

## Warf family tells both sides of fostering teens

### *From the youth:*

Three years ago when Angel Goodsell was first placed with Angie and Brian Warf her outlook and behavior were in a negative spin. She was unconcerned about her education, had adopted a "goth" lifestyle in her dress and interests, and engaged in minor delinquent activities. Lacking significant family supports, she was by her own admission, "pretty much doing what I wanted."

After DCFS intervened, Angel was placed with Angie and Brian Warf. Even Angel would have to agree that the first seven months were a difficult period.

"They didn't give up," she said, despite the fact that her attitude remained defiant and she was reluctant to allow herself to become part of the family. "They always treated me like family," she said. "Even though I thought I didn't deserve it."

As Angel realized that they were not going to give up on her, she began to make changes in her attitude and behavior. The gothic look was the first to go, and she began taking pride in her appearance. Next, the Warf's focus on education began to pay off, and Angel's commitment to school got solid and her performance took off. She is currently a senior ranked 90<sup>th</sup> in her class of 365, was named to the High Honor Roll in the fall, and is in the running for a Coca-Cola scholarship. Her plans now include attending Rend Lake college for two years then

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### *From the caregivers:*

It will be a long time before Angie and Brian Warf of rural Mt. Vernon experience the empty-nest syndrome. The Warfs have three children of their own ranging in age from 19 through 9 years. In the last seven years, they have fostered 25 children. The Warfs have always taken teen placements, and in many respects they prefer older youth.



"Teens are independent, but can take redirection," said Angie. "We enjoy helping them work through their issues."

Sometimes those issues simmer and other times come to a head quickly. According to Angie, Angel did not have the traditional honeymoon period.

"We were dealing with her issues right away," she said. "We really had to be patient."

The Warf's patient approach, flexibility, and firm resolve eventually had its intended affect with Angel and other teens. The Warfs have seen nearly all of their placements, young, and old alike, achieve permanency, primarily due to success in returning children to their parents. That is due in part to the stability that children have enjoyed while placed with them. From Angie's perspective, the key to their approach is being flexible and willing to listen.

"We don't have a list of rules," she said. "We take it day by day and focus on being honest and open. What we're looking for is slow, steady improvements in communication and trust."

## Licensing visits go smoothly with preparation

Foster caregivers can sometimes feel like it would be easier to replace your front door with one that revolves. The children that come in and out can be outnumbered by the child welfare staff that come for regular visits. Sometimes it's welcomed, other times it can be at the very least inconvenient. Monitoring visits required for licensing can go smoothly with a bit of preparation.

DCFS regulations require that twice a year, a licensing representative, family development specialist or worker by another name (depending on your licensing agency) will come to your home for a monitoring visit. The purpose is to confirm that the home continues to meet licensing standards for safety. The licensing worker must do a physical check of the home, completing a list of safety items and compliance with agency rules. These items need to be checked and documented. Newly licensed homes will have the first monitoring visit at 60 days. After that, everyone gets a visit every six months as long as they keep their license open. This can seem redundant, particularly for long-term caregivers who have done countless monitoring visits. Yet, there is more to the licensing visit than a checklist.

"I would like to see staff work more closely with the people who are currently fostering our youth and be more of a support to them," said Steven Minter, DCFS Licensing Administrator.

Licensing staff help make sure that caregivers can meet children's needs. When the physical aspects of the home are settled, they can help support the family through other licensing aspects such as training and placement issues. Since DCFS moved to a placement model to match youth to homes nearest their schools, open foster homes go into a foster home availability database. Foster caregivers should have discussions with their licensing representative about their capacity for potential placements.

To work through the necessary items more efficiently, caregivers can prepare for an upcoming monitoring visit with the following simple steps:

- Have driver's license and proof of auto insurance available
- Confirm that your home has working smoke detectors and a carbon monoxide detector
- Check that there are no flammable materials near the furnace and hot water heater areas
- Make sure that you still have dangerous household chemicals, cleaning products and medications stored appropriately in areas inaccessible to young children
- For pets, have proof of up to date inoculations available
- If possible, re-check your hot water temperature before the visit. Licensing standards require hot water to be no higher than 115 degrees
- If you have foster children in your home, have updated

records available such as personal allowance and clothing logs and receipts, medication and behavior logs.

Completing these activities prior to your bi-annual monitoring visit will not only make things go more quickly, but will prevent your licensing worker from having to re-visit your home to ensure compliance at a later date. If your home is out of compliance with licensing standards during the monitoring visit, you will be placed on involuntary hold. Your licensing worker will explain what you need to do to meet the regulations and have the hold removed.

### Angel, con't.

heading off to Eastern Illinois University. She hopes to major in Special Education with a concentration in working with autistic children.

Angel formally became a "real" member of the Warf household in September 2006 when Brian and Angie assumed subsidized guardianship of Angel. Though adoption was also an option at that time, for her own reasons Angel felt more comfortable with the guardianship option.

"They showed me what love means and that's what I needed," she said. "Guardianship and adoption are really the same thing to me. I have a family now, and that's what's important."

## Holiday spirit spread throughout Southern region

*The Southern Region is pleased that so many organizations and individuals, even beyond those listed on this page, helped to make the holidays bright for families.*

The Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition (FACC) in St Louis, which provides services to Metro-East foster and adoptive families, partnered with KSDK-TV to sponsor the third annual Holiday Wishes program. Foster parents in the Metro-East area received a gift catalog in October from which they chose two gifts and one special wish per foster child. Adopted children also could make a special wish. Using first names only, the children were then identified on the FACC website and the program publicized on KSDK from October through December. Members of the public purchased gifts or granted wishes online, and FACC insured that all of the presents were delivered. In 2007, over 900 gifts were purchased and over 80 special wishes granted for children in the Metro-East area.

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Catholic Charities in Effingham serves 11 counties in East and South Central Illinois. A local business, Mid-America Corvette has "adopted" the agency's foster care program during the holidays for the past few years. Employees all contributed towards the purchase of gifts for Catholic Charity's foster children and delivered those presents to the Effingham office. Case managers then distributed them. This year over 35 children received gifts.

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The Metro-East Foster Parent Association, in conjunction with the East St Louis Field Office placement team, held their second annual Christmas party on December 14<sup>th</sup> for foster caregivers and children, parents, and DCFS staff. The evening event featured Santa Claus, games, seasonal music and gifts for all the children. The foster parent association, using money generated throughout the year by bake sales, dinners, and personal donations, funded the activities. Over 100 people attended the event, which was held at the Caseyville Township Hall.

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A 20-year tradition continued in Union County during the holiday season. Addus Healthcare and Family Services workers Debbie Jackson and Karen Funkhouser, who work primarily from the DCFS Anna Field Office, again coordinated a countywide gift and food distribution program for foster children and their families. Community interest in this is so great that the pair can accept referrals for children and families from other agencies and organizations such as Public Aid, Head Start and schools. Debbie and Karen matched children to various community sponsors, including businesses, churches, and individuals. They arranged to deliver gifts in time for Christmas. The program also included referrals for food vouchers and an Angel Tree at Wal-Mart. Over 200 families and 450 children participated this year.

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Children's Home and Aid offices in the Metro-East again sponsored a holiday party for foster families, agency staff, and supervisors. This year the event was held at the Edwardsville YMCA and featured a potluck meal, a visit from Santa, distribution of donated gifts to foster children and parents, and free roller skating for all. More than 60 people attended the event this year.

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Catholic Social Services in Belleville held their annual Christmas Party for foster families and children at the Fun Spot Skating rink. Over 250 people attended, including CSS staff and supervisors. Guests enjoyed a raffle, a potluck dinner, gifts distributed by Santa, and roller skating for all.

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Catholic Social Services of Southern Illinois continued with their long-standing Secret Santa program for all the agency's foster children in the Southern Region. Children completed wish lists that were reviewed by case managers for appropriateness. Many "Santas" in the community purchased the gifts and took them to the agency's office. Case managers then distributed the gifts to foster families in time for Christmas. More than 300 children received gifts through this program. Also, in the spirit of the holidays, CSS included approximately 60 foster children served by the Children's Home and Aid office in East St. Louis.

# Southern Region Training Calendar

## Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Training. Advance registration is required. Training dates, times and locations are subject to change.

### Module 4 - *The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse* (9 training hours)

Participants learn to differentiate normal from problematic sexual behaviors in children and youth, signs and symptoms of sexual abuse and ways to help sexually abused children recover.

**Marion** *The Pavilion*  
 March 4, 6 & 11 6-9 p.m.  
 (Tue/Thu)

### Module 12 - *Understanding and Promoting Preteen and Teen Development* (6 training hours)

This new course will assist Caregivers to identify developmentally appropriate ways to best promote healthy develop-

ment for preteens and teens who have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma. This six-hour module will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand the teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use while fostering teenagers.

**Fairview Heights** *DCFS Office*  
 Feb. 5 & 12 (Tue) 6-9 p.m.

**Mt. Vernon** *DCFS Office*  
 Feb. 13 & 20 (Wed) 6-9 p.m.

### *Attachment and the Teen in Family Foster Care* (6 training hours)

**Mt. Vernon** *DCFS Office*  
 Feb. 27 & March 5 6-9 p.m.  
 (Wed)

**Belleville** *Catholic Social Services*  
 March 6 & 13 (Thu) 6-9 p.m.

## Educational Advocacy

6 training hrs.

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

**Mt. Vernon** *DCFS Office*  
 Mar. 11 & 18 (Mon) 6-9 p.m.

**Godfrey** *Church of the Nazarene*  
 March 22 (Sat) 9 a.m.-Noon  
 April 5 (Sat) 9 a.m.-Noon

**Belleville** *Catholic Social Services*  
 March 8 & 15 (Sat) 9 a.m.-Noon

**Fairview Heights** *DCFS Office*  
 April 5 & 12 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.  
 (Sat)

## 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.

## Child Trauma

4 training hrs.

This four-hour course helps caregivers recognize the signs of trauma and understand how to work with children who have experienced trauma.

**Fairview Heights** *Ramada Inn*  
 March 29 (Sat) 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

**Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.**

**Call the DCFS Office of Training**

**877-800-3393**  
**toll free**