

Childhood lessons lead to future foster parenting

The Mitchells are no strangers when it comes to providing foster care. They are aware of the rewards, the hard work and time involved in being a caregiver. Leroy and Veatrice Mitchell have been foster and adoptive parents in the DeKalb area since 1981. In the last 25 years, they have provided foster care for more than 50 children. They also adopted children, who are now in their early 20s. Currently, the Mitchells are fostering a 3 year old, who may be able to return home.

The path that led to a life of foster care started when they were each young children. Leroy knows first hand about being a foster child, since he himself was adopted as a child and has three adopted siblings. As if it were yesterday, he remembers how his foster parents took in children at all hours of the day or night. The local social services department and police would always come to the door with the most difficult kids. His adoptive mother would never turn anyone away. Veatrice grew up knowing she wanted to do fostering because her mother and grandmother were always helping single mothers with their children. On Sundays, they would take the children to church. Both hail from upstate New York, he

from White Plains and she from Buffalo. When they met, the future Mrs. Mitchell said she knew for sure that this was her destiny.

They both devoted themselves to careers involving children. Leroy has degrees in education and

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-Leroy Mitchell

advanced degrees in divinity and ministry. He has worked in the areas of disadvantaged youth and special academic programs. Currently, he works at Northern Illinois University as director for the ‘Chance Program.’ This program is a student support service for youth to help maximize their potential in a university setting. Veatrice attended college and took classes in Child Development and currently manages her own day care service. The two devote time to the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church in the

DeKalb area, where Mr. Mitchell is the founder and pastor of the congregation.

Their professional experiences spill over to their home life and vice versa. First they each strive to be a good role model for children. They believe in good communication, being patient, setting standards, and being mindful of children as individuals. With these principles, they create a safe, secure and positive environment, which will help the child grow and develop. However, they know that sometimes you can’t always reach some children no matter how hard you try. For example, one foster child came to their home from a very troubled family and he was always getting into trouble. This child worshiped the ground his mother walked on. Eventually, he ran away. Later, when he was 18, he came by to say hello to the Mitchells, to their surprise. So they always have hope for a positive outcome and they continue their work with children, while recruiting others to consider foster care.

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Start the new year with an education “tune-up” with these tips

Educational issues may be confusing, and everyone needs help at some time. At this point, school has been in session long enough for issues to surface. The good news is that there is still time to address them. Caseworkers and caregivers working together most often successfully advocate for the children in their care. When you need more help, contact the DCFS Education Advisors. They provide educational support to families with licenses supervised by DCFS and to post-adoption and guardianship homes. Private agency homes can contact the education liaison at each agency.

Northern Region Education Advisors

- **Rhonda Best**
DCFS, 107 N. Third Street,
Rockford, IL 61107
815-967-3750
rhonda.best@illinois.gov
Counties covered:
Boone, Carroll, DeKalb, Jo
Davies, Kane, Kankakee, Lee,
Ogle, Stephenson, Whiteside
and Winnebago
- **Mitch Kremer**
DCFS, 113 Newell Street,
Woodstock, IL 60098
815-338-1068
mitchell.kremer@illinois.gov
Counties covered:
DuPage, Grundy, Kendall, Lake,
McHenry and Will

These tips from the education advisors can help caregivers prepare their students for success.

Keep communication lines open

In order to have the school year be successful it is important for both the caseworker and caregiver to have ongoing contact with the school. Some of the activities may include:

- Attend parent-teacher conferences and school functions
- Encourage the student's participation in academic and extracurricular activities
- Monitor homework
- Touch base with school teachers and related school personnel
- Review progress reports
- Arrange for individual problem solving meetings if needed
- Express your concerns before they turn into a crisis
- Express appreciation when things go right

Be proactive on homework

- **Set a Spot.** Have a 'homework spot' in the house. There should be a special desk or table that is simply for homework. There should be no outside distractions like television or the radio.
- **Set a Timer.** Do homework at the same time each day. Set a timer for when it starts and an alarm for when it ends.
- **Set Goals.** Have your child show you what he/she is going to do before going to the 'homework spot.' Have them

explain what they are doing so you know they understand the directions.

- **See the Results.** Have your child show you what he/she accomplished during the time in the 'homework spot'. Don't grade it, but check it for completeness and neatness.
- **Control the homework.** Don't let it control you. If you make a routine a habit, it will become less threatening and more a part of life. Homework is supposed to help your child develop life skills such as time management.

Be involved in discipline plans

- School districts are required to provide students with copies of school discipline policies and to provide copies of discipline procedures upon request. Make sure you have copies, and review the procedures with the children.
- At any time a child is suspended more than twice in a semester the caseworker and caregiver should meet with the school and develop or revise a behavior plan for the student.
- For any student who faces expulsion the caregiver should contact the caseworker immediately. Through the DCFS Guardian's office, each child will be ensured legal representation, if needed.
- If any child is not enrolled in school or for assistance regarding suspensions and expulsions contact the appropriate education advisor's office.

New options for buying youth eyeglasses

Children and youth in care who need prescription glasses just got a few more options. The Department of Healthcare and Family Services (formerly Public Aid) will continue its eyeglass program. However, outside of Cook County it can be difficult to find a provider enrolled in the DHFS program within 30 miles of where the family lives. Now, under the Downstate Vision Care Program, DCFS will ensure that eyeglasses are more readily available to children and youth.

In DCFS Northern Region, DCFS now has a formal agreement with Wal-Mart and Sam's Club to provide eyeglasses to children and youth under DCFS care (foster care, independent living or residential programs). Frames and prescription single vision polycarbonate lenses may be obtained up to a maximum of \$60 at Wal-Mart. Costs at Sam's Club may be somewhat higher and DCFS will assist by paying up to a maximum of \$60.

Stores in the following DCFS Northern Region counties are participating providers: DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, LaSalle, Lee, McHenry, Will and Winnebago.

Caseworkers will still need to request authorization before caregivers can go to purchase glasses. Caregivers must tell their caseworkers the name and address of the vision care provider

they want to use. As part of the request, caseworkers must provide a copy of the eyeglass prescription and certify that:

- There is not a DHFS provider within 30 miles to fill the eyeglass subscription.
- The caregiver has been told he or she will be responsible for any costs exceeding \$60.
- If the caregiver uses a non-participating vendor, the caregiver has been told he or she will pay out-of-pocket and be reimbursed for an amount not to exceed \$60.

Once a request is authorized, foster parents can take the eyeglass prescription, the purchase authorization form and any additional forms provided by the caseworker to their chosen vendor.

Foster parents will still use the DHFS providers for eye exams. The DHFS provider also remains the first option for the eyeglasses. However, if distance is prohibitive (more than 30 miles) caregivers now have other choices.

Contact the child's caseworker for more details on the Downstate Vision Care Program (Policy Guide 2006.06) or call the DCFS Office of Health Services at 217-557-2689. Updates on new participating providers will be included in future newsletters as they are added.

Wrong regional insert?

The IL Families Now and Forever newsletter publishes with four regional editions. The main section goes to all readers, but into the middle there is a regional insert for local news:

- Northern News (Northern Region)
- Central Connections (Central Region)
- Our Kids (Southern Region)
- Cook County Advocate

Currently the DCFS technology office is working on a solution to make certain all homes receive the correct edition. Caregivers who do not receive the right edition can send an email to the Editor at Vanessa.James@illinois.gov or call 312-814-6824.

Vanessa James
Editor

Northern News

Regional Reporter

Catherine Johnson
DCFS Reporter/Editor
841 N. Lake
Aurora, IL 60506
Phone: 630-844-8400
Fax: 630-844-8968
Catherine.Johnson2@illinois.gov

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 Training Calendar

Important Information!

The DCFS Office of Training is realigning the training offerings across the state. Training for the regions is now coordinated by DCFS in Springfield. This shift includes many improvements to make it easier for caregivers to register for classes, track their training credits and participate in more classroom or Internet-based offerings.

The new schedules for In-Service training classes are being developed. When classes are confirmed, schedules will be announced on this page in future issues of IL Families Now and Forever. For more information call 877-800-3393.

DCFS Lending Library offers alternatives for education credits

The DCFS Lending Library can be used as a convenient alternative for obtaining approved training credit for license renewal. Licensed foster and adoptive parents can borrow materials for a two-week period at no charge.

The Lending Library catalogue highlights a multitude of books, audio cassettes and videos for self-directed training in parenting and family life, spanning 17 categories. Following are a few titles of interest:

Winning Cooperation From your Child

by *Kenneth Wenning, Ph.D.*

This book provides strategies for parents to help a defiant child develop behavioral and emotional control when provoked, teased, or frustrated. Credit: 2 hours

Taming The Dragon In Your Child: Solutions for Breaking the Cycle of Family Anger

by *Meg Eastman*

This book discusses how to determine whether anger is a normal expression of hurt, fear, and frustration, or if it is a warning sign of a more serious cycle of family stress. Practical answers about how to stop angry tirades and teach children to express anger responsibly are provided. Credit: 4 hours

Managing the Defiant Child

by *Russell A. Barkley*

Sometimes parents need to modify their own behavior in order to change their child's behavior. The day to day struggles of three families who have children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) are followed in the video.

Credit: 30 minutes

Common Sense Discipline: Building Self-Esteem in Young Children

by *Grace Mitchell*

This book provides you with information and strategies on successfully disciplining your child. You will learn to teach children to feel better about themselves and enable them to be "happy and confident" so they may not feel the need to act out. Real life stories are used as examples. Credit: 4 hours

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To borrow these or one of the myriad titles in the Lending Library, simply fill out the order form at the back of the catalogue. Send it to the DCFS Office of Training, Station 122, 406 E. Monroe, Springfield IL 62701.

To request a catalogue, call 877-800-3393. The catalogue is also available on the DCFS web site: <http://www.state.il.us/DCFS/docs/lendinglibrary.pdf>.

Lending Library Categories

- Child Sexual Abuse
- Children with Sexually Aggressive Behaviors
- Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Children with Behavioral Disorders/Emotional Disturbances
- Disciplinary Strategies for Difficult Children
- Separation and Visitation
- Drug-Affected Infants and Children
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effects (FAS/FAE)
- The Medically Complex Child
- The Child With HIV/AIDS
- Promoting Educational Success Through Improved Learning Skills
- Building A Healthy Self-Esteem in Kids
- From Foster Care to Adoption
- Child Development and Parenting
- Parenting Adolescents
- Families and Diversity-Parenting with Greater Understanding
- Children With Mental Health, Language and Physical Challenges