

Illinois Families Now and Forever

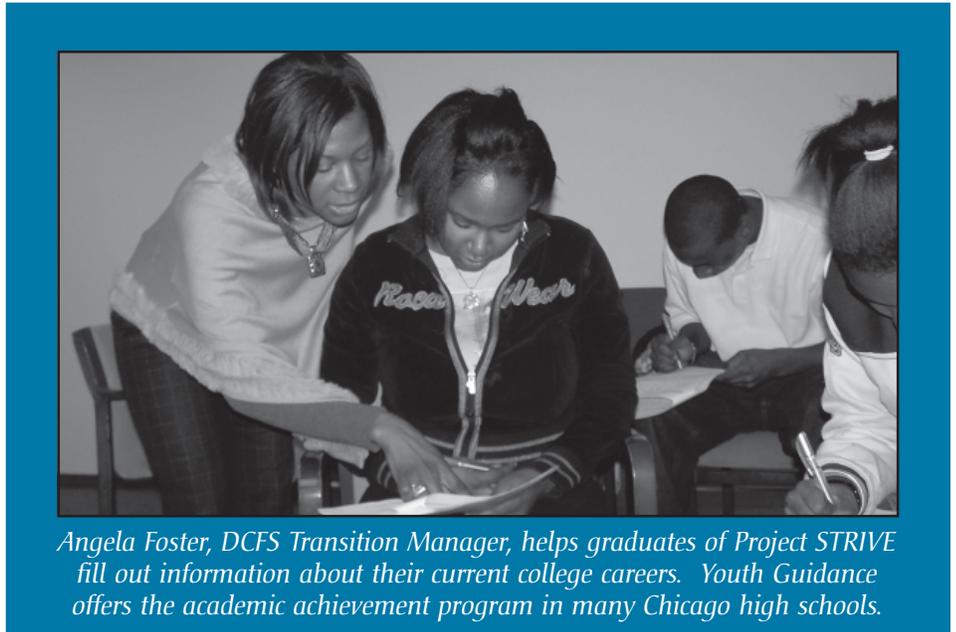
Families by Foster Care, Adoption and Guardianship®

As teen numbers grow, families need more resources

Many caregivers have a willingness to work with teens. Some may seek out adolescent placements as their "calling." Currently, of the 15,756 youth in care, more than 5,000 are 13 to 19 years old. For youth in adoptive and guardianship homes, the number soars to 22,000, or 55 percent. Caregivers need practical tools and effective resources to prepare youth (and themselves) for the journey toward adulthood.

The Division of Service Intervention has a unit devoted to serving youth approaching adulthood. Staff from the Office of Education and Transition Services (OETS) work directly with youth and families and also support many programs for older youth. Most of the Department-sponsored programs target young people who are still in DCFS care. However, OETS also has information about many community programs for youth who moved to adoption or guardianship.

The publication *Get Goal'd* is a handy reference for programs that teens and caregivers can turn to as they set goals for education, career, relationships, home, health and family. Following are a few of the resources listed in the brochure.



Angela Foster, DCFS Transition Manager, helps graduates of Project STRIVE fill out information about their current college careers. Youth Guidance offers the academic achievement program in many Chicago high schools.

Youth In College/Vocational Training

What can you get? \$458/mo. + book money
Who is eligible? DCFS youth 16-20 taking 12 credits (fall & spring) or 6 (summer) or in an approved internship
Other requirements: C average, apply for financial aid annually

Community College Tuition Payment Program

What can you get? For up to 4 semesters, money for tuition and books not covered by financial aid
Who is eligible? DCFS youth
Other requirements: Be accepted at an IL community college; apply for financial aid, maintain C average

Employment Incentive Program

What can you get? \$150/mo. (+ work earnings)
Who is eligible? DCFS youth ages 17-20, high school grad/GED, completed Life Skills Training
Other requirements: Work 20+ hours per week or be in job skills training program

Education & Training Vouchers

What can you get? Up to \$5000/yr. for educational/vocational expenses not covered by financial aid
Who is eligible? DCFS youth 16-22; adoption assistance and subsidized guardianship at 16+; emancipated youth under 22
Other requirements: Be in college or vocational training

Continued on page 3



From the DCFS Director

Erwin McEwen

In the 2003 Federal Review of child welfare programs, Illinois, like all of the other state programs, learned that it had room to make improvement. We put in place an aggressive Program Improvement Plan (PIP), and many initiatives are already making a difference. At the end of last year, we had accomplished several, but not all, of the outcome goals stated in the PIP.

In March the agency will reach the next evaluation point. If we don't meet all the goals set in the PIP, the bar moves even higher for the next evaluation. So why share what could be construed as bad news? Because I have witnessed the impact of open, honest communication about the barriers and seen it improve policy and practice. We are doing things better and the work continues.

Here are some of the critical initiatives that we will focus on:

- implementing the Reunification Model for working with parents
- reducing the recurrence of child maltreatment
- stabilizing placements through the CAYIT program
- implementing fully the Behavioral Health and Child Trauma models

There are other items on a list that is admittedly long. Yet, due to the cooperation of our caregivers and the commitment of the child welfare staff, we will fulfill the promise we make each day to keep children safe and families strong.

Finding financial aid sources for college

The first step in qualifying for financial aid is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid form (FAFSA). All assistance based on financial need requires filling out the FAFSA. It is important that each youth complete and mail or e-mail their applications early in the calendar year, in order to secure the maximum benefits. Students can get forms from their school counselor or via the Internet.

For students who have been in the child welfare system, the major factor for financial aid is the student's status as "dependent" or "independent." The FAFSA will ask if the applicant is currently a ward of the court or if the applicant was a ward until age 18. Youth in foster care, guardianship, residential or independent living programs should answer YES. Youth who were adopted before age 18 must answer NO. A YES answer will consider the youth to be an independent student, which means their parent's (parent by birth or foster caregiver) income will not be included in the financial need formula. However, adoptive parents' income will be included, unless special circumstances apply.

After filling out and returning the application, the student will receive the Student Aid Report (SAR) that lists the Expected Family Contribution (EFC), which is what the family is expected to pay, based on their family income, on top of any financial aid that is awarded.

DCFS Scholarships

Apply before March 31

DCFS annually provides 48 college

scholarships to youth who are currently under guardianship of the Department or who left DCFS guardianship through adoption or private guardianship arrangements. Scholarship recipients receive up to four consecutive years of tuition and academic fee waivers to be used at participating Illinois state colleges or universities, a \$458 monthly stipend and a medical card up to age 23. Applicants must have a high school diploma or GED by the end of the current school year. Scholarship Program Student Applications (CFS 438) are available now. Contact the youth's caseworker or call 312-814-5959.

Web resources

These Internet sites have information on selecting colleges, preparing the applications and financial aid. They can be valuable tools in helping students make decisions and secure resources for further education.

- **Free Application for Federal Student Aid**
www.fafsa.ed.gov
- **IL Student Assistance Commission**
www.collegezone.org
- **Fastweb scholarship search**
www.fastweb.com
- **United Negro College Fund**
www.uncf.org
- **Broke Scholars Scholarships**
scholarships.brokescholar.com
- **Black Excel College Help Network**
www.BlackExcel.org
- **Minority Scholarships**
www.free-4u.com/minority.htm
- **Orphan Foundation**
www.orphan.org

What readers want, we'll try to write



Every year, in this issue I invite you to complete a reader survey. I take time to look through the responses to get a pulse for what you would like to see in upcoming newsletters. Most of you just circle topics, but some write in comments. When the question what do you like least about the newsletter? says "nothing" and what do you like best? says "everything," it's like winning the lottery. Still, even (especially) the negative comments are helpful and can set our course.

I hear from many anxious caregivers seeking information on resources after moving to permanency. Now with nearly three times more former DCFS kids in adoptive and guardianship homes than in foster care, it makes sense. In every issue, you will find articles on adoption and guardianship in the back half of the newsletter after the regular policy and parenting articles.

Mental health topics such as attachment, depression and self-esteem also ranked high on your interest scale. There are new initiatives underway to identify mental health needs earlier as youth come into care and to link children with trained providers. Look for more news as those programs develop.

My youngest son by adoption is now a senior in high school. So, like many of you, I am also interested in education services, options

for college (hopefully) and resources to prepare him for life on his own. This issue includes a special feature on teens. I will include more information in the regular column "Movin' On Up" for topics concerning youth transitioning to adulthood.

There are countless topics that could go in the newsletter, but only so much space. I appreciate those who are clamoring for a monthly instead of bi-monthly mailing. If you heard a primal scream echoing along the I-55 corridor, that was the six regional reporters, our graphic designer and the DCFS print shop staff shrieking at the thought. For seven years, I have been grateful for all the behind the scenes support that makes this newsletter possible. I have not seen another state publication like ours for families with the reach and wealth of information.

Please take a moment to let me know what you think of your newsletter, cut the survey out and mail it back. I read all the responses, but I read the ones decorated with heart stickers first. Thanks, to the unnamed reader, for making me smile.

Vanessa James, Editor
M³ (Mom by Many Means)

teen resources, con't.

Job Corps

What can you get? Stipend, GED, and training in 14 fields

Who is eligible? Youth 17-24 with no diploma or GED

Contact: 800-230-JOBS

Youth Housing Assistance

What can you get? (1) Help finding affordable housing, food and clothing; help budgeting (2) Cash for security deposit, beds, utilities, appliances, etc.

Who is eligible? DCFS youth ages 17.5-20, including closed cases. Call for income and other requirements.

Contact: 312-814-5571

Youthbuild

What can you get? Stipend, GED, job training, scholarships, and leadership and computer training

Who is eligible? People 16-24 nationwide who do not have a high school diploma or GED

Other requirements: Work in home construction while earning GED

Contact: www.youthbuild.org

Additionally, OETS has Transition Coordinators assigned to each DCFS region to help youth and caregivers navigate the programs available. To receive a copy of *Get Goal'd*, learn more about programs or reach a Transition Coordinator, contact the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services:

- Chicago: 312-814-5959
- Peoria: 309-693-5150
- Springfield: 217-557-2689

DCFS hosts 2008 Caregivers Conferences in two sites— Register Today

Caregivers can now register for the 2008 Caregivers Conference “*Together We Learn; Together We Grow.*” The conferences, taking place in Lisle on February 22-23 and in Fairview Heights on March 7-8, will include an afternoon and evening of events on Friday, overnight accommodations, and additional learning opportunities on Saturday. The conferences offer a wide selection of workshops. Caregivers will also have an opportunity to meet with the DCFS regional executive teams on Friday to discuss hot topics and learn about agency initiatives. These conferences will provide opportunities for learning, meeting other caregivers, and recharging the batteries for more parenting. Participants who attend the entire conference will receive seven training credit hours. Register now to reserve your space. **Register by Mail: DCFS Registration Unit, 406 E. Monroe, Station 122, Springfield, IL 62701, Phone: 877-800-3393. Register by FAX: 217-557-4349.**

Spring 2008 DCFS Caregiver Conferences ~ Registration Form

Directions: Please print or type to complete this conference registration form. **Couples attending this conference must complete a conference registration form for each individual.** Please make copies as needed. Spaces are limited, so early registration is advised.

After completing **both** pages of the form, you may submit your conference registration by mail, fax or phone. To make phone registration more efficient, have the form completed and available when you call. Following registration, you will receive a detailed conference confirmation letter from the DCFS Registration Unit. Those staying overnight must follow the instructions in the confirmation letter to call the hotel to give a credit card or other deposit to hold your hotel room until check-in. There are no provisions for children to attend the conferences or be on-site.

Registration will open at Noon on Friday and the conference will close by 2 p.m. on Saturday. All registered participants are expected to arrive at the conference before the opening session and attend the full two-day conference.

If you have questions about this conference registration form, please call the DCFS Registration Unit toll free at 877-800-3393. Registration must be submitted by January 25. Registration after January 25 may be accepted based on availability.

All Registrants – Complete This Section / Describe Yourself. Check all that apply

Foster Parent Relative Caregiver Adoptive Parent Guardianship Parent

DCFS Region: Cook North Cook Central Cook South Northern Central Southern

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Foster Care License #(if applicable): _____ Expiration Date: _____

Licensing Agency: (if applicable) _____ Last 4 Digits of Social Security #: _____

Home Street Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____

E-Mail Address (if any): _____

Day Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

In Case of Emergency, Contact: Name _____ Phone: _____



Participant First Name _____ Last Name _____

Which Conference do you wish to attend?

- February 22-23, 2008 Chicago Area Conference, Hyatt Lisle
- March 7- 8, 2008 Southern Conference, Four Points Sheraton, Fairview Heights

You may attend both a conference and one of the upcoming Caregiver Institutes (see page 6). However, if attending the Chicago Area Conference, you will be placed on a waiting list if you wish to also attend the Cook Institute.

Workshop Choices – Please circle two choices per session:

Space is limited for some workshop sessions. Your second choice will be used if one of the sessions is already filled.

	A	B	C	D	E	Preference
Session 1 <i>Hot Topics Discussions</i> Friday, 1 p.m.	Positive Mental Attitude	Placement by School District	Understanding My Role as a Reunification Team Member	Young Gifted and Teen	The "Joys" of Being Licensed	1st Choice _____ 2nd Choice _____
Session 2 Friday 4:30 p.m.	Creating a Safe Place for Gay Youth	PRIDE Digital Training Tools	Psychotropic Medications (Repeated)	Transition Services for Older Youth	Parenting with Love & Logic	1st Choice _____ 2nd Choice _____
Session 3 Saturday 8:30 a.m.	Accessing & Understanding Psychiatric Services	How Trauma Impacts Education (2-part session- You MUST register for both parts)	Caregiver's Role in Decision Making (Repeated)	Intro to Trauma	Adolescent Behavior Issues – Lisle only	1st Choice _____ 2nd Choice _____
Session 4 Saturday 10:20 a.m.	Psychotropic Medication (Repeated)		Helping Youth Avoid Criminal Involvement	Reunification Update	Caregiver's Role in Decision Making (Repeated)	1st Choice _____ 2nd Choice _____

Check Meals You Will Attend:

(Meals are provided at NO COST to Conference Registrants)

- Dinner, Friday Night
- Light Breakfast, Saturday
- Lunch, Saturday
- Request Vegetarian Meals

Lodging Requested – Friday Night

DCFS Division of Training will coordinate all lodging for all caregivers. All foster, adoptive, relative and guardianship caregivers are eligible for complimentary lodging when attending all conference sessions.

Lodging Requested: Yes No Smoking preference (based on availability): Smoking Non-Smoking

Shared rooms will be assigned to couples. Single rooms will be provided for individual participants unless a shared room is requested. I prefer to share a room with: _____

Upon receipt of your confirmation letter, you MUST personally call the hotel by the deadline stated in your letter to guarantee your room reservation with a credit card, check or other means.

Check here if under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) you require auxiliary aids or services. **Please describe your requirements.**



Register today for the 2008 Caregiver Institutes – the focus is on trauma

Enrollment is now open for the 2008 Caregiver Institutes. Foster, adoptive, guardianship and relative caregivers can call the DCFS Registration Line at 877-800-3393 TODAY to register for one of four sessions. The training “Trauma-Dealing with a Child’s Past to Make a Better Future” will focus on caring for children affected by trauma. The training covers how trauma affects children in care and their caregivers, tips on recognizing and dealing with trauma, how caring for these children affects caregivers (including compassion fatigue) and what caregivers can do to keep themselves healthy.

DCFS is bringing the Caregiver Institutes to four sites around the state. You may choose the location most convenient for you, regardless of your designated DCFS region. The same training content will be presented at each institute, so plan to attend only one institute.

The Caregiver Institutes have become known for being dynamic and interactive sessions. Participants will earn five training credit hours to meet licensing requirements when they sign in and attend the entire session. While the institutes include some added features, the basis of the trauma training is the curriculum used in the PRIDE In-Service class “Child Trauma,” so caregivers may enroll as they feel appropriate.

March 1
DCFS Office, 6201 S. Emerald,
Chicago

March 15
Embassy Suites, East Peoria

April 12
Holiday Inn, Rock Falls/Sterling

April 26
Hawthorne Suites, Champaign

The Institutes open at 8 a.m. for check-in with the course beginning at 9 a.m. and finishing by 3 p.m. Coffee, donuts and lunch will be provided for participants.

There are no accommodations for childcare at the institutes, and children must not be brought to the sites. There may be limited funds available through the DCFS regions to reimburse DCFS-supervised caregivers for child care or mileage (not lodging) expenses to attend this training. Caregivers should follow normal procedures within their own regions to check on potential reimbursement **before** attending. Attendees from private agencies should contact their agencies in advance to determine whether they can be reimbursed for those expenses.

Spaces are limited at each site so call 877-800-3393 today to register.

Homeward Bound *When return home is the goal*

The often-asked question “Isn’t it hard when the kids leave?” can be as difficult for foster caregivers to explain as the actual departure. There are some things to keep in mind while children are with you and after they leave.

1. Remember that you are fulfilling a purpose. In foster care, the main objective is not to keep the kids forever, but to make a positive difference while they are with you that lasts a lifetime.
2. Give yourself permission to grieve. “Each child takes a piece of you with them when they go,” said Cindy Kay, a caregiver who does emergency care for infants. “With every child, you grow another heart so there is always room to love.”
3. Keep expectations realistic. Back at home, parents will do things differently than you did. Different does not mean worse or unsafe. Do your best not to judge. “Just remember, if you are a good foster parent, you are giving children a good start (or restart) for life,” said Kay.
4. Work hard to maintain the connection. Just because you don’t live in the same house doesn’t mean you aren’t connected emotionally. DCFS will support caregivers who support the family after the child is returned home.

Even after the case is closed, foster caregivers can be mentors, “god-parents,” surrogate grandmas, or even short-order cooks when a hungry teen makes a surprise visit.

Drug makers decide to recall cold medicines for infants

Recently, the Nonprescription Drugs Advisory Committee that advises the FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) met and voted to ban some over the counter pediatric cold medicines for children under the age of six. The over the counter pediatric cold medicines of particular concern to the committee are those sold to treat runny noses, coughs, and congestion that contain dextromethorphan and phenylephrine. Medicines that are labeled "DM" generally contain dextromethorphan.

The FDA has not yet officially taken action on the committee recommendations. However, the makers of the following over the counter medicines have voluntarily taken the following products off the market for children under the age of two:

- Dimetapp® Decongestant Plus Cough Infant Drops
- Dimetapp® Decongestant Infant Drops
- Little Colds® Decongestant Plus Cough
- Little Colds® Multi-Symptom Cold Formula
- PEDIACARE® Infant Drops Decongestant (containing pseudoephedrine)
- PEDIACARE® Infant Drops Decongestant & Cough (containing pseudoephedrine)
- PEDIACARE® Infant Dropper Decongestant (containing phenylephrine)
- PEDIACARE® Infant Dropper Long-Acting Cough
- PEDIACARE® Infant Dropper Decongestant & Cough (containing phenylephrine)

- Robitussin® Infant Cough DM Drops
- Triaminic® Infant & Toddler Thin Strips® Decongestant
- Triaminic® Infant & Toddler Thin Strips® Decongestant Plus Cough
- TYLENOL® Concentrated Infants' Drops Plus Cold
- TYLENOL® Concentrated Infants' Drops Plus Cold & Cough

Studies have shown that over the counter cold products are not effective in children in providing relief of cold symptoms or shortening the length of the illness. Children's colds will generally resolve on their own without the assistance of medicines. To help protect your child from getting a cold, there are steps that you can take:

- Encourage your child to cover his/her nose and mouth when he/she coughs or sneezes
- Encourage your child to wash hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available
- Remind your child to avoid touching his/her nose, mouth, and eyes because germs can spread this way

If your child does become sick, there are things that you can do:

- Give your child plenty of fluids
- Do not give your child medicine that is packaged or made for adults.
- Do not give your child more medicine or more often than what is indicated. Too much medicine can lead to serious life threatening side effects.



- Read the information on the package labels of the medicines and products that are being given to your child so that you know the active ingredients and warnings.
- When giving liquid medicine, be careful to give the right amount to avoid accidental overdose. If the medicine does not come with a measuring cup or measuring device, ask your local pharmacy for one.
- If your child is getting two or more prescription medications and/or over the counter products at the same time, consult with your child's primary care physician or pharmacist to make sure that the combination is safe.
- Talk with your child's primary care physician if you have questions or concerns or if the child's condition worsens or does not improve.

For further information about cold medicines or similar topics, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics Web site at: www.aap.org or the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Web site at: www.fda.gov.

Caregivers receive free tax help with the annual tax booklet

It is time to gather the receipts and statements and get ready to do the taxes. Foster caregivers, adoptive parents, and legal guardians can encounter an array of confusing rules and regulations relevant to changing family situations. More importantly, they may not realize that they can often qualify for many tax credits and deductions.

DCFS and the Center for Economic Progress offer the *Tax Booklet for Illinois Foster & Adoptive Parents*. The Tax Booklet clarifies rules and gives examples about a variety of credits, dependency issues, and qualifying children definitions. For example:

- A recent change to Illinois income tax law will provide more earned income tax credit (EITC) to many low-income families with foster children. In the past, foster parents were, in some cases, excluded from receiving state EITC. Effective for tax year 2007, the definition of a qualifying child is the same for both federal and Illinois income tax preparation. Thus, foster children can qualify for the federal credit and the full Illinois EITC credit.

The Illinois EITC is 5% of the federal EITC. The maximum Illinois credit for 2007 is \$236. For Illinois taxpayers with at least one qualifying child, this credit is fully refundable; that is, the taxpayer receives the credit amount even if they owe no tax.

- The Uniform Definition of Child affects many parents of foster and adopted children. One aspect of the law is that foster children no longer have to live in the home for all 12 months of the year to be claimed as dependents.
- A significant benefit for families who adopt is the Adoption Tax Credit. The credit could be up to \$11,390 (an increase this year) for each adopted child with special needs. Any unused portion of the credit can even be carried forward five tax years.
- Taxpayers who receive an adoption subsidy can use the tax credit to exclude income, and potentially pay less taxes. This applies even if there were no actual expenses associated with the adoption. This benefit phases out at higher income levels.

These topics and many others are covered in detail in the easy-to-follow booklet. You will also find various tools and resources, such as free instruction books, phone numbers, and Web sites relevant to tax issues faced by foster and adoptive parents. The booklet will be mailed in January to the homes of caregivers who receive a board check or subsidy payment.

To further assist families in 2008, the Center for Economic Progress, through its Tax Counseling Project, will offer free tax preparation assistance in 40 Illinois communities.



To find out about a free tax preparation site near you, refer to your Tax Booklet, visit www.centerforprogress.org, or call 312-630-0273 within the Chicago area or 888-827-8511 outside Chicago or 312-701-1326 for the TTY line. Most sites will be open as of January 26, 2008. To qualify for free tax preparation services, family income must be less than \$40,000.

The Tax Booklet is a valuable tool that can save you money at tax time through your own return preparation or by sharing it with your tax preparer. If you do not receive a booklet, request one at taxtraining@centerforprogress.org or by calling 312-252-0280.

The Tax Booklet is provided to caregivers through funding by the DCFS Division of Clinical Services and Professional Development, Office of Foster Parent Support Services.

2008 Reader Survey

Please help us make sure Illinois Families Now and Forever offers what you want to know. After circling your answers on **both** sides, simply fold, seal and mail the survey back. Or visit the DCFS web site at www.state.il.us/dcfs to fill it out on-line. You may also fax both sides to 312-814-4131. Thank you in advance for your input.

CIRCLE: 1=GREAT interest 2=SOME interest 3=NO interest X=NOT applicable

Working Within the Child Welfare System

- | | | | |
|---------|----------------------------------|---------|------------------------------------|
| 1 2 3 X | Foster care rules/procedures | 1 2 3 X | Child and family teams |
| 1 2 3 X | Adoption rules/procedures | 1 2 3 X | Confidentiality |
| 1 2 3 X | Guardianship rules/procedures | 1 2 3 X | System of care service network |
| 1 2 3 X | Governmental rules/legislation | 1 2 3 X | Integrated assessments |
| 1 2 3 X | Licensing policy | 1 2 3 X | Intake/child investigation process |
| 1 2 3 X | Obligations of foster parents | 1 2 3 X | Juvenile Court |
| 1 2 3 X | Recruiting foster/adopt families | 1 2 3 X | Resolving DCFS/agency disputes |
- other topics/comments: _____

Adoption and Guardianship

- | | | | |
|---------|----------------------------------|---------|------------------------------------|
| 1 2 3 X | Financial implications | 1 2 3 X | Subsidy agreement |
| 1 2 3 X | Advocating for the adopted child | 1 2 3 X | Rights and responsibilities |
| 1 2 3 X | Obtaining community resources | 1 2 3 X | Accessing free post-adopt services |
- other topics/comments: _____

Medical and Mental Health

- | | | | |
|---------|-----------------------------|---------|------------------------------------|
| 1 2 3 X | Depression | 1 2 3 X | Developmental disabilities |
| 1 2 3 X | Attachment disorders | 1 2 3 X | Medically-fragile children |
| 1 2 3 X | Eating disorders | 1 2 3 X | Sexual abuse |
| 1 2 3 X | Self-esteem | 1 2 3 X | Resources for medical specialties |
| 1 2 3 X | Fetal alcohol/drug exposure | 1 2 3 X | Resources/info for dental services |
| 1 2 3 X | Asthma | 1 2 3 X | Resources for mental health |
| 1 2 3 X | Diabetes | 1 2 3 X | Using the Public Aid medical card |
- other topics/comments: _____

Education

- | | | | |
|---------|-------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|
| 1 2 3 X | Working with schools/teachers | 1 2 3 X | Tutoring |
| 1 2 3 X | Special education services | 1 2 3 X | DCFS Education Advisors |
| 1 2 3 X | Scholarships | 1 2 3 X | Education after high school |
- other topics/comments: _____

Age-related Topics

- | | | | |
|---------|-----------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------|
| 1 2 3 X | Early childhood intervention | 1 2 3 X | Independent Living |
| 1 2 3 X | Tantrums, biting, aggression | 1 2 3 X | Services for teens |
| 1 2 3 X | Safety (home, playground, school) | 1 2 3 X | Housing for transitioning teens |
| 1 2 3 X | Pre-teen sexuality | 1 2 3 X | Youth Advisory Boards |
| 1 2 3 X | Teen sexuality | 1 2 3 X | Runaways |
- other topics/comments: _____

Family Life

- | | | | |
|---------|--------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 2 3 X | Behavior management/discipline | 1 2 3 X | Foster/adoptive family networking |
| 1 2 3 X | Sibling rivalry | 1 2 3 X | Family traditions/activities |
| 1 2 3 X | Impact of placement changes | 1 2 3 X | Camps |
| 1 2 3 X | Handling stress | 1 2 3 X | Arts, music, sports activities |
| 1 2 3 X | Family therapy/counseling | 1 2 3 X | Travel |
| 1 2 3 X | Self-care for parents | 1 2 3 X | Free services, products |
- other topics/comments: _____

Tell us how you feel about the regular features currently offered in each issue:

CIRCLE: 1=GREAT interest 2=SOME interest 3=NO interest X=NOT applicable

Regular Features

- | | | | |
|---------|--|---------|----------------------------------|
| 1 2 3 X | Director's Message | 1 2 3 X | Family for Me photos of children |
| 1 2 3 X | Foster/adoptive parent profiles | 1 2 3 X | Regional edition insert |
| 1 2 3 X | Tell It Like It Is question/answer | 1 2 3 X | Training schedule |
| 1 2 3 X | Movin' On Up (for transitioning youth) | | |

other topics/comments: _____

Fold here _____

Vanessa James, Editor
Families Now and Forever
IL Department of Children and Family Services
James R. Thompson Center
100 W. Randolph, 6th Floor
Chicago, IL 60601

Fold here _____

Please tell us about yourself:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| _____ # foster children currently in your home | _____ # children by birth |
| _____ # children you have adopted | _____ private agency supervised home |
| _____ # foster children previously in your home | _____ DCFS office supervised home |
| _____ # children you have taken guardianship of | _____ relative caregiver (yes / no) |
| | _____ DCFS/agency staff (yes / no) |

Circle your DCFS region: Cook Central Cook North Cook South Southern Northern Central

Would you be interested in receiving the newsletter by e-mail? Yes No

Would you be interested in reviewing the newsletter on the DCFS website? Yes No

What do you like **best** about the newsletter? _____

What do you like **least** about the newsletter? _____

Other comments: _____

Please offer your Name, Address and Phone Number, if you wish.



Subsidy ends at 18 with 2 exceptions

As youth approach 18, they often look at that birthday as a beginning. Still, practically speaking, it is often an end to the adoption or guardianship subsidy agreement. Six months before the youth's 18th birthday, the family will receive a letter from DCFS titled Notice Of Intent to Discontinue Subsidy Payments on 18th Birthday. On the youth's 18th birthday, the many benefits in the subsidy including the medical card may also end. There are only two specific circumstances where the subsidy could continue beyond 18. Both require preparation and necessary documentation from the family, **before** the child turns 18.

The only two conditions that could qualify for extending the subsidy are:

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

A child must be coded as an exception for one or the other but cannot qualify for both. Either exception must be confirmed with DCFS before the 18th birthday.

Parents should be aware that an 18-year old high school senior cannot get a subsidy extension for high school and come back at 19 to extend the subsidy because of a physical or mental disability.

The disability extension only applies for a condition that affects the individual's major life activities. If a child is eligible for SSI (Supplemental Security Income) from the Social Security Administration (SSA), then the disability requirement is met to extend the subsidy.

To document a disability, a parent or guardian can send a copy of the letter indicating the child is eligible for SSI. Other acceptable documentation would include a copy of a report or letter from a duly licensed or credentialed professional within the last year. **All documentation needs to go to the subsidy worker (as listed on the notification letter) before the child's 18th birthday.** For youth without disabilities, the high school can provide a letter confirming enrollment and anticipated graduation date.

Parents must respond to the notification letter before the child's birthday, when the subsidy automatically ends. Parents or guardians seeking an extension should gather documentation well before the child turns 18. Contact the subsidy worker directly with questions or use one of the regional numbers:

- Cook County: 866-538-8892
- Northern Region: 630-844-8400
- Central Region: 309-671-7900
- Southern Region: 618-583-2189

Child research studies mom and dad

Anyone who ever vowed never to do to their children what their parents did, may be interested in a new research study. A researcher from Walden University is examining how a caregiver's own parental relationships may impact permanency outcomes for foster children.

"My research about the parents of parents who have adopted or fostered children with special needs may provide valuable help to other families," said Patricia Somers.

The questionnaires she has developed focus on caregivers' relationships with their mother and father and other people close to them. Somers hopes that the information gained from her research will help child welfare agencies match children and prospective caregivers more effectively, and minimize the trauma that can result from multiple moves.

Somers is an adoptive parent and works as a counselor in the Western suburbs. She also serves as an adjunct faculty member at the College of DuPage and at Benedictine University.

Caregivers who wish to participate in the survey can do so on-line at www.parentshelp.us. The questionnaires take about 10 minutes to complete. All responses are anonymous. Approval to conduct this research was granted by Walden University and DCFS. Somers can be reached at patsomers1@gmail.com.



Preservation services can help keep families together

"Our son had been with us since he was four months old. We had basic information in the beginning, but then the big stuff started coming out. Right after the adoption when he was five, we started having a lot of problems – aggression, emotional and behavioral problems. He went through several schools really quick.

It became a nightmare. We didn't know what to do. We had people say just give him up. There were several times we were at our wits' end and we did not know how it was going to work out.

I felt like I was stuck on a deserted island with no one to talk to. There was no one I could trust.

Lynn from Adoption Preservation was really a life preserver for us. Finally, someone understood. There was someone who knew that we loved our son and wanted the best for him. We had someone to help us get the help he needed and we needed to be his parents."

-Suzanne and Robert Majors

Families created by adoption or guardianship are just like other families and at the same time can face difficulties that no other family could anticipate. While it may not happen often, sometimes a family gets off course. That is when the Adoption and Guardianship Preservation Program can help a family hold it all together.

The Adoption and Guardianship Preservation Program helps families who often feel they are at

the end of their rope, by offering family-centered support and services. They serve the whole family, not just the identified child, to keep the family together.

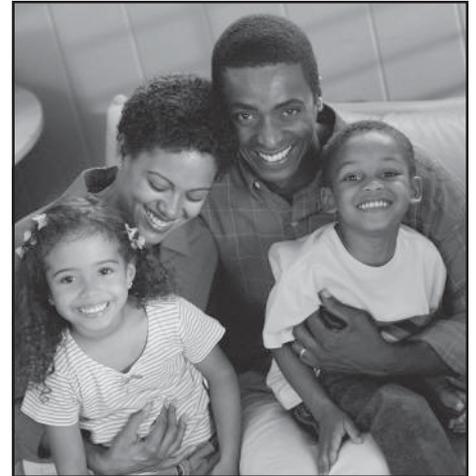
The Majors family (names have been changed) reached out to Matthews and Associates, one of the Adoption Preservation programs in Southern region. Suzanne found a steady source of support in Lynn Blanton, the therapist assigned to help her family.

"Lynn helped a lot with getting us the things that we needed—what Mikey needed. She was a mentor, savior. I could sit and vent and not be looked at like some nut. Matthews and Associates stood by us," said Majors.

"One of the primary reasons children come to us is that they don't know how to attach. The couple adopted the child, but they are not really a family," said Blanton. "We can teach the parents how to work with the kids so the kids can learn to adapt. We teach the child what is appropriate parenting and we teach the families how to handle things on their own after they graduate."

"We were determined to figure out a way to get what he needed. But we as his parents needed to know what we needed to do.

The preservation staff provide both knowledge and skills for the family unit with a variety of options, depending on the situation:



Comprehensive Assessment/ Crisis Intervention

Preservation staff will respond by phone within 24 hours and make an in-home visit within three days. A therapist will help a family identify their own strengths, complete an assessment and develop a family treatment plan within 30 days of the referral.

Clinical Services

The therapist will provide the clinical services identified in the family treatment plan.

Support Groups

Support groups are offered for both parents and youth at varying times and locations.

Case Management/ Advocacy Services

The preservation agency will provide some case management and advocacy services by linking families with other service providers, participating in staffings and by supporting the family while providing the services identified in the treatment plan.

Children's Mental Health Advocacy Services

Most preservation agencies have a person on staff who is knowledgeable in the area of mental health. If a child has significant mental health needs, the program will facilitate the recommended services.

Cash Assistance

If a family participating in the program experiences economic hardships or requires specialized services that cannot be obtained through other resources, a cash assistance payment (limited to \$500 per family per fiscal year) may be provided.

When Suzanne Majors thinks back to 1999 (or maybe 1998) when she first turned to the Adoption Preservation program, the actual details get cloudy. The turmoil within the family was so great that the specifics are hard to recall.

"Mikey is 13 years old now and tall enough to look me in the eye. He is still our son and we love him. I just took his file down and started throwing the old paperwork away. I don't need it to remind me what that time was like, and now we can look ahead," she said.

Adoption and Guardianship Preservation services are available at no charge to families who moved to permanency through DCFS. Several agencies have contracts to provide the service in communities across the state. Families, at any point after moving to adoption or guardianship can contact the preservation program in their area.

Adoption Preservation Agencies

DCFS Cook County Regions

Catholic Charities/Chicago
312-655-8357

Metropolitan Family Services/Chicago
773-884-3310

Families in Cook County can contact either agency for service

DCFS Northern Region

Children's Home + Aid/Rockford
815-962-1043

Counties: Boone, Carroll, DeKalb, Jo Daviess, Lee, Ogle, Rock Island, Stephenson, Winnebago and Whiteside

Metropolitan Family Services/Wheaton
630-682-1802

Counties: DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will

Lutheran Social Services/Bradley
815-936-9166
County: Kankakee

DCFS Central Region

Cornerstone/Quincy
217-222-8254

Counties: Adams, Brown, Calhoun*, Hancock, Pike and Schylur
* Families in this county are served by two agencies, according to address. Call to be referred to the appropriate agency.

Family Service Center/Springfield
217-528-8406

Counties: Cass, Christian, Greene, Macoupin, Menard, Montgomery, Morgan, Sangamon and Scott

Lutheran Social Services/Peoria
309-671-0300

Counties: Bureau, Fulton, Henderson, Henry, Knox, LaSalle, Logan, Marshall, Mason, McDonough, Mercer, Moultrie, Peoria, Putnam, Shelby, Stark, Tazewell, Warren and Woodford

Lutheran Social Services/Bradley
815-936-9166

Counties: Clark, Coles, Cumberland, Edgar, Iroquois and Vermilion

The Baby Fold

309-454-1770

Counties: Champaign, DeWitt, Douglas, Ford, Livingston, Logan, Macon, McLean and Piatt

Children's Home + Aid/Granite City

618-452-8900

Counties: Calhoun*, Jersey, and Macoupin*

*Families in this county are served by two agencies, according to address. Call to be referred to the appropriate agency.

DCFS Southern Region

Children's Home + Aid/Granite City

618-452-8900

Counties: Bond, Clinton, Madison, Monroe, Randolph, St. Clair and Washington

Matthews & Associates/Herrin
618-988-1330

Counties: Alexander, Clay, Crawford, Edwards, Effingham, Fayette, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson, Johnson, Lawrence, Marion, Massac, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Richland, Saline, Union, Wabash, Wayne, White and Williamson

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!

Here's what you had to say about the question: *Do you think having a pet in the home makes a difference when caring for children?*

Having a pet teaches children unconditional love. They can create a feeling of safeness for the child. He knows if the animal is taken care of, I am taken care of. Sometimes it's someone for them to share secrets and quiet times with. Pets bring happiness in the house. I do respect children who are afraid and I don't force animals on them. There are many pros that outweigh the cons.

Joyce B., Addison

It might be advantageous to parents to get a dog. It took a year to get the right dog. He loves them they love him. He sleeps in the room with one and checks in on the other. He is so responsive to everything. The boys want to brush the dog's teeth and take care of him. I have to fight with them to take care of themselves, but not the dog. That dog is an asset to the family.

Vernon Johnson, Chicago

Sometimes if the foster family has a pet and they have a foster kid, the kid gets close to the dog and then they can get closer to the family. Sometimes the child could be mean, but with love from the dog, he could change. After he learned that he had hurt someone's feelings he would learn to say sorry.

Maya Scott James, age 7

We've always had 1 or 2 dogs, and often had cats as well. I'm a single parent, and despite the extra work that pets can be, I always felt that the pets were essential to raising kids, especially kids who've been through a lot. I call the pets the "live-in therapists." When everyone else in the house is mad at a kid, they can always find a dog or cat that will cuddle up and listen to them. All my kids always had chores, and one of the least controversial was always taking the dog for a walk. When you're new and unfamiliar in the neighborhood, walking a dog up and down the block gives you a reason to go out and meet some of the kids playing out there. Of course, it's essential to have kid-friendly pets. And I always made sure I watched a new kid carefully with the animals so the animals didn't get mistreated.

Connie Catellani

The new question is: *Do you think support groups are helpful to families providing foster care or adoption? If so, what works. If not, what is missing?*

You can contact me with your response by e-mail at Vanessa.James@illinois.gov or by phone at 312-814-6824.

Add your support group to the 2008 listing

If you lead a support group or association for foster or adoptive families, you can be included in the Directory of Support Groups, published in May.

Please send the following information by March 1:

- Name of group
- Meeting schedule (e.g. 2nd Tuesday monthly at 10:00 a.m.)
- Meeting location
- Contact name with phone number/or e-mail
- Any other notes (e.g. potluck dinner, child care provided, etc.)

New listings and updates should be sent in writing by e-mail or post to:

Vanessa.james@illinois.gov
Vanessa Scott James
DCFS
100 W. Randolph, 6-200
Chicago, IL 60601

A family for me

Zachary [7154] Zachary, 14, is an outgoing young man with a great personality and sense of humor. He keeps everyone around him laughing. Zachary loves sports, including football, baseball, soccer, and basketball. He also enjoys working with his hands on art projects. Recently, he's gotten very interested in reading and has been devouring all kinds of books. He is good at debating and is thinking about becoming a lawyer when he grows up.

His worker said Zachary is very intelligent, engaging, and mature. Zachary enjoys group activities like bowling and miniature golf. Zachary will do well in a family that can provide both nurturing and structure. The right parent for Zachary will take the time to have good conversations with him and listen to his thoughts and ideas.

Geoffrey [7626] Geoffrey, 16, is an outgoing, thoughtful young man. He enjoys sports, especially baseball, basketball, and swimming. He is very creative, too, and draws and writes poems in his spare time. In school, Geoffrey works hard and achieves As and Bs. He loves animals and likes to take care of dogs.

His worker and teachers said Geoffrey is a nice young man who is a pleasure to be around. He is caring and considerate towards others. The forever family for Geoffrey would be caring and supportive. Geoffrey said he'd like to join a family that has positive moral values and a good sense of humor.

Joshua [7270] Joshua, 13, is a smart, articulate young man who communicates well with people of all ages. He enjoys playing basketball and soccer with his friends. He relaxes by watching cartoons and wrestling on TV.

His foster parent said she enjoys Joshua's company and they go on walks together in the afternoon. Joshua's teachers speak highly of him and say that he is a delight to work with. Potential parents to Joshua would be patient and nurturing, and you could provide Joshua with plenty of one-on-one attention. Joshua said that he would like to join a family that is kind to one another.

Michael [7602] Michael, 10, is a talented young man with lots of imagination and creativity. He loves to draw pictures of cars, trucks, and superheroes on his Magna-Doodle sketch board. He also likes to read all kinds of books, including long mystery novels. When Michael is feeling more outgoing, he plays with his foster brother on the family's trampoline. In school, his favorite subjects are science and social studies.

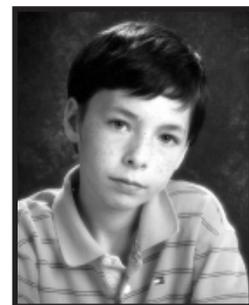
His foster mother said that Michael is loveable and affectionate. He's always glad to give her a hug. His worker said Michael is a warm and caring guy. He has a great sense of humor and lots of interesting and insightful things to say. Michael's forever family should be able to provide him with lots of kindness and attention.



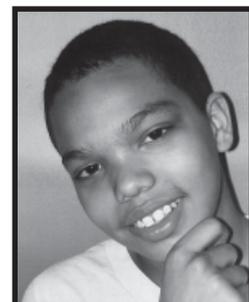
Geoffrey (7626)



Joshua (7270)



Michael (7602)



Zachary (7154)

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



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*

Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor

Publisher:

Office of Foster Parent Support
Services, Velma Williams, Deputy
Director

Editor: Vanessa James

Phone: 312-814-6824

Fax: 312-814-4131

E-mail: Vanessa.James@illinois.gov

Regional Editors

Central – Sam Saladino

Northern – Rafael Serrano

Southern – Michael Bollman

Cook North – Ami Joof

Cook Central – Merrylee Guge-
Jorgenson

Cook South – Rod Mulford

Graphics: Jenny Florent

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Vanessa James, Editor
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Register now for the DCFS conferences and institutes – See pages 4 – 6!

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