

## Tough times give family new purpose thanks to foster care

Sandy and Ron Berndt turned a tragedy in their lives into a positive experience. The Berndts' daughter and two granddaughters, ages five and six, were in a fatal car accident. The Berndts went through unimaginable pain and suffering over their loss. One thing that helped them through the pain was the thought of becoming foster parents and making a difference in someone's life.

Then in summer of 2010, when their license was still new, they were asked to care for a little boy who had already been through multiple placements. The trauma that he had experienced meant that the Berndts would need to help academically, socially and emotionally. As brand new foster parents they were hesitant, but agreed. He came to their home on his first day of first grade.

"With all that was going on, let's just say the school principal had us on speed dial," stated Sandy.

Time and teamwork helped the family work through the difficulties. In their first year of foster care, they learned how

children benefit when the adults in their lives work well together.

"This little boy has now done a complete 180 degree turn since being in their home," said Noell Juola, a caseworker with One Hope United.

She is happy to report that he has settled into the household routines and is doing well at school. The pace of phone calls has slowed down, and more often the news from teachers is good.

Some of the progress might be related to the fact that his sister has also joined the home. The Berndts feel very fortunate that they are able to keep the siblings together. Sandy and Ron have enjoyed sharing experiences with both children. Many activities that one could take for granted are new and exciting to them.

"If I could describe the ideal foster family to work with the Berndts would fit the bill perfectly. Sandy and Ron accept children into their home and treat them like family," said Juola.

"They go above and be-



Once hesitant, new caregivers Ron and Sandy Berndt find gratification from foster care

yond to meet the needs of the children in their home. They are always willing to assist me and they are very open to suggestions."

The Berndts feel very fortunate in having a supportive caseworker. They give her the credit for making their foster care experience positive. They say Juola communicates well, explains rules and what is happening with the children's case, and returns the Berndt's phone calls quickly.

Even when everyone cooperates, they recognize that foster care is a difficult, yet rewarding, vocation.

The best advice the Ber-

ndts would give to new foster parents is to invest yourself 100 percent in the child. One of the hardest things the Berndts have had to confront about fostering is never knowing what the outcome will be when taking a child into your home and heart. They wonder if the children will go back to their parents. If they do, will they ever see them again?

Fortunately, those thoughts are outweighed by the simple rewards.

"How can you not feel appreciated when you get to see the successes, frequent smiles? You get the hugs when you tuck the children in each night," said Sandy.

**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

## *Project Success helps McHenry County students improve*

Since 1995 the McHenry County Mental Health Board has led an outreach effort to help students who may be struggling at school. The Project Success/Attendance Initiative serves students in McHenry County who are at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion.

The program is voluntary, and it does not require a mental health diagnosis. It is geared toward prevention and steered by the mantra “Empower—Not Enable.” It is open to all county families with children from birth age to 18. Youth come to the program by a referral from school, a parent, a child welfare professional or other concerned individual in the child’s life.

After the referral, a coordinator provides the family with a comprehensive assessment at no cost. The assessment focuses on the family’s strengths as well as needs and includes a Child and Adolescent Needs & Strengths (CANS) assessment. The coordinator next determines which of two tracks will best suit the situation.

### **1. PROJECT SUCCESS features:**

- Linkage and referral services
- Short-term average 90-day program
- Community-based

individualized service

- Bi-lingual support for the Hispanic population
- Collaboration with multiple community and social service agencies
- Child and family assessments to understand and address strengths and challenges

### **2. ATTENDANCE INITIATIVE features:**

- Individualized program to target each student’s truancy challenges
- Academic year participation
- Coordination with school personnel both weekly and monthly
- School-based staff trained in Response to Intervention & PBIS models
- Bi-lingual staff for Hispanic population

The program administrators report much success for the families that participate in both programs. In many cases, parents were not aware of the resources in the community that could help sort out school-related concerns. Other benefits include in a better working relationship between parents, school personnel, agency providers and law enforcement. Overall, by ad-

ressing these challenges in the early stages from a prevention perspective, there can be better long-term results. When children are in school and families have access to resources that can also decrease the need for high-end services such as mental health services or involvement with the Juvenile Justice system.

Families that live in McHenry County should contact Family CARE at 815-788-4360 for more information.

### **More youth services in Northern Region**

For information on resources available through the Local Area Networks contact one of the DCFS LAN Liaisons. These services are open to all families, including foster, adoptive and guardianship families. The DCFS LAN Liaisons can provide more information.

**Phil Biage**  
630-801-3400  
*Kane, Kendall, McHenry, and Lake counties*

**Sidella Hughes**  
815-967-3731  
*DeKalb, Lee, Ogle, Whiteside and Winnebago counties*

**Sharon O’Bryant**  
815-730-4000  
*DuPage, Grundy, Kankakee, and Will counties*

## Northern Region sends 5 to college with DCFS full scholarships

This year, five students whose cases were served by programs in DCFS Northern Region headed to college with the benefits included in the DCFS Scholarship program. The scholarship includes the waiver of tuition and mandatory fees at one of the nine Illinois state universities or an Illinois community college, a monthly maintenance grant of \$471 and a medical card.

Scholarship recipients were chosen statewide on the basis of scholastic aptitude, a written personal statement and demonstrated community involvement. Next year's scholarship application process begins in January and ends in March. Contact the youth's caseworker or the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services at 312-814-5959 for more information on the scholarship program.



### **Kaitlin Blakeney**

Kaitlin is a graduate of Kankakee High School where she earned a 4.25 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. In high school she participated in Student Council, Interact Club, Foreign Language Club, volleyball and track. She was a member of the National

Honor Society and was on the High Honor Roll. Kaitlin also volunteered at her church as a teacher's aid at Vacation Bible School and participated in many of local events to benefit her community. She is now studying at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, majoring in biology.



### **Montea Dominguez**

Montea graduated in 2010 from East Aurora High School and is a sophomore at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. While in high school, Montea was a member of the Student Council, serving as President her senior year. She was part of the Student

Advisory Board and Upward Bound. She was also a member of the National Honor Society and consistently on the High Honor Roll. Montea is pursuing a major in Political Science.



### **Brent Lacheta**

Brent graduated from Grant Park High School where he earned a 3.73 grade point average. He was a member of the National Honors Society, his high school math team, and Scholastic Bowl team. He was voted MVP on his golf team. In band, he earned medals

for his horn solos. He also represented his school at American Legion Boys State, a government education

and leadership program. Brent attends Illinois State University, where he is majoring in mathematics and actuarial science.



### **Elizabeth Pruchniak**

Elizabeth is a graduate of Harvard High School where she earned a 3.2 grade point average. Her extracurricular activities included student council, history club, cheerleading, academic team, math team and accounting bowl.

Her volunteer experiences include preschool teacher for Vacation Bible School and a mission trip with the 1st Presbyterian Church of Harvard. She also trains exotic animals. Elizabeth attends Northern Illinois University to study accounting.



### **Andrew Sperry**

Andrew, of Warren, graduated in 2010 and since has studied at Highland Community College. Andrew was on the dean's list in his freshman year. He was accepted into the Phi Theta Kappa Honors program because of his outstanding academic

achievements. Andrew's volunteer experiences include helping raise money for Cancer Awareness, Go Green and Haiti Relief. He aspires to become part of the Big Brothers of America Organization to help local underprivileged youth as he continues his educational studies in psychology. He has plans to transfer to Illinois State University.

# 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.

## October

Module 4	Joliet
Child Trauma	Aurora
Educational Advocacy	Elgin, Kankakee, Rockford
Adoption Certification (worker referral required)	Joliet, Rockford

## November

Module 2	Rockford
Child Trauma	Rockford
Educational Advocacy	Joliet, Lake Zurich, 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.