

# Illinois Families Now and Forever

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship®

## Plans highlight dignity and respect for caregivers

Each year the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council receives, reviews and scores the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans for every agency and DCFS region's foster care program. Council members spend many hours of volunteer time poring over plans. They follow a tool developed to discern how the foster care programs measure up against the rights and responsibilities outlined in the Law. Of the more than 70 plans submitted, there are a very few that stand out as exceptional. Council members can go beyond the standard scoring to nominate a plan for special recognition in one of three categories: Dignity and Respect; Organization/User Friendliness; and Foster Parent Involvement.

This year three agencies submitted outstanding plans, all in the category of Dignity and Respect. In May, during Foster Parent Appreciation Month, Director Erwin McEwen joined the Council in honoring:

- [Catholic Charities of Rockford](#)
- [Little City Foundation](#)
- [Our Children's Homestead](#)

Representatives from the three agencies came to the council meeting to receive their well-deserved recognition. The plan submitted by Catholic Charities stood out for the involvement of



**Catholic Charities Rockford Diocese receives a 2009 Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan Award for Dignity and Respect**  
Pictured: Mike Benjamin, foster parents Ruth Ann Nelson and Gloria Crite, Director McEwen, Stephanie Jones and Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Council Chair Robyn Harvey.

foster parents in developing training specific to their needs. The agency considers caregivers a part of the team and works one-on-one with them. At Little City Foundation, compassion is a core value that extends to the relationship with caregivers. They make a point to listen to foster parents so they can understand how to help them meet the children's unique needs. Our Children's Homestead demonstrated responsiveness to caregivers with a 24-hour return-call policy for all staff. The agency also surveys caregivers to gauge satisfaction and to plan improvements.

*Continued on page 2*

### Award Criteria

#### **Dignity and Respect**

Plans had strong examples of the program's consideration of foster caregivers as professional team members, responsiveness to caregivers, and innovative means of demonstrating dignity and respect for caregivers.

#### **Organization/User Friendliness**

Plans were easier for caregivers to read and use than all or most plans. The text was non-technical, extremely caregiver-friendly and useful.

#### **Agencies and DCFS Foster Parent Involvement**

Plans demonstrated extraordinary means of involving caregivers in the plan's development, implementation and accessibility.



## From the DCFS Director

*Erwin McEwen*

It may seem like summer is just getting started, but it is not too soon to think about returning to school. Particularly for the children we care for, the school experience so often leans toward the extremes. One day it may feel like a bad dream that won't end. On the next day it could be the lifeline that just might pull a child toward a brighter future.

With both my own children now in middle school, I feel like time is running out and the stakes are getting higher. You may feel that pressure to an even greater degree, since we know that the kids we are all responsible for often have to make up for ground lost while they are "in the system."

That reality means that the Department has to change how we look at education to shift the odds in favor of our children. For example, we implemented the SchoolMinder case assignment process in July 2006. Two years later, the average distance of a child's foster home placement from their family home went from nearly 10 miles to 6.4 in Cook County and from 22 to 16 miles outside of Cook. This focus on keeping children in their own school catchment area provides educational continuity and helps protect their emotional stability.

With sound casework practices, appropriate services, and support from you, school can become a sanctuary. The education that our children receive can open up new paths to lead them past "potential" and on to real success. Thank you in advance for all that I know you will do to support your students when school starts.

## Implementation Plans, con't.



*Director McEwen with Theresa Moran and Emily Rawsky of Little City Foundation and Chair Robyn Harvey*



*Bob Geniesse of Our Children's Homestead, Chair Robyn Harvey, Professional Foster Parents Charlotte Crawford and Eddie McFarland with Director McEwen.*

To rise to the top for one of these awards, the plans had to be foster-parent focused. This fall, agencies and DCFS regions will be drafting new Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans, due November 30. Caregivers can and should contribute to the plan. In fact, when an agency submits its plan it must document that caregivers did participate.

Many foster care programs will hold meetings throughout the fall to prepare their final submission. Additionally, copies of the current year's plan are to be made available to the caregivers. Each agency and DCFS regional foster care program has designated a Foster Parent Law Liaison, who has more details on how to be involved.

# Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Update

## Elections and membership changes

At the May meeting, the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council held elections for the new fiscal year. Robyn Harvey was voted to remain as chair for another year. Angela Barber joins her as vice chair.



**Robyn Harvey**



**Angela Barber**

Joining the council as new members at the May meeting were Amy Garcia and Andrew DeLao. Garcia is a

foster parent from the Northern Region. She and her husband have been licensed for a year and have been doing reunification foster care so far.

Andrew DeLao represents the Southern Region on the council. He and his wife Rae have been involved in foster care for the past seven years. In addition to their three children by birth, they have made a home for approximately



**Amy Garcia**



**Andrew DeLao**

20 other children. DeLao recently moved to Salem from Los Angeles, where he was a police officer.

With the close of the state fiscal year in June, the council had to bid farewell to Ronald Davis after his first term on the council. Davis, a foster and adoptive parent from Belleville represented the Southern Region.



## Deputy Director Fitzgerald addresses council

Daniel Fitzgerald, Deputy Director, Service Intervention, came to the Council's May meeting to update members on programs that the division oversees, including post-adoption services, education and transition services for youth, and health services, among others. One notable project is the electronic "health passport" that is due to be launched by the end of 2009. It will collect and link vital information about immunizations and other medical data in one reliable, comprehensive record. Staff from the Office of Health Services will be at the next council meeting to provide more specifics on what foster parent caregivers can expect from the new application.



**Deputy Director Daniel Fitzgerald (c) hears from Regional Administrator Debbie Palmer-Thomas and council member Patty Welander.**

*The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council was formally established by state statute in 1995. Membership consists of caregivers, agency representatives and other experts in child welfare, who are appointed by the DCFS Director. The positions held by caregivers are designated among the DCFS regions.*

*The council holds open meetings at least 6 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 Friday, September 18 beginning at 9 a.m. in Peoria.**

**Call the Office of Foster Parent Support Services at 217-524-2422 for details.**

## Foster Parent Reimbursement helps fix what gets broken

The Foster Parent Reimbursement program is similar to insurance, in that you hope you never have to use it, but you are glad it is there when you need it. While it is not insurance, if a foster child living with you breaks something, or hurts someone in, or outside of your home, then DCFS can pay a portion of the repair or replacement cost when your own insurance doesn't fully cover it.

"The Department knows that things can sometimes happen, and foster and relative caregivers need someplace to turn when they are picking up the pieces, sometimes literally," said program coordinator Bruce Hirsch.

There can be reimbursement if the claim can meet certain guidelines. For example, the program can only consider reimbursement based on the actual cash value. That requires documentation, such as proof of purchase. Caregivers also should know that there is a \$50 deductible, and that they must file within 12 months of the incident.

To file a claim with the DCFS program, the caregiver should notify the caseworker, who will contact the program coordinator. The office will mail a claim form for the caregiver to complete and return with the caseworker's signature and documentation. Each claim is screened and goes to a review committee for a decision. The coordinator will send the caregiver notice of the decision in writing. For more information, contact Bruce Hirsch at DCFS in Chicago at 312-793-8896.

## Homeward Bound

*when return home is the goal*

In 2004 DCFS developed the Partnering with Parents Initiative as a fresh approach that engages the parents of the children it serves. From that beginning sprang 10 regional Parent Councils that give parents who are involved in the child welfare system a platform to advocate, inform and advise. Recently the councils held two events to demonstrate the progress made to contribute to more parent-friendly and effective child welfare practices.

On June 10, parents from councils in Rockford, Aurora, Peoria, Danville, Springfield, Salem, and East St. Louis convened for the second annual Downstate Partnering with Parents Summit. Last year the parents compiled a list of the top ten issues they wanted to address with DCFS. Then each council selected two or three items that they would work on. At this summit they came back to present the results of their efforts. For example, in Peoria, parents developed a tip sheet to help parents help their children be successful in school. This tool will be shared among other parents with open cases. The Aurora council is advising DCFS on how to administer drug testing more effectively and more timely so that problems can be caught and addressed, rather than missed. The councils shared these ideas and more with DCFS Director Erwin McEwen and Deputy Director Arthur Bishop. They came to Springfield to listen and show their support, as well as to explain their vision for this work.

Parents took center stage again on June 26 in Chicago at the third annual Cook County Birth Parent Councils Institute Day. At this



**Parents performed a skit to illustrate the parent's perspective when a child is removed from home. Pictured: Jacqueline Lenoir (mom), Gregory Cox (caseworker) and Cynthia Hoyle (child).**

event the councils presented a full slate of activities around the theme "Reunification: Avoiding Burnout While Waiting." The event was open to parents and staff and included a resource fair. DCFS Acting Deputy Director Larry Small helped to open the day by reaffirming the Department's commitment to supporting parents as they work hard to preserve a positive relationship with their children. Parents also had an opportunity to hear from the Honorable Judge Mary Mikva of the Cook County Juvenile Court. Judge Mikva spoke about how to manage the court process. From there, parents had a choice of workshops covering separation trauma, the Strengthening Families program, and overviews of the Juvenile Court and DCFS systems. After lunch, DCFS Director Erwin McEwen explained his vision and his support for this important work.

Caregivers who may know of a parent with an interest in joining one of the councils can contact the Office of Foster Parent Support Services at 217-524-2422.

## Eligible older students may purchase a computer with ETV Program

A computer can be a very valuable asset for a college student. Now, DCFS is expanding the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program to allow eligible youth to purchase a Department-provided Hewlett-Packard computer package using available ETV funds. The computer packages consist of a desktop computer, monitor, keyboard, mouse, printer, software, antivirus software, and limited technical support.

The ETV provides up to \$5,000 annually to assist with payment of school-related expenses, such as tuition, books/supplies, required uniforms and transportation. With the enhancement to the program, a student could use a remaining portion of the annual allocation to purchase a computer, after other school expenses have been paid.

In order for youth to be eligible to purchase a Department-provided Hewlett-Packard computer package using a portion of their ETV annual allocation, they must first meet the following requirements:

### ETV Program Requirements

- Youth must be in foster care, or aged out of care at 18 years of age or older; or
- Youth must have been placed in either subsidized guardianship or adoption at 16 years of age or older; and
- Youth must be enrolled and attending an accredited post secondary college, university or vocational school program listed at [www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation](http://www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation) with active status;

- Youth enrolled and attending a post-secondary program and making satisfactory academic progress on the date they turn 21 years remain eligible for funding until age 23;
- Youth must file a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) every academic year and complete the school financial aid package.

### Education Program Requirements

Youth must have completed a semester of post secondary college, university or vocational school with a minimum of a “C” grade point average.

- If enrolled in the Youth in College/Vocational Program or Department of Children and Family Services Scholarship Program, youth must be in compliance with all program requirements.
- Youth must submit documentation that tuition, books and mandatory fees have been paid.

Caseworkers can provide students and caregivers with the ETV application. Questions about the Education and Transition Voucher Program can be directed to Pat Palmer of the DCFS Division of Education and Transition Services at 630-801-3453.

## Movin’ on up *for youth transitioning to adulthood*

Many DCFS youth are in college without the support of home that their fellow classmates enjoy. DCFS coordinates the Care Package Program for freshmen by linking them to a volunteer who will offer encouragement by mailing care packages once a semester. Some volunteers may also decide to establish a mentoring relationship with the student. Volunteers can decide their level of involvement.

Volunteers could:

- Send a box of goodies once a semester such as snacks, food staples, cookies, shampoo and hygiene products, stationery and art supplies or coupons for restaurants.
- Send a package for special events such as that student’s birthday, holidays or finals week.
- Send printed items such as books, articles or magazines.

The youth enrolled in the program are participating in the DCFS Youth in College/Vocational Training Program or are DCFS Scholarship recipients with open cases. They attend schools across the state and outside of Illinois. The students will note their preferences so volunteers will not have to guess what they might need or like. Students must also commit to sending a thank-you for each package they receive.

Those interested in volunteering can contact Alisa Thomas of the DCFS Division of Service Intervention at 312-814-8258 or [alisa.thomas@illinois.gov](mailto:alisa.thomas@illinois.gov).

## Head back to school healthy with required exams

As students head back to school with fresh pencils and notebooks, they also need to go in good health with up-to-date dental and medical exams. When caregivers make arrangements for routine visits, be sure to bring home a copy of the exam forms to turn in to the school. The state of Illinois requires school children to have a current physical (within the past year) and to be current with immunizations when they are:

- entering an Illinois school for the first time at any age
- starting kindergarten
- entering the sixth grade
- entering the ninth grade

A lead screening is required for young children entering daycare, preschool and kindergarten. Children entering kindergarten or first grade also must be immunized against chicken pox/varicella. In areas of high incidences of tuberculosis (TB) a TB skin test is required as part of the physical exam. Talk with the child's doctor to see if that is required in your locale.

The physical examination form that schools and the Illinois Department of Public Health require for documentation is the "Certificate of Child

Health Examination" form. Most physicians and local health departments use this standardized form. Caregivers can also request a blank form from the child's caseworker (form number CFS 600) or download it from the DCFS Web site at <http://www.state.il.us/DCFS/docs/cfs600.pdf>. Original copies of the Certificate of Child Health Examination, completed and signed by the physician, should be given to the school nurse where the child is enrolled. Don't forget to give a copy to the child's caseworker, and keep a copy for your own records.

According to state law, children who do not have a current physical or shots by October 15 will not be allowed to attend school until the record is updated.

### Eye exams for Kindergarten

Along with a physical, all students entering kindergarten (or starting an Illinois school for the first time) must also have an eye exam performed by a licensed optometrist or a medical doctor who performs eye examinations. This required examination is beyond the screenings that are often part of a regular physical or are sometimes provided at the school. The doctor must sign the Eye Exam Report that caregivers will submit



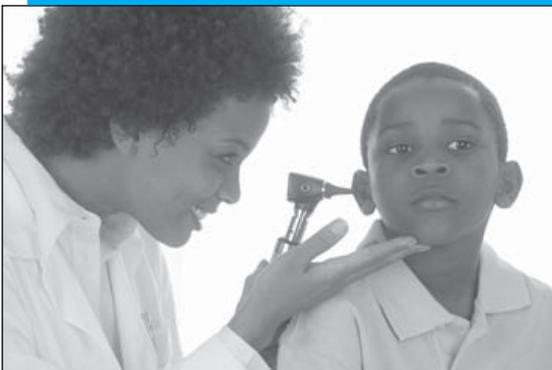
to the school. The form should be turned in to the school by October 15. Students without this exam will not be excluded from school, but report cards could be withheld.

Youth in DCFS care can use the state-provided medical card as payment for the eye exam. To locate a provider, call the Medicaid Health Benefits Hotline at 800-226-0768.

### Dental Requirements

Additionally, state law requires that Illinois children in Kindergarten, second and sixth grades have dental examinations by a licensed dentist. This includes all students attending public, private or parochial schools. Caregivers must present proof of examination before May 15 of the current school year. If not, the school may hold second and sixth grade report cards until receiving proof that the exam took place or will happen within 60 days of May 15. Each school must give notice of the requirement to the parents or guardians at least 60 days before May 15 each school year.

Call the DCFS Office of Health Policy at 217-557-2689 with questions.



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## Remember these 12 tips to be ready for a great school year

- B** Before school begins, set (and stick to) an after school routine. This routine should include completing homework and other activities designed to ease the morning rush (e.g., packing lunches and backpacks, picking out clothes for the next day)
- A** Attend all conferences, registration meetings, and school functions. Your attendance at these events helps you get to know the other adults in your student's life. This will also help you stay informed of upcoming events at your student's school.
- C** Check backpacks and folders each night. Look for any school notices, papers requiring signatures, and other updates. You can also help your student keep a tidy backpack by removing (or asking her to remove) unnecessary items.
- K** Keep accurate records of your communication with the school. It helps to keep a notebook containing meeting dates and people with whom you've spoken. When concerns come up, remember - if it isn't documented in writing, it didn't happen.
- T** Take time to talk to your student's teacher when things are going well. You will have established a positive home-school relationship, which will help you feel more comfortable talking to the teacher if concerns arise.
- O** Observe your student to see how he or she learns best. Your thoughts and comments are critical in designing your student's school environment.
- S** Share information about your student's background only when it is relevant to her education, emotional well-being and/or safety.
- C** Consult your caseworker, who can link you to other educational assistance whenever questions arise.
- H** Homework should have a 1) set spot, 2) set time and 3) set purpose. When the expectations for homework are clear, everyone can work together to get it done.
- O** (Turn) Off the television and other distractions during homework time.
- O** Ongoing encouragement helps students stay motivated to succeed. Catch students being "good" whenever possible. You might say something like, "Wow, I'm really impressed with how you've been bringing your homework home each night. Keep up the good work!"
- L** Learn to laugh at and about school! Whatever it takes, help your student enjoy his time at school. Children are in school too many hours each day to be miserable. It is our job to make learning fun.



## Subsidy questions?

Call the subsidy worker in your area

- **Cook County**  
Pamela Mills  
312-808-5250, ext. 339
- **Joliet**  
Norma Napper  
815-730-4086
- **Aurora**  
Deirdra Davis  
630-844-8966
- **Rockford**  
Jennifer Zaluckyj  
815-967-3763
- **Peoria**  
Deborah Hawkins  
309-671-7944
- **Springfield**  
Gail Mayer  
217-557-2668
- **Urbana**  
Elois Drake  
217-278-5417
- **East St. Louis**  
Carol Teague-Douglas  
618-583-2189
- **Mt. Vernon**  
Wendy Manna  
618-244-8424

## Illinois Adoption Advisory Council Update

### Council membership changes

The end of the state's fiscal year brought the close of terms to several council members. Susanne Loss, an adoptive parent from Southern Region; Gina Samuels of the University of Chicago; and Dave Matthews of Matthews and Associates, an Adoption Preservation Services provider in Southern region, saw their terms expire. At the June meeting, Bob Bloom of Jewish Child and Family Services announced his retirement and departure from the council.



*Council co-chairs Jim Jones and Elizabeth Richmond thank Dave Matthews (c) for his service on the council.*

The recruitment committee has identified candidates to fill some vacancies. However, there are two open positions for persons who were themselves adopted. Contact the Office of Foster Parent Support for details.

### National Adoption Month

The council has a committee to coordinate events to celebrate November as National Adoption Month. The committee is developing a theme and a proposal to mark the month with an event that would generate awareness across the state. All caregivers are invited to submit news of local plans and to help plan other events. Caregivers can reach the council at the phone number below.

**The next meeting of the IL Adoption Advisory Council will be on Friday, August 7 at 10 a.m. in Bloomington. Call the Office of Foster Parent Support Services at 217-524-2422 for details.**

## New federal KinGAP provides subsidies for licensed relatives



Illinois led the nation in 1997 with a demonstration project for subsidized guardianship and adoption. The benefits that flowed from these arrangements for Illinois families and those in 12 other states, have led to a new federal law called the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program. This new program is similar to the current subsidized guardianship offering in terms of the support it provides families. However, under

the new program, relative homes must be licensed before the child goes to KinGAP. Also the child will only have to be in the relative home for six months, rather than a full year to qualify.

KinGAP is designed as a permanency option when return home and adoption have been ruled out. When a child has a strong attachment to a relative who is committed to caring permanently for a child, KinGAP can help with a payment and services.

The new program goes into effect October 31, when the current guardianship program expires. Relatives with youth in the current program as of September 30 will automatically move to KinGAP. DCFS adoption and guardianship staff have spent several months working out the transition plan to the new program, particularly for relatives moving from foster care to establish guardianship soon. Current guardians and prospective relative guardians should contact their subsidy worker with questions.

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## Go back to school with Cook South

The Cook South Region will hold its 20th annual Foster Caregiver, Parent and Youth in Care Back to School Picnic on August 7 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The festivities take place at Central Park (400 Lakewood Blvd) in Park Forest. Over 200 children, caregivers, parents, and staff will gather for a day of fun, activities, information, food, fellowship, and family visitation events. It takes staff and foster caregiver volunteers months of advance work to produce an extravaganza that always proves to be a highlight of the summer.

“Nineteen years ago we started this event and have watched it grow into one of the largest events in Cook South,” said the primary chairperson Michael Stripens.

The recurring success is due in large part to staff members and local businesses that make monetary and in-kind product donations so the day can be extra special. In addition to the recreation, staff have arranged for medical providers, education advisors and representatives from community organizations to be on hand with important information about their programs.

For further information, please call 773-371-6119 or 708-210-2833.

## DCFS joins Real Men Cook on Father’s Day

DCFS sponsored the Children’s Pavilion at the twentieth annual Real Men Cook event, held on Father’s Day. This fundraising event invites the public to purchase food cooked by volunteer fathers/chefs. Director McEwen, (*shown right*) along with Deputy Director Daniel Fitzgerald and Gregory Cox, chair of the Birth Parent Council, were among 50 cooks serving delicious foods.

DCFS staff volunteered to support activities in the Children’s Pavilion, which was free to the community. Foster families, birth parents and youth from one of the Chicago emergency shelters were given tickets so that they could enjoy this event.

Director McEwen spoke to the crowd about how important fathers’ involvement is to their children’s



success in school. He introduced Gregory Cox, a father who had eight children leave the child welfare system to be reunified in his home.

“We also have to focus resources on fathers to build strong families. An event like Real Men Cook puts out a very positive and powerful message about fathers,” said DCFS Regional Administrator Michael Byrd.

## Cook South thanks caregivers in May

The Cook South Region had a round up of appreciation events during the month of May. At the start of the month, the Harvey office held a “shopping spree” where caregivers could come and select items that had been collected especially for them to enjoy with their families. Next, the offices at Emerald and Harvey each held a “meet and greet” for casual interaction between foster parents and staff. The groups enjoyed light refreshments and a movie that

depicted a youth’s journey through foster care. The region also hosted a trip to see the play *Strong Connections*. The night was shared with caregivers from Cook North. This production was written and performed by youth from the child welfare system. Finally, the month’s celebration ended with a health fair at the Harvey field office, where providers conducted health screenings and shared important health and safety information.

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## Proposed south suburban charter school with foster care focus

The south suburbs may soon have another option for schooling. The Illinois State Board of Education is reviewing a proposal to open a charter school that would focus on children who have experienced trauma, including those in the child welfare system. The school, Foster Care Institute-Illinois Charter School, is planned to open in August of 2010.

The charter school format allows for an approved school to be under the public school system while having the flexibility to determine its mission and academic focus. Dr. Barbara Jackson, executive director, says she envisions starting with third through sixth grades. The proposed model would incorporate counseling and other social services into the regular curriculum offerings. An after-school component would provide additional math and reading support.

Educators, parents and caregivers hold a wide range of opinions on the best setting for children with special education needs or emotional challenges. There will be a series of public meetings to get input from the community. The next two public forums for the proposed school are scheduled for August 10 and 17 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at University Park Library, 1100 Blackhawk Drive. These sessions will also be eligible for training credit. For more information, see the Web site at [www.fciillinois.org](http://www.fciillinois.org) or call Dr. Jackson at 708-759-7123.

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## Cook Central caregivers get showered with appreciation during the month of May

Every year Cook Central celebrates their foster parents by honoring them during the month of May. This year there were three different activities that the Foster Parent Appreciation Committee organized. The first event was a Shopping Spree held Friday, May 8 at 3518 W. Division. DCFS staff provided all of the new or gently used items. Some of the donations included clothing, household items, jewelry, books, games and other miscellaneous items. Refreshments were provided to the foster parents after they completing their shopping.

The following week was Family Fun Night on May 15 at 3518 W. Division. The whole family was invited to dine on hot dogs, chips, cookies, ice cream cups, bottled water and juice packs.

Games like Floor Darts, Ring Toss, Bingo and Bozo Buckets, resulted in prizes that included basketballs, t-shirts, toys, jewelry, toiletries and other gifts for the youth. Throughout the evening, there was face painting, washable tattoos and a children's movie playing.

The final event was a catered dinner held Friday, May 29 at the Maywood office. The room was decorated by the Foster Parent Committee and staff. Many large gift baskets were raffled off as well as other items, which included free tickets to the Children's Museum in Chicago. Young musicians from LaFayette public school provided excellent musical entertainment for the evening.

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## Cook Central Regional Advisory Council

The month always ends on a positive note when the Cook Central Regional Advisory Council meets. On the fourth Tuesday of the month, caregivers come together to learn about new DCFS policies and gain important parenting information.

"We try to keep things interesting so caregivers will feel good about coming to the meetings," said council chair, Jerry Welenc.

At the August meeting, the council will begin work on the new Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan. It is important that caregivers help draft the plan that details how the

Cook Central Region's foster care program addresses the rights and responsibilities in the Foster Parent Law. Also at the meeting, Chicago fire fighters will help foster parents develop emergency escape plans and secure their homes from fire risks.

The Cook Central Regional Advisory Council meets at 9:30 a.m. on the 4th Tuesday of every month (except December) at the regional office, located at 3518 W. Division. Contact the foster parent support specialists' phone line on 773-292-7879 with any questions.

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## Cook North offers special trainings for caregivers

The Cook North Region, as part of its Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan, makes a point of providing trainings tailored to the needs of caregivers. The region identifies topic experts and arranges for interactive sessions where the foster parent participants can gain credit hours, along with knowledge and new skills.

In April, Cook North foster parents attended the training Understanding Autism, clarifying what it is and what it is not. There was a focus on how to help children and youth with autism learn and grow socially, while keeping in mind how differently they react to things from those who are not autistic. Dr. Shawn Daugherty, the Director of Psychological Services at

the Streamwood Behavioral Health Hospital, spoke to foster parents, describing the autistic youngster's special sensitivity to sound, light, and changes in the environment.

He explained how the autistic youngster's brain functions in a way that interprets sounds as extremely loud and unpleasant when they would not seem unusual to the foster parent. He explained that the autistic youngster could become very upset at holiday time, when families change things around as they decorate. The autistic child cannot cope with this, and it could often trigger an emotional episode that could require hospitalization. He also explained how youth can be at different levels

of functioning on the autistic spectrum, some of them being far more severe than others.

These courses are developed to meet the needs expressed in the region. Caregivers who attend will receive training credit hours that can fulfill licensing requirements. The training sessions each begin at 10 a.m., but the location can move between the three regional offices, so contact Iris Cuevas at 773-866-5680 to confirm.

Any foster parent with additional ideas for future Cook North foster parent trainings can also contact Iris Cuevas with suggestions.

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## Youth Summit offers resources to young adults

Nearly 200 young people gathered at Malcolm X College for the Youth Summit on June 17. They learned about services and resources that could help launch them toward successful adult lives.

Director McEwen kicked off the event with a series of good advice that was inspired by hip-hop music. The youth from 14 to 21 were enthusiastic and a bit impressed at his knowledge of "their" music. While the approach was light, the messages about education, responsible decision-making were taken seriously.



**Deputy Director Daniel Fitzgerald thanks the members of the Youth Summit advisory committee with custom sweatshirts.**

The Youth Summits are sponsored by the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services. Youth from across the state could participate in summits held in Springfield, DeKalb, and Centralia during the month of June.

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## Cook North shows appreciation

Foster Parent Appreciation Month activities are a small way to show caregivers how much the Cook North Region appreciates them and values what they do for our foster children. The first event was a trip to see the play *Strong Connections*. The second activity was a luncheon for foster parents at 1911 S. Indiana. Mary Clark from Chicago Lakeshore Hospital first did a presentation on "Compassion Fatigue," an issue that resonated with most foster parents. The foster parents especially appreciated the reminder to take care of themselves so they could be able to take care of their foster children. Caregivers had a chance to network with each other. They even tested their knowledge in a quiz of licensing standards, with prizes.

## Rookie foster parents hit the ground running

Just about a year ago, the Garcias of Libertyville thought their family picture was complete. Their 11 years of marriage brought three sons and a busy calendar of baseball practices, swimming and trips to the beach. What a difference a year makes. The “rookie” foster parents became licensed, aided a successful reunification and became statewide advocates for foster care.

This journey began when they saw their neighbors start on the foster care path. It got the Garcias thinking about how they might be able to help. They knew there could be complications to work through. Amy faces daily challenges as a special education teacher assistant, and Rich has a high-pressure schedule as an executive chef at Old Elm Country Club. When their neighbors had the first child placed, the discussions began in earnest. These discussions at times included Amy and Rich’s three active young sons, ages seven, eight and ten.

Amy read every book about fostering children she could, educating herself and Rich. They attended PRIDE classes in Waukegan, met with their licensing representative, Anne Wells, and continued having deep discussions. They became licensed for three children ages three to twelve years old. Their first placement was extremely rewarding.

“I am continually amazed at my children’s ability to empathize, sharing their parents and belongings with ease and grace. I attribute this to sitting down with our kids regularly, talking about common issues that bring kids into care and letting them share their concerns and feelings. We are so proud of them,” Amy said.

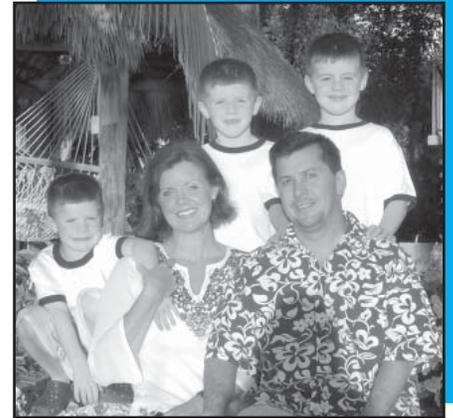
One of the Garcia family’s proudest moments while fostering was a recent reunification they had a part in. The way the little girl’s eyes lit up when she was with her mom made it all worth it.

“When I saw the little girl’s excitement in seeing her mom, I knew we had done a good thing.”

The reality of children being separated from their family has been a challenge for the Garcias. “We often try to give the children everything in order to make up for the one thing we cannot give: a healthy and safe relationship with their family. It’s a sobering experience.”

DCFS Northern Region Administrator Debbie Palmer-Thomas recently appointed Amy to fill one of the region’s two positions on the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council.

“In her relatively short fostering career, Amy has demonstrated a desire for knowledge, and wants to



*The Garcia family*

make the DCFS system as strong as it can be. She has a good attitude, even when discouraged. She is a strong supporter of foster parents’ rights,” said Palmer-Thomas.

“She is enthusiastic, energetic, and eager to give an opinion, which are all needed attributes when serving on the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council,” reported Robyn Harvey, the council chair.

After her first meeting, Amy was amazed at the amount of support and information foster parents have access to. She hopes to be able to help foster parents in the DCFS Northern Region have an avenue to voice their concerns, complaints and suggestions. On the council and at home, the Garcia family is committed to being part of the solution, so children can have the opportunity for a positive outcome.

## Get away with Adoptive Families Together

The Adoptive Families Together is a program for couples to address the stress that adoption or guardianship of a child can place on a couple's relationship. Children's Home + Aid developed the program to strengthen and support those adult relationships for the benefit of the entire family. One unique aspect of the program is a weekend Marriage Enhancement Retreat for couples who participate in the Adoptive Families Together program.

The free retreat provides couples an opportunity to get away, have fun, relax, and enjoy each other's company. The next retreats will be:

- Williams Bay, WI  
September 11 - 13
- Rockford, IL  
November 6 - 8

The retreat is a component of other programming, which includes workshops and group activities that explore:

- Communication
- Conflict resolution
- Commitment
- Expectations
- Enjoyment
- Friendship

Child care and group activities are available for children during evening workshops. Workshops and the weekend retreat are offered at no cost to participants.

To register for an Adoptive Families Together workshop series or learn more about upcoming retreats, call Marlana Dokken at 815-720-7111 or see the Web site at [www.childrenshomeandaid.org](http://www.childrenshomeandaid.org).

## Free health fair in Will County

Will County families can take care of both back-to-school physicals and school supplies at a free comprehensive health fair. Catholic Charities DAYBREAK Center coordinates this event to serve families with children zero to 18 years old. The Back to School Fair will include medical exams, immunizations and dental exams. School supplies will be distributed and haircuts will be available. There will also be additional information on various community resources.

The event is going to be held at the University of St. Francis located at 500 Wilcox Street, Joliet, IL 60435, on Thursday, August 6 from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Health Services will be provided from 11 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. When receiving Health Services:

- A legal guardian must be present for medical services.
- Shot records must be provided for immunizations.
- A current Medical Card or All Kids Card is needed or a \$12.50 fee per immunization and \$15.00 fee for lead and hemoglobin screen will be charged; however, no one will be turned away due to inability to pay.

For more information, contact: DAYBREAK at 815-774-HOME (815-774-4663) by July 13, 2009.

## LAN Corner

DCFS contracts with Child and Adolescent Local Area Networks (LANs) have focused on creating programs to stabilize youth in their educational settings. Providers across the state have developed programs to help families when students may have school-related problems. Families that live in Local Area Network (LAN) 49 can turn to the program Building Esteem Support Team (B.E.S.T) when a student may be at risk of suspension, truancy or expulsion.

Building Esteem Support Team (B.E.S.T) has an advocacy, tutoring, and mentoring program for children age 5 to 21 years who reside in Will or Grundy counties. The B.E.S.T. program will match a tutor/mentor who will work with the student on an individual basis twice a week for 30 weeks. The goals of the program are to decrease the incidence of school truancy, suspension, expulsion, and failure. Teachers or caseworkers often make the referrals for school intervention. However foster caregivers or parents can also make referrals. Interested parents, foster parents, and caseworkers can phone 815-725-8014, and ask to speak with Debralee Townsend, Director.

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*There are more educational intervention programs in LANs across the Northern Region. They are open to all foster, adoptive and guardianship families who are concerned about students at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion. For more information about LANs, call the local DCFS field office and ask for the LAN Liaison or contact Frank Navarro of DCFS at 630-801-3405.*

## Head Start class jumpstarts a 24-year foster care career

Betty Burton looks back on two dozen years of foster parenting to remember her previous career. The Champaign native left a Head Start teaching and supervisor position to concentrate on foster care and adoption. Still, even after leaving the classroom, she has more lessons to teach children. She drives home the value of education as a given, but she also looks to the whole child.

“All I want is for my children to be happy. Kids come in with a lack of self-esteem. I try to make them feel good about themselves, and I want them to be happy and productive in their life,” she said.

Betty practiced what she preached first with her three sons by birth. The oldest is 49 years old now. But when it came to foster care, she started fresh with girls. Betty

has adopted four girls and took guardianship of another. Now their ages range from 18 to 36. In fact, of the nearly 30 children she has had at home, most have been girls. Many turned into long-term placements, being in her home for up to five years. She is currently parenting an adoptive daughter and three youth in foster care.

All of her children have provided many reasons for Betty to feel proud of them. She enjoys looking back to see how they have progressed. The second child placed with her so long ago is now a registered nurse. Betty has another daughter studying for a master’s degree so she can become a teacher in Chicago.

These rewards and the smaller “everyday” joys of foster care outweigh the inevitable moments of frustration. She has seen struggles where the system did not always meet the needs of the kids. She has had to do a high degree of advocating around medical issues.

“There are a lot of kids with special needs that I’ve had problems getting the needed help for,” Betty stated.

Tim Lappin, DCFS Foster Care Licensing worker from Champaign, said this about Betty Burton. “She’s an unsung hero. We know she’ll always do a good job and is a great



Betty Burton

role model. We take her for granted, but she could be a poster child for foster parents. She always puts the kid’s needs first.”

Over time, she has seen those needs change. There are more behavioral problems and parents have more challenges to overcome. Still she remains hopeful. After 24 years, Betty feels certain that foster care was her calling and believes people need to go into it for the right reason.

“You need to want to help kids and be in it for the child’s best interest. Having patience and wanting to see children succeed is very important,” she said.

*“You need to want to help kids and be in it for the child’s best interest. Having patience and wanting to see children succeed is very important”*

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## Urbana families get school help from Parents Involved In Education

Every Local Area Network (LAN) in Central Region sponsors an educational support program for at-risk youth in its service area. Any child, including those in foster care, adoption or guardianship homes, can take advantage of this resource. Services are tailored to the child's specific needs and may include crisis intervention, advocacy, tutoring, and mentoring.

In LAN 24, caregivers can turn to Parents Involved In Education (PIIE) when students are facing truancy problems or are at risk of suspension or expulsion. PIIE is designed to help families enrolled in the Urban School District. It is a collaboration between the education, business and social services communities.

PIIE is grounded in its mission "to empower children and their families with the knowledge and skills that will allow them to maximize educa-

tional opportunities, while strengthening their social and spiritual development." The philosophy of PIIE is based on embracing the "Spirit of the Sankofa Bird" of African heritage. It teaches that one must reach back to go forward successfully, because by knowing the past one can better plot a course for the future. PIIE attempts to combat the history of academic deficits in many minority or low-income families by helping parents advocate for their students. They get support so they can take leadership in their child's educational, social and spiritual transition from early childhood to a productive and independent adulthood.

PIIE encourages the entire family to participate in programs and events that create more positive school experiences. Children can gain more academic learning opportunities as they are exposed to cultural, social and intellectual enrichment. Foster

parents can also find help to navigate the school system and identify community wraparound supports, special summer programming and a host of other services to enhance the child's academic and social development.

Caseworkers and teachers can refer students to PIIE. Caregivers can also contact PIIE to discuss having their student participate in the program. For more information, call Janice Mitchell of the Urbana School District #116 at 217-384-3685.

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*There are more educational intervention programs in LANs across the Central Region. They are open to all foster, adoptive and guardianship families who are concerned about students at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion. For more information about LANs, call the local DCFS field office and ask for the LAN Liaison or contact Greg Hixon of DCFS at 217-221-2525.*

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## Region shows appreciation for caregivers

May's Foster Parent Appreciation Month put the spotlight on the Central Region foster caregivers. Staff from many of the region's DCFS field offices found ways to make caregivers feel extra special.

The Springfield office and the Urbana office each held an appreciation dinner for their caregiver families on May 29. In Peoria, foster parents and staff came together over a catered luncheon. Families and staff shared a meal at a potluck dinner held for the Jerseyville, Carlinville and Jacksonville families. The Canton and Macomb offices also

combined efforts, but headed in a different direction for fun. They held a bowling party for caregivers, children and the staff.

In Quincy, they took the fun outdoors for a cookout and puppet show on May 14. Two days later, Bloomington staff provided families with a picnic at Miller Park Zoo. Decatur followed with a picnic later that week.

In Galesburg and Cambridge, the staff decided to wait on summer weather and planned an appreciation picnic on June 18 at Lincoln Park. The Danville office also hosted a

picnic that day. Finally, the Rock Island office held its annual picnic for caregivers on July 25 in Camden Park.

Each year the DCFS regions and the private agencies go the extra mile to show appreciation for the caregivers that make it possible to meet the needs of Central Region's youth in foster care. These efforts are driven by the staff who give their time and in many cases their own funds to make sure foster parents know their work does not go unnoticed.

## Connections to adults launch youth to independence

**N**ineteen-year-old Anna feels positive about the nearly seven years she spent involved with DCFS. Anna credits her caseworker, Guardian ad litem, and previous foster parents, Teresa and Dana Brooks for supporting her. She had some difficult times, when poor decisions and a negative attitude threatened to derail her dreams. Now Anna is living independently, working two jobs, and making plans to attend community college in the fall.

Her caseworker, Nancy Dodson, worked to secure independent living resources for Anna, including the DCFS Employment Incentive program. This monthly stipend supplements her regular income from work as a waitress and an aide at a fitness center. She has a savings account, an automobile, and car insurance.

She gives a lot of credit to the Brooks family, with whom she lived for three years.

*“Everybody says that I’ve turned out pretty good for being in foster care.”*

“They always tried to get me to do the right thing,” Anna recalled.

Even after Anna left their home, the Brookses were willing to be in her life, and are now among her key supporters.

“They’re always here for me,” Anna continued. “They’ll do anything for me. They helped me furnish my first apartment.”

In an unplanned stroke of fortune, Anna found herself renting a house in the same block as the Brookses. She feels supported and safe having them living just a few houses away. For Teresa, the proximity is just another part of their continuing support. “We love having her right down the street,” she said.

Anna also leaned on her GAL, Scott Turner, to be able to establish employment. She had to face the consequences of earlier decisions that resulted in a number of traffic violations. Without being able to drive, her job options were limited. Turner believed that she had the potential to be a success and intervened with the court on her behalf. Anna paid all of her fines and had her driver’s license restored. In addition to completing her required community service, she attended all of her multiple court



Anna

hearings, further demonstrating her motivation.

Now, Anna has clear career goals. She begins community college classes this fall. She has already identified pediatric physical therapy as her preferred course of study. She knows it will be a long-term commitment, but she is upbeat about the challenge.

“I want to do something that makes me happy every day.”

With the on-going formal support from the Department’s programs for older youth and the continued commitment from her previous foster parents, Anna is poised for success. As she said, “Everybody says that I’ve turned out pretty good for being in foster care.”

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## Appreciation showered on caregivers in May

The DCFS Southern Region celebrated Foster Parent Appreciation Month in May with events held at many of the field offices in the region. Private agency programs also held many events to honor their caregivers, beyond what could be listed here.

**Belleville/Sparta/Carlyle:** Foster parents were treated to an “A Evening of Elegance.” This included a catered meal, live music and a relaxing chair massage. Gift baskets were presented to families.

**Madison County:** Caregivers enjoyed a picnic provided by placement staff with hot dogs and burgers. It was a family affair where all the children were invited to take part in games and activities.

**Olney:** Foster parents and their children came out for a picnic. Caregivers and children received small gifts

and were inspired by a poem written especially for foster parents.

**Effingham:** Caregivers and staff came together for an outdoor barbeque. In addition to the appreciation certificates and gifts, youth could also get their fingerprints done on-site.

**Harrisburg/Marion:** More than 100 foster parents and support staff cheered on the Southern Illinois Miners baseball team on May 29th. A local business donated a block of 20 tickets and 20 arm bands for children to play in the children’s area. Foster parents were recognized on the ballpark’s “Big Screen.”

**East St. Louis:** The foster parent appreciation celebration was held at the Journey Restaurant in Fairview Heights. The theme was “The Gift of Giving.” It was a gathering to honor current foster parents and those who

had “retired.” Singing, poetry and games with prizes made the event entertaining and memorable.

**Salem/Mt. Vernon:** Staff grilled and brought all the trimmings for a “backyard summer fun” event. Kids could have face-painting or play games, including a small climbing wall and swings. Staff contributed generous gift baskets for door prizes.

**Catholic Social Services:** Caregivers and children came together for a picnic at Energy Park in Energy. The agency provided food and games. Fingerprinting was also available as a convenience for caregivers.

**Children’s Home and Aid:** The East St. Louis office showed appreciation for foster parents by sponsoring dinner and a bowling outing. Caregivers and children had a great time in friendly competition.

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## Education help for Southern Region families

Every Local Area Network (LAN) in Southern Region sponsors an educational support program for at-risk youth in their service area. The programs assist children who are experiencing school-related issues such as: suspension, expulsion, truancy, negative behaviors, poor grades, or classroom disruption. Any child, including children in foster care, adoption and guardianship, may be eligible for these services. Services are tailored to the child’s specific needs and may include crisis intervention, advocacy, tutoring, and mentoring.

Each LAN is able to respond to the needs within its community boundaries. So while the programs

are similar in their focus on school intervention, programs may take a different approach or have a different reach. For example, the Lessie Bates Neighborhood House program serves only a portion of St. Clair County, while the United Methodist Children’s Home Family Education and Support Program covers Hamilton, Jefferson, and Wayne Counties. Other programs in southern Illinois may cover even larger areas. Still, each of the 10 LANs in the Southern Region has a program to help families facing school issues.

These education services have been available within their respective communities for several years and have demonstrated considerable

success in improving educational outcomes. They work because they bring the caregivers, teachers, case managers and service providers together to work cooperatively and to think expansively about what the child needs.

Caregivers to children who are exhibiting school-related problems should talk with the caseworker about the situation and the possibility of a referral. Foster parents or caregivers whose children have moved to permanency can also contact Duane Phillips, DCFS LANS Liaison, in Fairview Heights at 618-394-2100 for more information on programs in their specific area.

## Tell It Like It Is

*Families Now and Forever wants to hear the real deal on caring for children from those who know best... YOU!*

Normally this is a space where you, the caregivers respond to a question, based on your experiences. Yet, given the state budget crisis, I thought I should come to you to "Tell It Like It Is."

At the time of this writing, the Fiscal Year 2010 state budget is not final and the budget under consideration projects severe cuts. On June 30, the last day of the fiscal year, United States District Judge John F. Grady entered a *Supplemental Order to Enforce Consent Decree in B.H. et al. v. McEwen*. In short, the court ruled that DCFS and the provider community must continue to provide all programs and services that were provided in FY09 without any reduction or cancellation.

I intend to stay the course, and because I understand that there is strength in numbers, I ask each of you to join me. We have important work to do in our agencies, as do you in your homes.

I know we ask much of you. I understand that these circumstances have made an already difficult task even harder. It is during life's most challenging times that the depth of our commitment is laid bare. Thank you so very much for your patience and perseverance in serving the children in our care.



Erwin McEwen  
Director

## Notes from the Editor:

### Format changes

At the time of publication, the budget situation for the new fiscal year (July 1) was still to be determined by the Legislature. We made content changes and brought each of the regional inserts into one publication, so we could provide accurate and timely information. We trust you will still find the newsletter to be helpful to your families.

### Training schedules

With the state budget still under consideration as of press time, Illinois Families Now and Forever is unable to print the schedules for caregiver trainings. However, during this period, courses are open for registration. Caregivers should call the Office of Training at 877-800-3393 for the most up-to-date information on local training.

### Clarification

An article in Volume 3 on the reimbursement for graduation fees and expenses should have stated that only students in foster care are eligible. Adoptive or guardianship families are not eligible for this reimbursement. Illinois Families Now and Forever regrets the oversight.



Denzel (7620)



Mierra (7677)



Samuel (7720)



Nautica and Heaven  
(7665 - 7666)

Please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390.

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

**Denzel [7620]** Denzel, 11, is an active young man who loves to explore his surroundings. He enjoys drawing and uses his artistic talent to express himself and tell stories. Denzel responds well to structured activities and extra time with his foster family. He also enjoys spending time on the computer and watching wrestling on TV.

Denzel's teachers say he is respectful and does well in school when he focuses on his assignments. Denzel's worker says he is fun-loving and enjoys just being a kid.

The forever family for Denzel would be able to provide him love and attention, as well as consistent limits. The family would be patient and understanding as Denzel adjusts to his new environment. You could also be a good role model for Denzel and provide positive outlets for him to express his feelings.

**Mierra [7677]** Mierra, 9, is a happy young lady who loves Disney Princess dolls and hopes to have her room decorated with princess wallpaper. When she's not watching cartoons, Mierra likes to play board games and ride her bike with friends. Although she's a little shy at first, Mierra is very friendly once she gets to know someone.

Her foster parents and teachers say that Mierra is kind and sociable. She wants to make friends and is eager to please.

Potential parents to Mierra would provide lots of love and encouragement, while also being clear about expectations and consequences. You would also be able to give Mierra time to adjust to your home.

**Heaven and Nautica [7665-66]** These sisters are very close to each other, but have very different personalities. Heaven, 8, is athletic and loves to skate, tumble and jump rope. She is compassionate and brings her dolls with her almost everywhere she goes. Heaven's sister Nautica, 7, loves school and enjoys reading chapter books. She has a bubbly personality and makes friends easily. Both girls are creative, imaginative and affectionate.

Heaven's teachers say she is a good student and has shown improvement in her studies. Her worker says she is loving and affectionate. Nautica's teacher says she is a good student and a joy to have in class. Her foster parent says she is well-behaved and studious.

The forever family for these sisters would be able to provide a loving, stable home and display patience and understanding as the girls adjust to their new surroundings. Parents would spend time with each girl individually in order to help them develop independently. Heaven and Nautica would also benefit from continued contact with their brother as well as their current foster parent.

**Samuel [7720]** Samuel, 11 is an outgoing young man who gets along well with his peers. He has established a strong relationship with his foster family and has stayed in close contact with three of his siblings. Samuel is also generous; when he won a new bicycle at a foster parent appreciation dinner, he immediately told his foster parent that he would give his old bicycle to his younger brother, who did not have one. Samuel can often be found riding his new bicycle and enjoys other outdoor activities as well, including basketball, baseball and skateboarding. He also likes to play video games and watch movies.

Samuel's foster parent says he has made tremendous progress since coming to live with her family and that he has developed a close bond with her youngest son. Samuel's teachers say he is very smart and has a lot of potential. His worker says everyone who spends time with Samuel finds him to be a bright and sweet young man.

The right parents for Samuel would provide structure and discipline while reassuring him that he is part of a caring and supportive family. You could also encourage Samuel to stay connected to his siblings at the same time that he is developing a strong bond with his adoptive family. Samuel would like a family with an older male role model who will spend time with him. He would also like to join an active family that will play sports with him.



Please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390, or see the AICI Web site – [www.adoptinfo-il.org](http://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

Pat Quinn, Governor  
Erwin McEwen, DCFS Director

Published by:  
DCFS Office of Foster Parent  
Support Services  
Ray Gates, Administrator

Editor: Vanessa James  
Phone: 312-814-6824  
Fax: 312-814-4131  
E-mail: [vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov)

Regional Editors  
Central – Sam Saladino  
Northern – Catherine Johnson  
Southern – Michael Bollman  
Cook North – Joann Niemuth  
Cook Central – Merrylee Guge-  
Jorgenson  
Cook South – Rod Mulford  
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Vanessa James, Editor  
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