their children and DCFS responded to that request.

The workshop "Programs for the Summer" was designed to acquaint foster and adoptive parents with activities for the summer that could give their children the opportunity for personal, cultural, and academic growth. The presenters were from the Chicago Park District, the Chicago Public Library, the Chicago Public Schools, Mayor Daley's Gallery 37, Pathways to Development, and the

Beverly Arts Center. Each presenter gave an overview of the programs that would be offered this summer as well as programs that our children could take advantage of during the school year. Many of the programs are free.

There were programs for all ages: summer camp, reading programs, summer school, and art and music programs. There were even volunteer opportunities for high school students who needed community involvement hours. For more information on the Support Group, families can contact Elise Worrell at 773-371-6005.

The Cook South Support group continues to grow, with meetings reaching over fifty foster parents in attendance. We encourage all of our foster parents to get involved in this group, which meets the second Tuesday of each month at 10:00 a.m. at the DCFS office at 6301 S. Emerald. Future topics include Stress Management and Educational Advocacy.

Cook County students can get a jump-start on learning

Children acquire skills throughout the school year, but they can lose ground if learning stops during the summer break. Fortunately, learning never has to stop. Even if they took time off, it's not too late to begin preparing to learn. Children who read throughout the summer *gain* skills, can start the new school year with a better understanding of language and the world around them, and discover the joy of reading. The more they *like* to read, the more they *will* read.

It's not hard to help your children keep their interest in reading and learning. Children learn through a variety of activities, and almost everything we do presents an opportunity to read. When you're eating breakfast, read the cereal box; if you're in a restaurant, read the menu. Read the newspaper with your children and discuss what's happening in the world.

Introduce them to new experiences, encourage them to pursue their own interests and combine reading and writing with their new adventures. Take advantage of local resources and everyday activities by reading with your children and helping them learn. For example:

- Check out the library. Take your children to the library regularly. See if your library has a summer club, story hours, or other reading events.
- Visit parks, zoos, and nature centers. Visit the library afterward to get books on favorite animals and field guides to help identify wildlife in your area.
- Go to museums, science centers, and historical sites. Many have extended summer hours, special exhibitions, and hands-on activities for children.
- Check out local arts. Summer events often include summer stock theater, puppet shows, out-door concerts, and craft fairs.
- Read up on your trip. If you are traveling, involve your children in the planning. Read about the trip together and highlight your route on a map.
- Encourage pen pals. If your children will be separated from good friends for the summer, suggest that they write to each other. If they have access to e-mail, have them write online.
- Share the fun of reading. Encourage your children to swap books with their friends. Host a book party and invite the guests to come dressed as their favorite character.

Adapted from: Reading Is Fundamental
toll free: 1-877-rif-read or www.rif.org

If you have concerns regarding your child's progress in reading, contact the appropriate Education Advisor in the region.

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Cook County Training Calendar

FosterPRIDE In-Service Training

All licensed foster parents and adoptive parents are welcome to attend any or all of the PRIDE In-Service Trainings to enhance their skills and meet yearly training requirements.

Module 1 - *The Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children* (Four 3-hour sessions = 12 training hours)

Module 2 - *Using Discipline to Protect and Nurture* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hrs.)

Module 3 - *Addressing Developmental Issues Related to Sexuality* (One 3-hour session = 3 training hours)

Module 4 - *Responding to the Signs and Symptoms of Sexual Abuse* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 5 - *Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 6 - *Working as a Professional Team Member* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hrs.)

Module 7 - *Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 8 - *Promoting Permanency Outcomes* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 9 - *Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 10 - *Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children & Families* (Five 3-hour sessions = 15 training hours)

COOK SOUTH

	Module
African American Images	
September 6 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	6
& 13 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	
September 9, 11 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	2
& 16 (Tues/Thurs)	
September 20 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	9
& 27 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	
September 23, 25 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	4
& 30 (Tues/Thurs)	
DCFS Harvey	
August 25 6:30-9:30 p.m.	7
& 27 (Mon/Wed)	

Other In-Service Trainings

Transcultural Parenting

DCFS South Area Office

August 2, 9 & 16 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

COOK CENTRAL

	Module
Circle Family Care	
August 18, 20 6:30-9:30 p.m.	2
& 25 (Mon/Wed)	

COOK NORTH

	Module
Irish Center	
September 9, 11, 16 6:30-9:30 p.m.	1
& 18 (Tues/Thurs)	
August 2 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	4
& 9 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	

Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/ Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

COOK SOUTH

African American Images	
Sept. 24 & 26 (Wed/Fri) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	
DCFS South Area Office	
August 27 & Sept. 3 (Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.	
September 20 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	
DCFS Harvey Area Office	
August 23 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	
LSSI	
September 8 & 10 (Mon/Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.	
Youth Empire	
Sept. 18 & 23 (Thurs/Tues) 6:30-9:30 p.m.	

COOK CENTRAL

Association House (SPANISH)	
September 20 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	
Sequin Services	
September 8 & 10 (Mon/Wed) 5:30-8:30 p.m.	
Lutheran Child & Family Services	
August 14 & 19 (Thurs/Tues) 6:30-9:30 p.m.	

COOK NORTH

Irish Center	
August 21 & 26 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m.	
September 20 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	
Operation ABLE	
Sept. 18 & 23 (Tues/Thurs) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	

All classes are coordinated by
Harold Washington College in Chicago.
Call 312-553-5821 or -3031 to register.

*The purpose of life is to discover your gift,
The meaning of life is giving your gift away.*

~ David Biscott
Psychiatrist and Writer