

## Twists and turns don't stop this foster family

Persistence is not a word taken lightly in the foster home of Valerie Kirby and Bandy Eller. When these foster parents make a commitment to a child, they mean it. Despite what seemed like setbacks, Katrina\* is finally home to stay.

When Valerie and Bandy were licensed in 1999, they were primarily interested in adopting. They met that goal a year later when they adopted two children: Rose in June 2000 and Zachary later the same year. Neither was ready quit, and consequently about two years later they agreed to accept a child for a traditional foster placement. Unfortunately, that setting did not prove best for all of the children involved, and ended with a move.

Though disappointed, Val and Bandy maintained their foster care license. In 2006, their licensing representative approached them with the possibility of becoming a resource for 14-year-old Katrina. She had just disrupted a residential placement and was in juvenile detention. Though she was somewhat older than their licensed age range, both Val and Bandy agreed that Katrina's unique history and current issues were ones that they felt comfortable addressing.

They agreed to a pre-placement visit. They traveled to the detention center and met with Katrina and her worker on a couple of occasions, eventually deciding that they wanted to parent her in their home.

However, the caseworker felt Katrina still had further issues to resolve and would benefit from another placement in residential treatment. Undeterred, Valerie and Bandy maintained their commitment and kept the visits going. Moreover, they were willing to participate in any therapy necessary to have her eventually join their family through adoption.

For the next 12 months, Val and Bandy maintained their connection. Katrina visited two weekends a month and they participated in counseling sessions by phone. Even though issues arose on some of the visits, the pair was willing to work on addressing these with the help of the residential therapist. The case took another unexpected turn in mid-Spring 2006, when it was decided not to pursue termination of parental rights, ruling out adoption. Still, Val and Bandy maintained their desire to be Katrina's foster family, and eventually she was placed at the end of the 2006 school year.



Valerie Kirby

In retrospect, Val indicated that she was grateful for the extended pre-placement period, as it provided them with an opportunity to regularly assess Katrina's progress with her therapist. Val said, "It was overwhelming for her. There's a lot of difference in living in a foster home rather than a residential environment. We worked a lot of that out beforehand."

Neither Val or Bandy view their extended commitment as out of the ordinary. "If it's what you have to do, then that's what you do," noted Valerie. "I think you need to locate resources at least six months in advance. You have a much better chance of success with kids if you commit a little farther out."

*\*Name changed to protect the youth's privacy*

## Twin county foster group stays strong

The Twin County Foster Parent Support Group only covers Marion and Clay counties, but is certainly among the most active groups in the Southern Region.

The group formed eight years ago and has steadily developed a network of local businesses and individuals to support foster parents and the foster children they care for.

Fundraisers are held throughout the year, including concession stands at parades, chili-soup suppers, and pizza sales. The group partnered with Wal-Mart, which matches the monies raised by the group's activities.

In August, a Back-To-School event at the Salem Pizza Hut provided discount pizzas for approximately 35 foster children. After the meal, leaders of the support group presented each school-age foster child a \$10.00 Wal-Mart gift card to be used for purchase of school supplies.

The Twin County Group holds a variety of child-oriented events during the year. These include a Fall Festival as well as an annual Christmas party. The group meets on the second Tuesday of every month at 6:30 p.m. at the Marion County Saving Bank Annex Building in Salem. Those interested in attending should contact Robin Simpson at 618-775-6347 to confirm the location.

## Human Services Network Council fills in the gaps for youth and families in need



*Cindy Draege*

Southern Region adoption specialist Cindy Draege is a busy person. Not only does she work with adoption cases throughout the Marion sub-region, she also finds the time and energy to play an active role as the president of the Human Services Network Council.

Since the 1980s, it has functioned as a conduit connecting valuable resources and creative programs to youth and children in Jefferson, Hamilton, and Wayne counties.

When the Council learned that there was a need to provide clothing to children who had been removed from "meth homes" Cindy volunteered to write a grant to meet this need. She was the primary author of a \$6,000 grant that allowed the Council to develop a non-contaminated clothing program for these children. The program insures that children have clean clothing and personal items that have not been affected by the methamphetamine manufacturing process. The grant also allowed the Council to continue already existing programs. These included a resource manual for Jefferson, Wayne, and Hamilton counties and the Head Lice Program utilized by school districts to treat children and educate parents in families where this is a problem.

More recently, Draege submitted a new grant on behalf of the HRNC to the United Way and was awarded \$10,000. This will promote an expansion of the resource manual to five additional counties (Marion, Clinton, Washington, Richland, Clay) as well as providing ongoing support for the Non-Contaminated Clothing and Head Lice Program. It also provided funds to purchase "life books" for children in substitute care, and allow them to maintain connections to their birth family.

The HRNC played an important role in DCFS' graduation awards ceremony held on August 1. Draege enlisted the support of the HRNC and other community groups and was able to provide all the youth with sheets, blankets, desk lamps, alarm clocks, and backpacks filled with personal items. DCFS LAN Liaison Kay Teel, who was one of the organizers of the event said, "It was just the neatest thing. Every youth got things they really needed. Cindy did a great job and her efforts were much appreciated."

Anyone who would like more information about the Council's activities, or a copy of the resource manual can call 618-244-1817.

## Southern Region foster parent training program moves to DCFS

The Foster and Adoptive Parent Training offices at SIU-Edwardsville and Carbondale will be closing at the end December. However, training for Southern Region families will continue and will be coordinated by the DCFS Office of Training in Springfield. The schedule of upcoming classes remains on page four of the Our Kids regional insert. The Office of Training also will continue to mail a training schedule to foster and adoptive parent homes.

This reorganization is preempting a plan to centralize foster parent training in July at the start of the state's next fiscal year. Southern Illinois University

decided not to renew its existing contract to coordinate training for the first half of the new year. Even as DCFS moves forward in solidifying upcoming course offerings, it is difficult not to look back.

"We had a long partnership with SIU Edwardsville and Carbondale. The Training Coordinators Pat Eckert and Terry Bast were always trying to bring higher visibility to the training program and make training fun and the best quality it could be," said Jean Maher, DCFS Manager for Statewide Foster and Adoptive Parent Training.

As the Foster and Adoptive Parent Training Program moves under one administrative umbrella, the contributions of the coordinators will be missed but not set aside. Caregivers should anticipate the same level of responsiveness, attention to detail and dedication through the transition.

Call the toll-free number 877-800-3393 to register for a course, request a copy of a foster parent transcript or ask for help with any question related to the foster and adoptive parent training program.

## Advisory Council set for new year

The Southern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council held its final meeting of the year on November 1 in Mt. Vernon. All council members reviewed and signed off on the Region's 2007 Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan.

In 2006, the Advisory Council faced the challenges that came with the region-wide reorganization. Trainings on the Foster Parent Law in September and October were a first step in helping new placement workers and foster parents develop better relationships and brainstorm on ways to work more effectively as a team.

In 2007, the Council will continue the practice of having field offices host meetings for foster parents and workers. Although the focus and content of these meetings will vary from site to site, they will be an opportunity for foster parents to become more involved with the Advisory Council and to provide input, ideas, and suggestions to not only the regional and statewide councils as well. A list of these meetings will be mailed to all foster parents as soon as it becomes available.

If you are interested in learning more about the Foster Parent Advisory Council, contact Michael Bollman, Co-Chair, in the Fairview Heights Office at 618-398-2100.

### OUR KIDS

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

## Southern Region Training Calendar

### Important Information!

**The DCFS Office of Foster Parent Training is realigning the training offerings in the Southern Region and statewide.**

**To register for training courses or for more information, please call 877-800-3393.**

### DCFS Lending Library offers alternatives for education credits

The DCFS Lending Library can be used as an alternative for obtaining approved training credit for license renewal. The Lending Library is a resource to allow foster and adoptive parents access to a multitude of books, audio cassettes and videos for self-directed training in parenting and family life. The materials span 17 categories.

Licensed foster and adoptive parents can borrow materials for a two-week period at no charge. The order form is available in the 3rd Edition of the Lending Library Catalog, which can also be viewed on the DCFS web site at [www.state.il.us/dcf](http://www.state.il.us/dcf).

#### Excerpts from the many titles available to borrow

**When a Child or Youth is Sexually Abused...A Guide for Youth, Parents, and Caregivers**

*by Children's Aid Society Foundation*

Foster parents can read this comprehensive booklet or listen

to the audio cassette. Both give the same overview of child sexual abuse focusing on the caregiver/child relationship after disclosure. The information contained in this booklet/audio cassette is valuable to all caregivers of children who were sexually abused.

Reading Level: Easy  
Credit: 1 hour

**Bruised Before Birth: Parenting Children Exposed to Parental Substance Abuse**  
*by Amy Bullock, Elizabeth Grimes and Joan McNamara*

This book introduces and describes the signs and effects of a child that was prenatally exposed to drugs. It offers various parenting tools, techniques, and strategies that may assist in positive and effective caretaking.

Reading Level: Easy to Moderate  
Credit: 2 hours

### Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions =  
6 training hours

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

**BELLEVILLE**  
**Catholic Social Serv.**

Dec. 13 & 20      6:30-9:30 p.m.  
(Wed)

**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS**  
**DCFS Office**

Dec. 4 & 11      6:30-9:30 p.m.  
(Mon)

### FosterPRIDE In-Service Modules

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

**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS**  
**Ramada Inn**

Dec. 4, 11 & 18      6:30-9:30 p.m.  
(Mon)