

Ihm family focuses on teamwork for every child's goal

Whether it is on a sports field or around a conference table with caseworkers, the Ihm family knows how to work as a team. The Ihms spend countless hours supporting their children's extracurricular activities. They cheer them playing baseball and basketball, and applaud them in plays and musicals. The family roster includes four sons, ages 18, 14, 11 and two, and a 10-year-old daughter. The five children took part in the decision when Patty and Dan contemplated adding to their family through foster care in 2005. The foster care experience has helped everyone become an expert in teamwork as they have been down a road that has included foster care, reunification and adoption.

Being involved in reunification work has been especially gratifying. The Ihm family uses the skills they learned in PRIDE classes and have worked closely with parents and extended families of the foster children who have been in their home.

"Nothing feels better than to show parents new techniques with their child and to help them be the parents I know they can be," Patty said.

The Ihms have facilitated two successful "return homes" and are awaiting the reunification for a child with them in foster care now.

"The child is moments away from going home, and instead of being



The Ihm family for four years has supported children as they returned home and stayed through adoption.

nervous and anxious about this, I am excited and cheering the family on. I know these parents have worked hard, and I feel good about my part in their life," Patty explained.

The role that the Ihm family has played changes often and requires flexibility. For example, they have worked with other foster families to achieve smooth transitions when children have moved to new homes. Also, this summer, they had the opportunity to adopt one of their foster children. Whichever goal is chosen for the child, the Ihms have stepped up to the challenge, and worked with the entire child welfare team for the good of the children.

To respond to the differing needs of children through different stages, Patty and Dan have also made personal

changes. Dan works as the information technology manager for a university. Patty, after fostering for a few years, left her job as an early intervention child therapist so she could spend more time with their growing children.

"It is rewarding to be able to use all of my extensive education, especially on the children who are placed in our care. This is the job of a lifetime for me!" she said.

She did caution that it would be foolhardy to try to manage the stress of foster care alone. The Ihms are involved in their local support group, have a supportive base at their church and depend on extended family members that happily wrap their arms around each of the children, no matter how long they stay.

From the Northern Region Administrator



Deborah Palmer-Thomas

Watching a child grow and evolve into a young adult can often make us reflect on our own lives. The transition from birth through life is the common thread that ties all people. But for some children, that shared experience of growth can be riddled with traumatic events that leave a devastating effect on a child's progress into adulthood. These are the children that are at the heart of our mission as child welfare advocates.

These children will need special attention as the holiday season shines its spotlight on the young. The excitement and wonder of the holidays may not shine as brightly for some of our youth who have been hurt. We must double our efforts to let them know they are cherished gifts to humanity, and ensure they grow up to be as successful as possible.

For those of you dedicated to the welfare of children, you are the rare and often unsung heroes who have taken the time to ensure that our children have a fair chance to grow up with the gift of love you so generously and unselfishly give.

It is my pleasure to thank you all for your part in securing a better future for our children. May you all have a wondrous and magical Christmas, followed by a new year filled with joy, and more precious time to enjoy what really matters in life.

Director McEwen hosts Town Halls to improve outcomes for minority children

In September, DCFS Director Erwin McEwen, along with a panel of child welfare professionals from Northern Illinois University and the Illinois African-American Family Commission, hosted town hall meetings in Rockford and Aurora. The town hall meetings were just the beginning of a statewide initiative to transform the Illinois child welfare system.

The Northern Region is actively addressing issues that persist in the child welfare system related to the overrepresentation of children of color in foster care. More specifically, the administration is focusing on permanency outcomes for African-American children. Research shows that they are most likely to remain in foster care longer, are moved more often, receive less services, and are less likely to be returned home or adopted.

Other issues being addressed include:

- Revamping the investigative procedures in cases where the risk of harm to a child is low
- Improving the quality and frequency of visitation between parents and teenage foster children
- Implementing The Foster Child Successful Transition into Adult Act, which calls for DCFS to provide developmental and financial assistance for children aging out of foster care.

The Town Hall meetings were designed to invite community stakeholders to become part of local action teams that will address these issues at the root level. Participants included community leaders, representatives from churches, police personnel, school administrators, medical providers, child welfare professionals, and concerned citizens, along with foster and adoptive parents.

Director McEwen stated that he wants to change the face of DCFS by involving all parties who have a vested interest in children and families within their own communities who are or may be at risk of becoming involved in the child welfare system. He invited them to join their local action teams and work together toward making positive changes. He reminded the crowd that each community has within itself the power to produce positive changes through their own resources. Everyone within a community has a voice and the ability to become an agent of change.

Caregivers who are interested in joining a local action team can contact the Local Area Network (LAN) representative for details.

- Phil Biage at 630-801-3400 (Kane, Kendall, McHenry, and Lake counties)
- Sidella Hughes at 815-967-3731 (DeKalb, Lee, Ogle, Whiteside, Winnebago counties)
- Sharon O'Bryant at 815-730-4000 (DuPage, Grundy, Kankakee, and Will counties)

Northern News

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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.



Northern Region recruitment goes on one-on-one and in media

The Northern Region Foster Parent Recruitment Planning Council has been diligently working within their targeted communities to recruit new foster homes. This has been a combined effort between DCFS and staff from private agencies. Caregivers are also a driving force in the initiative. Foster Parent Support Specialist Robyn Harvey and Tina Moore of the Foster Adoptive Parent Association (FAPA), a DeKalb County support group, have taken on leadership roles in the recruitment strategy.

Outreach to Spanish-speakers

With the help of the Latino Consortium and the Spanish-speaking foster care licensing representatives, there has been a focused effort to recruit more Spanish-speaking and bilingual homes. The Latino Consortium has been following up on referrals from the “Foster Kids Are Our Kids” media campaign. The campaign to reach the Spanish-speaking community through radio spots has shown positive response. Additionally, in September the Aurora Field Office recruited at

the “Fiesta de Luces” or Festival of the Lights event held annually in downtown Aurora as part of a celebration of Hispanic Heritage month. Again, several individuals inquired about becoming foster parents.

Adoption Month Recruitment

The recruitment effort had one more end of the year push in November, during National Adoption Month. The recruitment council planned several activities throughout the region. The Elgin office hosted a “meet and greet” as part of a Public Service Announcement to advertise adoption month and to recruit more Spanish-speaking foster homes in that area. Staff from the field office purchased the supplies and made themselves available to talk with prospective foster parents who heard the announcement and came to the event. Other offices in the region continued with letter-writing campaigns, distributing inserts for church bulletins, hanging posters at local Secretary of State facilities and joining community sponsored events, and airing public

service announcements on local radio stations.

Outreach by caregivers

Although the recruitment council has stepped up to get the word out through many venues, it is agreed that the tried and true recruitment effort is still through example and word of mouth. Foster and adoptive parents are the most important resource and often the most successful in recruiting new families. The council is looking for more experienced caregivers to share sage advice and talk with people within their circle of family, friends, church, and community who share some of the same qualities that keep them committed to fostering our children. Only a caregiver can truly understand and convey just how rewarding fostering and adopting can be, and that those rewards can outweigh any reason not to become a foster or adoptive parent.

For more information, contact Frank Navarro at 630-801-3400.

Courthouse celebrates Adoption Day with weekend session

Winnebago County Court House continued its tradition of celebrating National Adoption Day for the sixth year. On Saturday, November 20, the court opened its doors for a special weekend session to finalize adoption proceedings for dozens of excited families.

A committee of six judges and eight child welfare staff from DCFS and private agencies prepared the annual event. They donated their time and resources to make the day memorable and festive with refreshments and other surprises for the children joining new families.

Special thanks go to Chief Judge Janet Holmgren and her judicial colleagues along with the support staff at the courthouse. The foster care agencies involved in this year’s event included: DCFS, Lutheran Social Services, Catholic Charities, Children Home and Aid Society, and Illinois Mentor.





Northern Region Caregiver Training

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Training. The descriptions below will allow you to decide which classes fit your family's needs or circumstances. Advance registration is required for all classes. In addition to the slate of classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of Digital Pride modules on CD and the full offering of Lending Library materials.

For the most up-to-date and complete schedule information for classes offered in your area, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center anytime at www.DCFStraining.org or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during regular business hours.

Module 1 - Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk (12 training hours)

This module focuses on building self-esteem in children. It covers how kids act when they need recognition, power, freedom, enjoyment, and a feeling of belonging. Caregivers will learn how to listen to what kids say and not what we think they say.

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.

Module 3 & 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.

Module 5 - Supporting Relationships between Children and Their Families (9 training hours)

This training focuses on helping foster parents learn how to help kids attach to caregivers and at the same time stay loyal to birth families. Caregivers learn about how to prepare and support children for and after visits with the birth family and how to share the parenting role with birth parents.

Module 6 - Working as a Professional Team Member (9 training hours)

Foster parents learn team members' roles, when and how to be an advocate for children, what conflict is and their own

personal style for managing it, and how conflict can be a "win - win" situation for everyone involved.

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.

Module 8 - Promoting Permanency Outcomes (9 training hours)

The focus of this training is on families who have children in care and supporting reunification of the children and parents.

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. They also learn about the supports that are available.

Module 10 - Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children and Families (15 training hours)

Foster parents study the risk factors for chemical use, abuse, and dependency and understand relapse and recovery and be able to acquire skills necessary to be an active member of the team to support recovery in birth parents.

Module 12 - Understanding and Promoting Preeteen and Teen Development (6 training hours)

This new course assists 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 understand teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use when fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.

The Teen in Foster Care: Supporting Attachment (6 training hours)

Attachment and the Teen in Family Foster Care will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand how early attachment experiences have impacted the teen's development. The training covers the teen's perspective on how the accumulation of loss, separation and trauma impacts his or her beliefs, feelings, behaviors and relationships. Participants will learn specific tips for helping manage behaviors that develop over time from the teen's adaptive responses to trauma, grief and loss.

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.