

Northern Region Foster Care Advisory Council

The recurring theme of the Northern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council has been communication between the caregivers and the agency staff. The spirit of teamwork has lent a renewed energy to the advisory council, evident in the first meetings of the new year.

"It is these kinds of efforts that are going to help in accomplishing the mission of strengthening the child welfare system and fostering positive outcomes for children and families," said Robyn Harvey, co-chairperson and foster parent.

The council wants to reach out to as many DCFS-supervised homes and private agency caregivers as possible. It is not an easy task since the Northern Region extends from the Wisconsin border to Kankakee and west of Cook County to the Mississippi River.

The goal of the advisory council is to get the word out that it can be a support to foster parents who are in need of assistance. To that end, Harvey and co-chair Debbie Frekke, have created a rotating schedule for meetings in locations throughout the region. Regional Administrator Debbie Palmer-Thomas provides leadership and logistical support to the council,

and many staff members also attend the meetings.

The last set of meetings featured a presentation called "Caseworker Potpourri" covering information that caseworkers thought caregivers should know to make foster care easier. This included reminders about reimbursement for sibling visits, respite care availability, and educational advocacy. The council also distributed many handouts on programs that serve children. The presentation was based on surveys that Robyn Harvey conducted with 25 caseworkers, licensing workers, supervisors and managers. Below are just a few of items shared:

1. If you go to the emergency room, make sure to tell them they are treating a foster child. Emergency rooms need to call the DCFS medical consent hotline.
2. Each day, point out something good your child does.
3. Don't forget that it is the caregiver's responsibility to get children's medical and dental checkups. Give a copy of the exam form to the caseworker.
4. Feel free to use the chain of command if there is a problem, but first give the caseworker enough time to remedy the situation.

5. Look for recipes that reflect the foster child's culture; better yet...ask the family to share some favorites.
6. Any time a foster home is investigated, there will a placement hold.
7. The receptionists often don't know the schedule or whereabouts for each caseworker, so be patient with them.
8. Know what forms caregivers can and cannot sign.
9. Have teenagers sign for their allowance so there are no questions later.
10. Caseworkers really do appreciate the work caregivers do.

In all, there were 100 tips and reminders discussed at the council meetings. One of the most positive outcomes was the dialogue among the caregivers and caseworkers. Foster caregivers also left knowing whom to contact for assistance. The next meetings of the council are scheduled for:

- April 8, DeKalb Field Office
- April 15, Rockford Satellite Office
- April 15, Aurora Field Office

The meetings begin at 6 p.m. and include a light dinner. For more information, contact Robyn Harvey at 815-986-8672.

Licensing visits go smoothly with preparation

As foster caregivers, you 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 inconvenient. Yet, 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 received 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.

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.

School help available in Joliet area

Child and Adolescent Local Area Networks (LANs) are a group of agencies, organizations, community members and individuals within a set geographic area responding to the express needs of citizens within the community. In recent years, the contracts between DCFS and the Child and Adolescent Local Area Networks (LAN) service providers focused on creating programs to stabilize children in their current educational settings.

These programs are available to all families, including foster, adoptive and guardianship families, concerned about students at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion. For information on resources in Northern Region LANs, contact Sharon O'Bryant at 815-630-4000 in Joliet or Phil Biage at 630-801-3405 in Aurora.

The LAN educational programs target students at risk of truancy, suspension, or expulsion. Each relies on individualized case management. For example, if a student is missing school repeatedly or receiving detentions, the caregiver can call for a referral to one of the programs. A case manager from the program will make the necessary connections between the parents and the school to get to the underlying reasons and find ways to turn the situation around.

Families living in the Joliet area can turn to BEST/AMT when issues arise that hamper academic performance. BEST stands for

Building Esteem Support Team. Since 1994, BEST has offered programs in self-esteem building and anger management services to reduce the incidence of violence in the community. Their newest program: Advocacy, Tutoring, and Mentoring, was created in response to a growing number of school-age children experiencing social, emotional, educational, physical and behavioral problems that affect their academic performance. Those problems often translate to poor attendance, truancy, suspensions, and expulsions.

As one example, BEST/AMT was able to help with a 17-year-old girl who missed a great deal of school because of unexplained fainting spells. First, BEST helped the family get medical treatment. Ruling out any physical cause for the fainting, they started looking at the social and emotional possibilities. While doing an assessment and social history, the student disclosed that she had been sexually abused. The BEST team helped the family obtain counseling services through the county mental health agency. After counseling, her fainting spells stopped.

Staff from BEST also provided tutoring and mentor services. As a result of advocacy with the school, it was discovered that the youth was missing a half credit needed to graduate. BEST helped her enroll in an on-line, accredited course, which allowed her to make up the half credit. She graduated from high school on time last spring.

Register for Caregiver Institute *Call 877-800-3393 now*

Enrollment is still open for the training "Trauma: Dealing with a Child's Past to Make a Better Future." The Caregiver Institute will be on Saturday, April 12 from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. at the Holiday Inn, Rock Falls/Sterling. The training covers:

- How trauma affects children in care
- Tips on recognizing and dealing with trauma
- How caring for these children affects caregivers
- What caregivers can do to keep themselves healthy

Participants will earn five training credit hours when they sign in and attend the entire session. Coffee, donuts and lunch will be provided for participants.

There are no accommodations for childcare, and children must not be brought to the site. There may be limited funds available through the region to reimburse DCFS-supervised caregivers for childcare or mileage to attend this training. Caregivers should follow normal procedures to check on potential reimbursement. Attendees from private agencies should contact their agencies to determine whether they can be reimbursed.

Note: caregivers who have taken the DCFS Child Trauma training will already be familiar with much of this material, but there will be added features.

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.

Aurora *Comfort Suites City Center*
April 5, 12 & 19 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

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.

Lockport *SOS Children's Village*
April 8, 10 & 15 10 a.m.-1 p.m.
(Tue/Thu/Tue)

Module 11 - *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 impact his or her beliefs, feeling, behaviors and relationships. Participants will learn specific tips for helping manage behaviors that develop over time-out of the teen's adaptive responses to trauma, grief and loss.

Rockford *Camelot Community Care*
April 22 & 24 (Tue/Thu) 6:30-9:30 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 when fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.

Glen Ellyn *America's Best Value Inn and Suites*
April 16 & 23 (Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Rockford *Camelot Community Care*
May 17 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Waukegan *Ramada Inn*
May 3 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Child Trauma

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

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*
April 28 & 30 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Mon/Wed)

Elgin *Judson University*
May 5 & 7 (Mon/Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Lockport *SOS Children's Village*
May 6 & 8 (Tue/Thu) 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

Naperville *Zion Lutheran Church*
May 10 & 17 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Rockford *Children's Home + Aid*
April 19 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Rockford *Camelot Community Care*
May 6 & 8 (Tue/Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.

Call the DCFS Office of Training

877-800-3393
toll free