



Illinois Families Now and Forever

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship®

Council honors outstanding Foster Parent Law plans

As the calendar closed on May being designated as Foster Parent Appreciation month, there was still one more celebration in store. On June 8, the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council bestowed awards to three outstanding foster care programs. Each year council members receive and score each Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan that every foster care agency and DCFS regional program must submit. The members follow a tool developed to discern how the foster care programs measure up against the rights and responsibilities outlined in the Law. All 62 plans made the cut as acceptable. For an exceptional plan, council members can go beyond the score to nominate it for special recognition in one of three categories:

- **Dignity and Respect**
- **Organization/User Friendliness**
- **Foster Parent Involvement**

This year the Council selected two plans that stood out for “dignity and respect” and one for “organization/user-friendliness.” Administrators and foster caregivers from each of the programs came to the Council’s June meeting to accept their award.

“It is important that we recognize the programs that are doing right by foster parents. We appreciate the way they approach their plans seriously, because that means they take the needs of caregivers seri-



ASSOCIATION HOUSE: DIGNITY AND RESPECT

Chair Angela Barber (far L) and Denise Gonzales, DCFS Chief of Staff (far R) congratulated the Association House foster care program, represented by Carlos McFarlane, Supervisor; Roschone Rogers, caregiver; and Tina Leeson, Plan Liaison.

ously,” said council chair Angela Barber.

Attention to detail and the importance of clear expectations were apparent in the plan the DCFS Cook Central Region developed with caregivers. The Council recognized the plan for organization/user-friendliness. The language was concise, to the point and easy to understand. The package was well-labeled and covered all topics thoroughly.

Association House of Chicago rose to the top for the way that the agency communicates with caregivers, including 24-hour contact with agency staff. Caregivers can give their input through quarterly quality surveys. Copies of the implementation plan were hand-

delivered to those who could not attend the meeting where it was presented.

DCFS Northern Region’s plan stood apart in how the licensing staff develops a bi-annual training plan and supports foster caregivers so they get training specific to their individual needs.

“These three programs set the bar for how we expect all of the agencies and DCFS regions to treat families. That bar is high, but that is exactly the level of service that our foster families deserve,” said Director Calica.

The Council will be gearing up for the next round of Foster Parent Law Implementation plans due this fall.

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From the DCFS Director

Richard H. Calica

As the end of the summer draws near, I imagine that you and your children are preparing for the coming school year.



School is a most important part of every child's life – it is their adult equivalent of work. Children learn many things in school besides the content taught in their classrooms. They learn if adults value them and have the positive expectations that they can succeed. They learn if adults have the hope and belief that they will grow up to be successful and productive. They learn the rules necessary for collaboration with their classmates in games, sports and school projects. They learn if they can have a positive effect on their environment; if they will be valued for succeeding; or if they will be viewed as failures.

In solid, well-functioning families, school is usually the center of the family's universe. Vacations are planned around it. Activities are planned so that there is enough time for studying and homework. Expectations are communicated in terms of acceptable levels of performance and limits are

set on when and if children can play in relation to whether their school work is done. And finally, open school week is the time when children deal with how their teachers view them and what their teachers tell their parents about their performance and worth. Hopefully, underneath all of this, is the basic message that the way to have a positive effect on the world and to succeed is to apply yourself at school and to do the best that you can to learn about yourself, others, and the challenges and joys that each of us deal with in our daily lives; and how to think about and solve problems of increasing complexity.

Your job as foster parents is a most difficult one. You have accepted the responsibility to temporarily care for someone else's child. This child is most likely dealing with past traumas and the aftermath of abuse or neglect along with the pain of being separated from their families. These special issues make the challenges that school presents even more difficult for our children. Please remember that unconditional positive regard, support along with achievable expectations and helping your child find something they value and are good at so that they can have the experience of succeeding are the most important ways you can help them do well.

Thank you for being our partner in caring for these children while we work to assure that they will have a permanent and stable living situation where they are loved, protected, admired and cared for.

DCFS COOK CENTRAL REGION: ORGANIZATION/USER-FRIENDLINESS

Council Chair Angela Barber (far left) and Denise Gonzalez, DCFS Chief of Staff (far right) celebrated the award winning plan with the Regional Administrator, staff from Cook Central and caregivers who represent the region on the advisory council.



DCFS NORTHERN REGION: DIGNITY AND RESPECT

Council Chair Angela Barber (far left) and Denise Gonzalez, DCFS Chief of Staff (far right) congratulate John Ellison, DCFS Licensing; Robyn Harvey, caregiver; Debbie Freke, caregiver; Colleen Woolwine, DCFS Licensing; and Frank Navarro, Acting Regional Administrator



Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan: What's in it for caregivers?

Every licensed caregiver should receive a copy of or be able to view their agency/DCFS region's Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan. It contains details on important topics including how the program will:

- provide training
- handle grievances
- conduct financial reimbursements to caregivers
- convey information about the child
- provide needed services

Implementation plans should be developed with caregivers. Many programs set meetings each fall specifically so caregivers can contribute to the draft. Contact your agency's or DCFS region's Foster Parent Law Liaison or DCFS regional advisory council for more information.



Illinois Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Bulletin

For the May meeting the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council diverted its regular agenda to allow time to sit down with parents who have or had DCFS cases. This is the third year that council members have split a meeting with the Partnering With Parents summit for the seven birth parent councils outside of Cook County.

The council for foster parents started the day with a business meeting that focused on fleshing out the priorities determined by the Critical Issues Committee. These included strengthening the relationship between licensing representative and caregivers, the increasing time for adoptions to progress to finalization and the need for improved diligent search for potential placements with relatives. The council will develop recommendations and present them as Director Calica requested.

The group took a break in their agenda to join the Partnering with Parents group in a Parent Cafe. The cafe approach is a way allow caregivers to discuss parenting challenges and their feelings about foster care in a safe, non-judging venue. After a series of questions that were led by a facilitator trained by Strengthening Families

of Illinois, there was time to enjoy lunch with parents and caregivers together. Both groups came away with a respect for the other's role and an understanding of the ways their situations are similar.

After lunch, Denise Gonzales the newly appointed DCFS chief of staff, spoke of the administration's focus on realigning the organization, working on the relationships with all the parties that DCFS serves and listening to learn what works and what needs to be fixed. The council looks forward to the outcome of a meeting she agreed to have to discuss the foster parent support specialist program. As a caregiver herself, Gonzales brought a well-rounded perspective to the discussion.



Caregiver Robyn Harvey, a facilitator for Strengthening Families, led a joint discussion during a Parent Cafe.

Advice to be ready as students head back to school

The DCFS Education Advisors have a few reminders to help caregivers get ready for the start of a new school year.

- School districts are required to provide students with copies of school discipline policies and to provide copies of discipline procedures upon request. Be sure to review the policies with the children.
- Contact the education advisor's office in your region for assistance with enrollment, suspension and expulsion issues.
- At any time a child is suspended more than twice in a semester the caseworker and caregiver should meet with the school and develop an Response to Intervention (RtI) plan or revise a behavior plan for

the student.

- Any student who faces expulsion can be ensured legal representation through the DCFS Guardian's Office.
- The application for free or reduced price school meals (commonly referred to as the free lunch form). Students who have an open DCFS case will automatically qualify for free meals. However, once a child moves to adoption, his or her case is closed; there is no longer an automatic qualification.

The education advisors are able to help all DCFS supervised homes and families that have moved to adoption. Call the nearest regional office to get connected. Many private agencies also have education liaisons for their families.

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council was founded in conjunction with the Illinois Foster Parent Law. Membership consists of caregivers, agency representatives and other experts in child welfare, who are appointed by the DCFS Director. The mandated positions for caregivers are spread among the DCFS regions.

The council holds open meetings at least six times a year, and more as needed, in locations around the state.

The next meeting of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council will be on September 21 in Bloomington.

Call the Office of Caregiver and Parent Support at 217-524-2422 for details.

Head back to school with a healthy report from doctor and dentist

As students head back to school with fresh pencils and notebooks, they also need to go in good health with up-to-date dental and medical exams.

Health Exam forms due by October 15

The state of Illinois requires school children to have a current physical (within the past year) and to be current with immunizations when they are:

- entering an Illinois school for the first time at any age
- starting kindergarten
- entering the sixth grade
- entering the ninth grade

A lead screening is required for young children entering daycare, preschool and kindergarten. Children entering kindergarten or first grade also must be immunized against chicken pox/varicella. In areas of high incidences of tuberculosis (TB) a TB skin test is required as part of the physical exam. Talk with the child's doctor to see what is required.

Completed Certificate of Child Health Examination” forms, signed by the physician, should be given to the school nurse where the child is enrolled. Give a copy to

the child's caseworker, and keep a copy for the home record. According to state law, children who do not have a current physical or shots by October 15 will not be allowed to continue attending school until they have received the care and their record is updated.

Eye and dental exams required

All students entering kindergarten (or starting an Illinois school for the first time) must also have an eye exam performed by a licensed optometrist or a medical doctor who performs eye examinations. This required examination is beyond the screenings that are often part of a regular physical or are sometimes provided at the school. The Eye Exam form should be turned in to the school by October 15. Students without this exam will not be excluded from school, but report cards could be withheld. Additionally, state law requires that Illinois children in Kindergarten, second and sixth grades have dental examinations by a licensed dentist. Caregivers must present proof of examination before May 15 of the current school year. If not, the school may hold second and sixth grade report cards until receiving proof that the exam took place or will happen within 60 days of May 15. Call the DCFS Office of Health Policy at 217-557-2689 with questions.

Whooping cough outbreak calls for more shots

Last fall, there were wide spread reports about an outbreak of whooping cough, otherwise known as Pertussis infection. Young children are especially at risk because they will not be fully immunized until six months of age. Complicating the situation is new evidence that the DPT/DTaP immunization doses completed for younger children weaken after about ten years and require an additional dose. Without an additional immunization, pre-teens and adolescents could be at risk.

NEW: Tdap shot for upper grades

Any child entering sixth grade must show proof of receiving one dose of Tdap (defined as Tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis) vaccine regardless of when they

may have had their last DTaP, DT or Td dose. Also, this school year, students entering grades seven through 12 who did not already receive a Tdap after their 11th birthday are required to receive one Tdap dose regardless of the interval since the last DTaP, DT or Td dose.

Adult immunizations recommended

In light of the pertussis outbreak sweeping the country, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adults receive a Td or Tdap immunization every ten years. DCFS encourages adults who are caring for children talk to their physicians about how to stay up to date with immunizations for their own health and that of children in the home.

New cuts to the Illinois Medicaid program passed at the end of May. Some changes will directly affect children qualified for Medicaid. These include:

- Utilization controls on durable medical equipment (DME) e.g. oxygen, diabetic supplies, nebulizers
- Utilization controls on home health services, such as limits on approved in-home nursing hours or reimbursement rates and periodic re-evaluation based on medical necessity
- Limit adult and children's prescriptions to four per month; can be increased based on prior authorization or other specialty drug/condition exception
- Prior approval on wheelchair repairs
- Limit on incontinence supplies – from 300 to 200 per month

For more information concerning these changes, contact the DCFS Office of Health Services at 217-557-2689.

Northern Region Education Advisors on call to help caregivers with school issues

With the start of a new school year on the horizon, Southern Region caregivers should know they have a powerful resource ready to help with education issues. Through a partnership with Northern Illinois University, the DCFS/NIU education advisors advocate for youth in care and also work with adoptive and guardianship families.

The Education Advisors can assist with the assessments and Individualized Education Plans (IEP) for special education. When there are behavioral issues, they can work out an intervention with the school. They can answer caregivers' questions and attend school meetings with them. They will help caregivers and caseworkers obtain appropriate educational services for the children. They also will help caregivers plan for education after high school.

With the background of working in or with schools before joining DCFS, Education Advisors know how to navigate the system. They understand school issues including special education, attendance policies, discipline and a host of other concerns. Working with an Education Advisor can be very positive and gratifying. They identify with and highly value caregivers and the children in their homes. They recognize and empathize with the frustrations and needs of both the education and child welfare systems, making them invaluable advocates. They advocate effectively because they

know what children have the right to expect from schools. The advisors are each well-versed in the federal and state education laws and DCFS Rule 314 concerning education services that must be provided to children in DCFS care.

Since every school can have a slightly different way of doing things, it helps to have an Education Advisor sitting beside the caregiver as you both advocate for the student.

DCFS Education Advisors for Northern Region

Advisor: Rhonda Best
200 South Wyman St., Suite 201
Rockford, IL 61101
Phone: 815-967-3750
E-mail: rhonda.best@illinois.gov
Counties covered: Boone, Carroll, DeKalb, Jo Daviess, Kane, Kankakee, Lee, Ogle, Stephenson, Whiteside, Winnebago

Advisor: Robena Morgan
1619 W. Jefferson St.
Joliet, IL 60435
Phone/Fax: 815-730-4342
E-mail: robena.morgan@illinois.gov
Counties covered: DuPage, DeKalb, Grundy, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Will

Local events celebrate graduation and prep youth for adulthood

Youth living in the Northern Region had several reasons to celebrate in June. The end of a school year brought more than 50 recent graduates from high school and college together at the Brunswick Zone entertainment center. Along with the games and prizes, youth also received goody bags with items donated by staff and community members who wished them well in their future.

The DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services also spearheaded the annual Youth Summit for all Northern Region youth in care ages 14 to 21. This program presented a slate of workshops and resources to help youth as they transition to adulthood. The Regional Youth Advisory Board played a key leadership role to make sure the information on employment, education and life skills was relevant and engaging for the young people. Anyone needing more information can contact Holly Bitner at holly.bitner@illinois.gov or 630-801-3446.



Pregnant and parenting teens turn to McHenry group for services

TAMI is a support group for pregnant and parenting teens in McHenry County. The goals of the TAMI program are to provide linkage, education, support and social activities for pregnant and parenting teens in a small group setting. The teen parents are eligible for services until their 22nd birthday.

The TAMI program provides links to practical resources such as childcare, housing assistance and food assistance. It also looks out for the other important issues like dealing with school challenges, working on time management, and preventing a subsequent unplanned pregnancy.

In the United States close to 25 percent of teen mothers have a second pregnancy within two years of the birth of their first child. In fiscal year 2011 only 2 percent of TAMI clients reported a second pregnancy. The national average of teen moms that drop out of high school is greater than 60 percent but as of June 2011, 81 percent of TAMI participants were either enrolled in school or had graduated from high school (or earned their GED).

TAMI has two evening groups that meet weekly in the community and three groups that meet in high schools during the school day. TAMI also offers home visits that provide the teens with individual support. The group meets from 4:30 to 6:00pm in Woodstock on Tuesday and in Crystal Lake on Wednesday. During the evening groups childcare is provided at no cost and a light dinner is served. Both parents are encouraged to attend TAMI weekly but moms or dads are welcome to attend on their own when one parent is unable to attend.

The teen parents earn “TAMI bucks” for attending evening groups, going to school and/or work, earning positive report card grades and for any other activities that help them to improve their role as a parent. The “TAMI bucks” can then be used to purchase items they need for themselves or their children.

For more information contact Youth Service Bureau, a division of Pioneer Center at 815-338-7360.

DCFS foster care programs honor caregivers across region in May

DCFS staff in southern Kane County hosted their Foster Parent Appreciation picnic in June. Caregivers and children enjoyed a leisurely stroll through Phillips Park Zoo in Aurora. Families enjoyed seeing the exhibits of bald eagles, wolves, foxes, otters, elk, goats, pot-bellied pigs, llamas and more. DCFS staff and families then enjoyed a nice summer barbeque by Mastodon Lake. Foster parents and staff mingled while children enjoyed playing on the playground and a game of volleyball. One child commented that it was the best party he had ever been to, but next year he needed to bring his fishing pole.

DCFS offices in northern Kane County and DuPage County kicked off the beginning of summer with their appreciation picnic for foster

families. Potawatomi Park in St Charles was the destination for this year's event. Located next to a 18-hole miniature golf park, some families opted to enjoy a healthy competitive game. The park also boasted a Victorian gazebo where families rested while enjoying a spectacular view of the Fox River. After mini-golf, foster families enjoyed a delicious barbeque while mingling with DCFS staff. It was a beautiful evening and a great opportunity for DCFS staff and foster caregivers to get to know one another in such a relaxed atmosphere.

In DeKalb, caregivers started what may become a new tradition. Instead of dinner at Portillo's as in previous years, families gathered for a breakfast. The grocer Hyee's provided a generous buffet in their food court. Seventeen of the forty

families attended the event, along with many staff.

May staff members once again donated money to add to other contributions so caregivers were able to receive gifts of appreciation. The region acknowledged the years of service for veteran foster parents and invited those who are brand new or in the licensing stage so staff could welcome and get to know them.



Kids get ready for fun at the picnic for Elgin and Glen Ellyn families.

Northern Region Training

DCFS Office of Training has scheduled sessions of in-service training modules and other courses in locations across the region. To get specific dates and locations, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center (VTC) anytime at www.DCFstraining.org or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during business hours. In addition to classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of videos, books and online training.

A family for me: Call AICI at 800-572-2390 for more information



Andre [7765] Andre, 11, is an honest and expressive young man who is always able to tell you what is on his mind. Although he can act out at times, his overall behavior is good. Andre interacts well with his peers and is always willing to share with his fellow students. He loves to stay active and spends a lot of time skateboarding, playing basketball, and playing football. He also likes to paint, draw, listen to music, and attend church.

Andre's worker says he is a likeable child and a hard worker. He does well with his day-to-day tasks, given gentle reminders from the adults in his life. The forever family for Andre would be able to provide a structured home for Andre, complete with well-defined rules and boundaries. You can spend lots of time with him, and assure him that he is loved. You can also work with Andre's teachers and support staff to ensure he receives the educational and emotional support he needs. Andre would like to join an active family that has a dog and enjoys spending time outside. He should be the youngest child in his adoptive home.



John [7944] John, 13, is a sociable young man who enjoys helping others. He has struggled with following directions in the past, but has made significant strides in this regard to the point where he does not usually have to be asked to do something twice. John is also an active child who likes playing sports and recently earned a yellow belt in karate. In his spare time, he enjoys playing video games.

John's teachers and helpers both report that he has made significant improvements in his behavior, and is generally positive, responsive, and independent. Potential parents for John should be patient with John, and willing to demonstrate your commitment to him on a regular basis. You can provide lots of structure and supervision, and redirect his behavior when necessary. You can also make sure John maintains contact with members of his birth family, including his sister, grandparents, and aunts. The ideal family would consist of two parents who live in central Illinois. Other children in the home should be older than John.

DCFS Lending Library closed for redesign until Fall 2012

The Lending Library is unavailable as of July 1. This break will allow the Office of Training to revamp the program and roll it out fresh this fall. Meanwhile, caregivers may find many of the DCFS Lending Library books in their local libraries. Contact the Northern Regional Training Manager, Lori Horgan at 815-730-4123 for more details on other training options and ways to earn training credit hours.



Latrice [7840] Latrice, 15, is an outgoing child who enjoys playing sports and spending time with her friends. She also has a creative side, and can often be found writing poetry or practicing the guitar. Latrice has trouble following rules at times, but she is also helpful around the house and often volunteers to cook or do household chores.

Latrice's teacher says she is an independent learner who gets along well with other students. Her foster parent says she is a good child who appreciates any opportunity to play basketball with her friends. The right family for Latrice is one that can also help her develop strong communication skills so she can express her feelings appropriately. Latrice should be encouraged to enjoy her childhood without taking on too many adult responsibilities. She would also benefit from ongoing visits with her siblings.



Marshae [7891] Get ready to have fun, because Marshae is a happy, energetic child who loves being around people. She is very talkative, and can hold a conversation with anyone. Marshae, 7, seeks attention on a regular basis, and sometimes needs to be reminded of the difference between positive and negative attention. When she is not socializing, she enjoys watching television, riding her bicycle, and playing outside.

Marshae's worker says she is a bright child who loves to learn. Prospective parents should be able to spend lots of time with Marshae. You can work with doctors and nurses to make sure her ongoing medical needs are met. You can also help Marshae maintain relationships with the important people in her life, including her current foster parent. The ideal family would include a strong female role-model. Marshae should be the only child in her adoptive home or, if this is not possible, the youngest child. A St. Louis-area family is preferred, so Marshae can continue to see her long-time medical providers.

Please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 800-572-2390, or see the AICI Web site – www.adoptinfo-il.org if you are interested in adopting one of these children or learning about other children waiting to be adopted.



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Pat Quinn, Governor
Richard H. Calica, DCFS Director
Published by: DCFS Office of
Caregiver and Parent Support

Editor: Vanessa James
Phone: 312-814-6824
Fax: 312-814-4131
E-mail: vanessa.james@illinois.gov

Sponsor: Debbie Palmer-Thomas,
DCFS Northern Regional
Administrator

Regional Reporter

Colleen Woolwine
595 South State St.
Elgin, IL 60123
Phone: 847-888-7635
Fax: 630-844-8968
Colleen.Woolwine@illinois.gov

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Vanessa James, Editor
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100 West Randolph - 6th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60601

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