

## Nearly 20 years of foster care proves teamwork is the key

When you ask caseworkers in the DuPage County area to describe Gay and Mel Carlson's family, the most common response given is, "they are committed." That testimony speaks to the way they approach foster care as a team effort with caseworkers and the children's families.

"If we could change one thing about the child welfare system, it would be to see an increase in good old-fashioned teamwork. We talk about it in the training. We see it at times, but a true team will be the saving grace for a child. Each child deserves this kind of teamwork on their behalf," Gay said.

Teamwork means keeping an open mind and trusting that others on the team will also act in ways to benefit the children. It means discussing issues before they become issues. It also means staying on top of their responsibilities, while expecting others to do the same.

"Fostering takes up a lot of time. Court dates, counseling, physical therapy, and caseworker home visits all fill my schedule. These tasks aren't necessarily fun, but they are so important to providing the children with all they need," Gay said.

Without everyone cooperating, it would be impossible to get everything done for the 40 children they have cared for during their 20 years of foster care. They also adopted two



**Gay and Mel Carlson have provided foster care for 20.  
All their children pitched in and continue even now that they are grown.**

daughters, giving them a total of nine children in their permanent family. Early on, the Carlsons' children by birth learned that foster care was a family affair. Everyone pitched in. Now those children are grown (there's a grandchild the same age as their youngest adopted daughter) and they still support the family. By defining family in the broadest sense of the word, they have created an atmosphere of normalcy and consistency where everyone benefits.

It is not enough for them to just keep their own home life running smoothly. Mel and Gay are committed to helping other families as well. They both have been certified to teach the prospective foster parent training, PRIDE since the

beginning of the program.

DCFS licensing supervisor, John El-lison said, "Mel and Gay are an asset to the training program. They have been through many situations in the time they have been licensed and can provide the participants with a touch of reality by sharing those experiences in training."

The Carlsons have kept many relationships with foster caregivers going after class. They continue to mentor and support those families. For them, teamwork doesn't end when the meeting is over. They are committed to making positive contributions for children however, whenever and for as long as they can.

## Northern Region youth advisory board seeks new members

The Northern Region Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is looking for youth who are currently in DCFS care, were formerly in care or have been adopted to join the advisory board. This group promotes youth empowerment, self-advocacy, youth development training, and leadership development. Membership is open to youth ages 14 to 21.

The youth leaders have asked that caregivers help more youth become part of their board. Through the advisory board, young people can express themselves, share their experiences, and address issues and concerns affecting youth in care. They learn how to work together to

accomplish important goals. They are also encouraged to have fun at the same time.

At the monthly meetings youth gain valuable information about:

- Court and legal issues
- Transitional/independent living programs
- Emancipation readiness
- Life skills
- Scholarships
- Job opportunities
- They can also contribute to the "For Youth by You Newsletter"

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month from 6 to 8 p.m. at the DCFS Aurora Regional Office, located

at 8 East Galena Blvd. The group meets in the 3rd floor conference room.

Food and beverages are provided. Transportation may be available upon request. To arrange transportation, youth should RSVP 72 hours in advance by phone to Antwan Turpeau at 312-588-3822 (fax 312-663-58730) or by e-mail at: [chicagoareaproject\\_tony@yahoo.com](mailto:chicagoareaproject_tony@yahoo.com).

Meetings are scheduled on the following dates until the end of the fiscal year:

- April 20
- May 18
- June 15

## *New "Life in Action" provides life skills training for teens in foster care*

Aunt Martha's Youth Service Center (AMYS) is offering a new life skills program called "Life in Action." This program provides an innovative learning program to youth in foster care, ages 14 to 20.

The Aunt Martha's "Life in Action" program addresses the following nine life skills categories identified by DCFS as key areas of need:

1. Education
2. Housing
3. Career planning, job readiness, employment
4. Money management
5. Health
6. Transportation
7. Parenting and prevention
8. Personal and community engagement
9. Self sufficiency

The program creates an engaging learning environment to enable youth to learn to use technology and participate in a mobile classroom with their peers. If appropriate, one-on-one sessions will be provided. The program is not a classroom-based curriculum, instead, it is a mobile

classroom that comes to where the youth are, and provides opportunities for youth to test their knowledge and learn how to manage their adult lives. One benefit of the "Life in Action" program is that it helps youth learn to use computers and the Internet through a variety of fun, appropriate and supervised activities, all based on the Ansell-Casey Life Skills curriculum.

The program also provides young people with immediate and long-term incentives. Graduates may move on to mentor peers. They could also earn a notebook computer.

Caregivers to youth in foster care who could benefit from the program should contact the caseworker. Holly Bitner-Duck, DCFS Northern Region Transition Manager, manages referrals from DCFS and private agency cases. Contact her at 630-801-3446 or by e-mail: [holly.bitner@illinois.gov](mailto:holly.bitner@illinois.gov).



## Caregiver Institute teamwork training comes to Northern Region

The 2010 Caregiver Training Institute: *Fostering Success by Strengthening and Supporting Families* will be coming to the Northern Region. This year, the popular session will be held April 24 in Waukegan.

The institutes are open to all foster, adoptive and guardianship caregivers. This year's institute focuses on teamwork. By working as an active member of the child welfare team, caregivers can find support and get what they need for children.

The agenda will include:

- Panel discussion with former youth in care
- State of the region address by the Regional Administrator
- DCFS vision for better outcomes through teamwork
- Training on Child and Family Team meetings, practical tips

for team-building and accessing resources through Local Area Networks

Participants will earn five training credit hours to meet licensing requirements when they sign in on time and participate in the entire session.

Registration opens at 8 a.m. with the program beginning at 9 a.m. and finishing by 3 p.m. Lunch will be provided for participants. There are no accommodations for childcare at the institute, and children must not attend.

There may be limited funds available through the DCFS region to reimburse DCFS supervised caregivers for child care or mileage (not lodging) expenses to attend this training. Caregivers should follow normal procedures within the region 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.

**Saturday, April 24  
8 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Milan Banquet Center  
Waukegan**

To register, call the DCFS registration hotline today at 877-800-3393.

## Kane County connects youth to job program

The Kane County Department of Employment and Education (KCDEE) is reaching out to youth between the ages of 16 and 21 who reside within the Kane County area and the surrounding communities of Aurora, DeKalb, Elgin, North Aurora, and Yorkville.

Some of the programs offered by KCDEE include adult mentoring, assisting with obtaining a GED or returning to school, setting career goals, offering tools to help find employment, and providing guidance and counseling.

This free training program is open to youth who have dropped out of school or are out of school and have not

secured employment or training; are pregnant or parenting; have physical, learning, or mental disabilities; are in foster care or have been adopted; are homeless or have run away; have been involved in the juvenile justice system; are having trouble with basic reading and/or math; and are "at-risk" as defined by school staff.

To find out more about the program and how to qualify, go to [www.kcdee.org](http://www.kcdee.org) or call one of the local offices:

DeKalb	815-756-4893
Elgin	847-888-7900
North Aurora	630-844-6640
Yorkville	630-553-8303

### 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 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](http://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.