

## Family forges life connections with kids and their parents

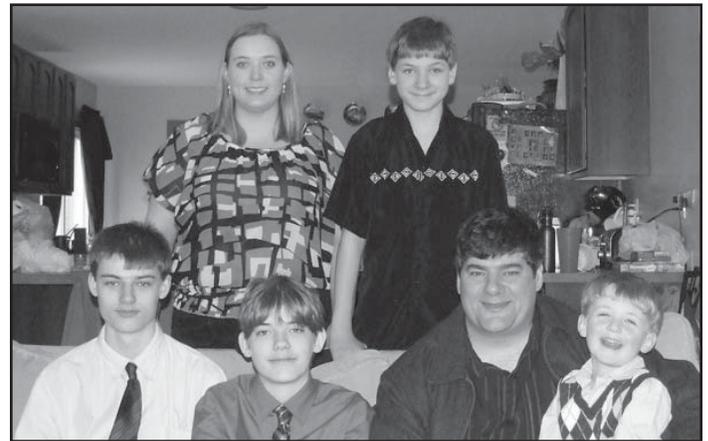
It took three years for Brian and Jennifer Zurick to accept their first placement. Being a foster parent was a clear choice for Jennifer who said she did not grow up in a “traditional” family and never knew her father. Still, even after they completed PRIDE training they were very nervous to dive in to foster care. Jennifer then found out she was pregnant with her fourth son and they moved to another city. Things settled down a bit and they decided to take the plunge.

Now after time and experience, they consider their family to be “the last stop in the child’s journey.” They have made a commitment that if they agree to bring a child into their home, the child doesn’t leave unless it’s for a return to a parent or relative.

So far, the Zuricks have only provided foster care to girls. Jennifer loves having girls around the home. She feels it is a nice balance to her husband Brian and four sons. The couple also believes that it is a good experience for their boys to see what having a sister is like.

Since becoming licensed five years ago, the Zuricks feel they have had two children placed with them that truly tested their commitment and proved that they were doing exactly what they were meant to do. The first was a young girl who had many emotional needs. Her mother and the Zuricks would have weekly contact with one another to discuss any concerns they had about the child. Then her mother and the Zuricks would talk directly to the child. The conversations really benefited the child, because it showed her that everyone was working together. In time, their foster daughter was returned home to her mother. The Zuricks are very thankful that she still lets them have contact by phone and sometimes the families have an outing together.

Another case had a rockier beginning, but a still gratifying ending. When they found out that a teenager from their community needed a new foster home, they immediately called Richard Echevarria, their Family Development Specialist in DeKalb County. Originally they had chosen



*The Zurick family finds meaning in foster care by staying committed and connected – even after kids leave their home.*

to only be licensed for children up to age 12. They asked to change it to 18 so they could keep the teenager in her community. But, Jennifer was informed that their home was currently at capacity and they could not take in any more children. She and Brian did not give up.

“What stands out to me about the Zuricks was that though they preferred to care for younger children, they requested an expanded capacity, based on the best interest of a child and received it,” said Echevarria.

The teenager came to their home at 16. She graduated from high school and went to college. Unfortunately, she did not do well in school

and eventually moved out of state to live with her mother. The Zuricks tried to engage and support her mother, but didn’t forge a solid relationship with her. However, Jennifer and Brian still keep in contact with the daughter they gained through foster care and continue to support her into adulthood.

The Zuricks say they have found their local support group to be helpful during complications that come from parenting through foster care. They have met several foster families and been able to share all the joy and pain that goes along with fostering. Their one wish is to somehow make the whole process easier on the children.

**Northern News**

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with story suggestions about:

- news and schedules from foster parent organizations
- local training notices
- features on foster families and community members working for children
- ideas for articles or services that would be helpful to caregivers

## Youth Summit helps clear the way to adulthood

The Northern Region hosted its annual Youth Summit on June 17, 2011 at Kishwaukee Community College. The theme this year was “Never Back Down, Never Give Up!” The Summit was a huge success, with more than 50 youth in attendance.

The youth enjoyed workshops on education, employment, health and sexuality, domestic violence and money management. The Illinois Attorney General’s Office presented a workshop on Internet Safety. The students were able to tour the beautiful college campus and enjoy entertainment from nationally known R&B/Christian musician, Chris Searcy.

The keynote speaker was Tony Lawlor, a successful motivational speaker who reaches young people all over the state. Lawlor also works with the Chi-



Ron Krueger from the Child and Youth Investment Team staff speaks to a group at the Youth Summit.

cago Area Project and is a coordinator for the Regional and Statewide Youth Advisory Board. DCFS Director McEwen and Daniel Fitzgerald, the Deputy Director for Service Intervention, were there to inspire and congratulate the young people on the bright futures ahead of them.

The youth were especially excited about the raffle and give-aways that included a DVD player,

flash drives, MP3 players and prepaid cell phones.

Holly Bitner-Duck, the Chair of the Youth and Adult Summit Planning Committee said, “This event is always such a fun thing to plan. The youth have a great time and receive many prizes while also learning about services and topics that will help them succeed in life.”

## Northern Region celebrates educational milestones

On Monday, June 20, Northern Region congratulated students who earned a high school diploma, G.E. D. or college degree while in DCFS care.

The new graduates enjoyed a festive picnic celebration in Aldean Park in Rockford with lunch, music and games.

The graduation celebration was sponsored by the Northern Region administration. The Youth Advisory Board and the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services spearheaded planning the event.

Students could each invite a guest to share in

the celebration. At the end of the afternoon they did not leave empty-handed. All of the graduates received goody bags that included gifts cards to local retailers. They could use the funds to purchase items for their next stage of school, for living expenses, or just for enjoyment.



## Caregivers bask in glow of appreciation month events

With May designated as Foster Parent Appreciation Month in Illinois, many foster care programs in Northern Region took extra measures to make caregivers feel appreciated.

### DeKalb

The DCFS DeKalb Field Office hosted their annual Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner on Thursday, May 12th. This year's theme was "Thanking You In Many Languages." It was a special night for foster parents to go out and enjoy a rare evening without the children.

One newly licensed caregiver commented about how nice it was to meet more experienced foster parents and to share stories and helpful resources. DCFS staff enjoyed talking with the caregivers and catching up with what is going on in their lives.

Foster caregivers were also able to meet two of their local representatives to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council. Robyn Harvey and Cathy McCoy were able to share all the new and future developments in foster care. Several recently retired caregivers were recognized at the dinner for their service and dedication to children.

### Elgin and Glen Ellyn

The DCFS Elgin and Glen Ellyn offices hosted a Foster Parent Appreciation Picnic on Thursday, June 23rd. The picnic was held in Armstrong Park in Carol Stream. DCFS foster families, staff, and their families enjoyed a wonderful evening. One caregiver remarked that it was great to be able to meet and talk with staff in such a relaxed atmosphere.

The children kept were kept busy by a Palatine Girl Scout troop that provided many fun summer games for them. Children's laughter could be heard while foster parents and staff were busy mingling and eating their bar-b-q dinner.

### Rockford

The Rockford Foster Parent Alliance hosted their annual Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner at Our Saviors Lutheran Church social hall on May 5th. The FPA Dinner is a fellowship opportunity to thank all the caregivers for the hard work they do. This year's guest speaker was Ann Wilson. Wilson is an employee at One Hope United. She spoke of her own experience as a foster child and how that experience has helped her in her work. There were nearly 200 people in attendance representing child welfare organizations including Juvenile Probation, YSN, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, Illinois Mentor, Children's Home + Aid, Our Children's Homestead, Catholic Charities, Evangelical Child and Family Agency and DCFS.

Each year agencies in the alliance nominate children in foster care who have excelled in the previous year. All the nominees are given gift cards for their accomplishments over the past year. The Foster Care Alliance then chooses three to get special recognition. This year, the FCA was especially taken with a teenager that has risen above, and secured her own living arrangement and employment. After many years in DCFS care, she is an excellent example of success after being in foster care. The FCA was pleased to applaud her as well as the other young nominees for all of their efforts.

### Southern Kane County

The Southern Kane County DCFS Office celebrated their Foster Parents by hosting a picnic in the park. The event was held on June 21st at Phillips Park Zoo in Aurora. Families enjoyed walking around the zoo before meeting up at the picnic shelter. Then foster families and DCFS staff spent a warm summer night eating and talking under the stars.

### Foster Parent Implementation Plans available for review

*Learn how the DCFS foster care program will honor the 15 rights of foster parents and how they will assist caregivers to fulfill their 17 responsibilities. Any caregiver can review the Northern Region implementation plan on line.*

*Visit the DCFS Web site at: [www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs). Click on foster care on the left side and scroll down under the heading Foster Parent Implementation Law Plans and click Northern.*

*Caregivers whose homes are supervised by other agencies can contact their agency to obtain a copy of their plan.*

*This fall DCFS and private agencies will begin drafting the 2012 plans. Caregiver input is invaluable. Be on the look out for announcements of meetings to discuss the new plan, and be sure to participate.*

# Northern Region Caregiver Training

DCFS Office of Training has scheduled sessions of in-service training modules and other courses in locations across the Northern Region. The listing below can help caregivers plan for their training needs. To get specific dates and locations, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center (VTC) anytime at [www.DCFStraining.org](http://www.DCFStraining.org) or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during regular business hours. In addition to classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of videos, books and online training.

## July

|  |            |
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| Module 2   | Aurora     |
| Adoption Certification<br>(worker referral required) | Loves Park |

## August

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| Adoption Certification<br>(worker referral required) | Wheaton<br>Rockford |
| Educational Advocacy                                 | Rockford            |

## September

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| Module 8   | Elgin                         |
| Module 2   | Naperville                    |
| Reunification Training                               | Rockford                      |
| Educational Advocacy                                 | Wheaton                       |
| Adoption Certification<br>(worker referral required) | Aurora<br>Elgin<br>Loves Park |

## In-service Training modules (scheduled periodically in classroom sessions or available on DVD)

**Module 1 - Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk (12 hours)** The focus of this module is how to build self-esteem in children; how kids act when they need recognition, power, freedom, enjoyment and to belong; and 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 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; how to catch kids being “good” and what to do to encourage positive behavior.

**Module 4 - The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (9 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 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 before 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 hours)** Foster parents learn everyone’s role on the team, 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 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 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 hours)** In this training caregivers learn how fostering children can affect family relationships, how to minimize stresses that can result and how to find available supports.

**Module 10 – Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children and Families (15 hours)** Foster parents will study the risk factors for chemical use, abuse, and dependency. They will understand relapse and recovery and be able to acquire skills necessary to be an active member of the team to support parents’ recovery.

**Module 12 - Understanding & Promoting Pre-Teen and Teen Development (6 hours)**

This 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 module will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use as fostering teenagers in the day-to-day life of the foster family.