

## Unconditional love sets a firm foundation

Namor and Gwendolyn Barnett have been fostering children in their home for more than 15 years. They have discovered how to strike the balance between giving your heart to a child and encouraging them as they work to return home—they just keep pouring out the love no matter what.

Perhaps it is because they have surrounded themselves with children in many circumstances that the difficult task seems doable. The Barnetts have three children by birth. Their daughter by adoption, Cinnamon, 12, has been with them since she was just one month old. In addition, Gwen says, her home was, and is, always full of people and kids. She even operates a day care in the house, and describes home as being nothing less than full of life.

"My front door is always open. I have been taking care of my kids, my nieces and nephews, and the neighborhood kids for years. They always want to come to my house because they know they can," she said.

Gwen and Namor see themselves as natural caretakers who love kids. They feel that anyone who might think they are in fostering

for the glory, or money, would be sadly mistaken.

"It is about the love. You have to make a difference in their lives. As a foster parent I treat them right, because when you love them they become like your own, and they will love you back," she said.

Gwen went on to share a story that illustrates the Barnett's philosophy behind fostering. Recently a young boy was placed in their care, whom she described as "a feisty one." Within the first six months, he had been caught stealing from them. They did not overreact, but they acted quickly. They explained to him that they would not allow this in their home. They also shared that they understood that he likely had never had anyone tell him that what he did was wrong.

When Gwen caught him stealing a second time, she confronted him again, explaining that she and he should be able to put something down without it being stolen. She reminded him of the rules for their home. He ran up to his room in anger, and she suspected he might try to run away. After waiting a few minutes, she went up to talk and decided to use a different strategy. She handed him a piece

of paper and told him to write his last will and testament on it because she would need to know what to do with his stuff when he goes. "Maybe I could sell it and get a nice new Cadillac for myself!" she suggested.

The boy's eyes flew open and he began to howl with laughter. It was then that she knew she had reached a turning point.

He exclaimed, "Ma – you are crazy! And you ain't getting a Cadillac, because I ain't goin' nowhere!"

This boy never stole from them again. Gwen Johnson believes that the Lord put this young man and his mother in her life for a reason.

"I am where I am supposed to be. If it doesn't feel right, or something just isn't working, it is time to change. Sometimes that is just what you need to do," she said.

Over time, Gwen developed a relationship with this boy's mother, who has turned her life around. He has since returned home, but returns to his former foster placement often to visit. His mother sometimes allows him to stay overnight. He still teases her about the Cadillac she missed.

## Holiday wishes from Deborah Palmer-Thomas

I am always glad for the opportunity to take a moment to reflect on the passing year and to send a most heart-felt holiday wish of the season to you—our foster and adoptive families. It is comforting to know that there will always be people like you who answer the call to foster children, and in some cases make them a permanent member of your families. Both are gifts of a generous heart and a caring spirit.

Recently we have seen many changes within the Department, with new processes, reorganized departments, and employee restructuring. All of which, I am sure, had some impact on caregivers. It is important to know that your continued patience, support, and input has not gone unnoticed.

Without your help, there would be many children who would not have a place to call home for the holidays. My appreciation of you extends beyond Christmas, and my good wishes for your family reach far into the future. That is where all of your hard work, sacrifices, and patience will pay off—in the future of the children we serve.

In the spirit of Christmas future, have a joyous and safe holiday season filled with love, and celebration.

## Winnebago County Court celebrates Adoption Month

For the third year running, the county court kept its doors open for a special Saturday session. On November 17, judges celebrated National Adoption Day by making more than 20 new, permanent families.

DCFS adoption specialist Jennifer Zaluckyj helped organize the event this year.

“Many families, court personnel and agency staff all come together to make this day go smoothly. It is very inspiring each year that we do this,” she said.

In the months and weeks leading up to the celebration, adoption specialists and attorneys put in extra effort to get all of the needed paperwork in place so these adoptions could happen during the special session.

Amid balloons, refreshments and gifts donated by child welfare agencies and individuals, families stood before judges who pronounced their families legal and permanent.

Sally and John Humphrey, longtime foster and adoptive parents, passed out balloons and also spoke to the crowd of families waiting to go before the judicial bench. More than 30 years ago, the couple became involved in foster care, even before there was foster parent training. In fact, Sally helped draft the curriculum that

became Foster PRAIDE. She is a Master Trainer and Adoption Support Specialist. Spanning three decades, the family has cared for more than 360 youth including completing two adoptions and a guardianship. Furthermore, their adult children have taken up the cause and done foster care and adoption.

The Humphreys and other families who gathered on National Adoption Day left the court with their official documents and precious memories marking the beginning of new chapter in their family history.

### Northern News

#### Regional Reporter

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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.

## PRIDE training goes digital with new computerized services

The DCFS Office of Training announced that it will soon offer the in-service PRIDE training modules as an interactive CD-ROM format in addition to the traditional classroom format. The digital format will provide any-time, anywhere use, allowing caregivers to receive training, while working around the other responsibilities that compete to for their time.

The nine in-service modules in PRIDE Digital Curriculum use the same combination of co-trainers that are featured in all the PRIDE classroom training programs. A child welfare professional and a foster parent professional guide at-home learners through each module. Using video and an easy-to-use computer format, the computerized course presents the information and recorded discussions from other caregivers, adopted individuals and agency staff with knowledge of Illinois' child welfare system. The digital system takes learners through exercises to test their understanding of the material. It saves exercises so caregivers can document their work for each module.

DCFS continues to work with Governor's State University on this project and the plans for making the digital courseware widely available. Details will be included on the training pages of future issues of this newsletter. Contact Jean Maher of the DCFS Office training at 217-524-3539 for more information.

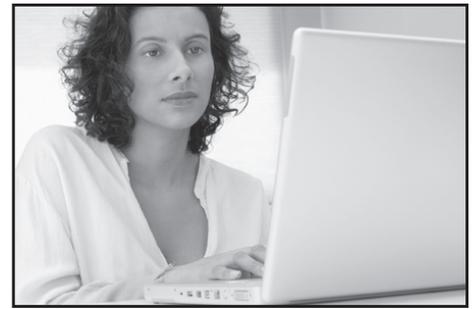
### Virtual Training Center offers on-line convenience

The Virtual Training Center (VTC) is a new on-line learning resource center from the Office of DCFS Training. All caregivers, DCFS or private agency staff or other child welfare partners will be able to access the on-line training center through the Internet at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org). All training registration, current schedules, updated announcements, training transcripts, and learning resources (including the foster parent library), will ultimately be available on-line in the center. The Department is asking each licensed caregiver with both the Department and the private child welfare agencies to register for a VTC account.

With a VTC account, caregivers can see their own transcripts at any time, search for the most up-to-date schedules of classes available, and even search the foster parent library for resources. It will save time by allowing caregivers to register for training on-line using a computer. It will also make it easier for the Department to communicate updates through e-mail.

To start a VTC account, all users need to complete a VTC Training Account form, which only takes a few minutes.

1. Go to the VTC Web site, look in announcements section, and click on the link to the form.



Users can fill it out on-line and submit via e-mail, **or**

2. Complete the form on-line, print it, and fax to the Registration Unit at 217-782-9301, **or**
3. Contact the DCFS Registration Unit at 877-800-3393, and they will e-mail the form. For caregivers who don't have e-mail, the Unit can mail the form or complete it by telephone.

Even caregivers that do not have access to the Internet are still being asked to complete the personal account form to ensure an accurate training profile for them is included in the DCFS database.

The Registration Unit and toll free number 1-877-800-3393 will still be operational after the VTC has been activated. However, the VTC is the gateway to training schedules, on-line registration, accessing your transcripts, and taking on-line classes.

If you have questions, contact Mary Ochman-Ahmed by e-mail at [Mary.Ochman-Ahmed@Illinois.gov](mailto:Mary.Ochman-Ahmed@Illinois.gov) or by phone, at 217-785-5689.

# Northern 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 2 - *Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs* (9 training hours)

*This workshop provides practical information to foster parents about how to use effective discipline techniques such as I-messages, natural and logical consequences, time out and how to catch kids being "good" and what to do to encourage positive behavior.*

**Lockport**      **SOS Children's Village**  
Feb. 5, 7, & 14 (Tue/Thu)    10 a.m.-1 p.m.

### Module 7 - *Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity* (6 training hours)

*Culture includes traditions, values, customs and history. What "culture" means to a child's self-esteem, how to manage cultural diversity in a foster home, how to discuss sensitive issues with children and how to help a child record his or her history are topics covered in this module.*

**Elgin**      **Judson College**  
Dec. 11 & 13 (Tue/Thu)    6:30-9:30 p.m.

## 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 traumatic events.

**Aurora**      **Comfort Suites**  
March 15 (Sat)    9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

**Glen Ellyn**      **Super 8**  
March 4 & 6 (Tue/Thu)    6:30-8:30 p.m.

**Elgin**      **Judson College**  
March 29 (Sat)    9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

### Module 9 - *Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family* (6 training hours)

*In this training caregivers learn how fostering children can affect family relationships and how to minimize stresses that can result and the supports that are available.*

**Aurora**      **Comfort Suites**  
Dec. 4 & 6 (Tue/Thu)    6:30-9:30 p.m.

### Module 11 - *The Teen in Foster Care: Supporting Attachment* (6 training hours)

**Rockford**      **Children's Home + Aid**  
March 8 (Sat)    9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

### 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 development 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 fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.*

**Aurora**      **Comfort Suites**  
Jan. 26 & Feb. 2 (Sat)    9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

## Educational Advocacy

6 training hrs.

It is mandatory for at least 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.

**Aurora**      **Comfort Suites**  
Dec. 1 (Sat)    9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Feb. 25 & 27 (Mon/Wed)    6:30-9:30 p.m.

**Elgin**      **Judson College**  
Dec. 4 & 6 (Tue/Thu)    6:30-9:30 p.m.

**Glen Ellyn**      **Super 8**  
Feb. 27 & Mar. 5 (Wed)    6:30-9:30 p.m.

**Love's Park**      **Illinois Mentor**  
Jan. 8 & 15 (Tue)    6-9 p.m.

**Rockford**      **Children's Home + Aid**  
Feb. 19 & 21 (Tue/Thu)    6:30-9:30 p.m.

**Waukegan**      **Ramada Inn**  
Dec. 1 (Sat)    9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

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

**Call the DCFS Office of Training**

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