

# Illinois Families Now and Forever®

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship

## College funds are out there for youth in care

Students planning to attend college will likely apply for financial aid. The first step to qualify for financial aid is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid form (FAFSA). All assistance based on financial need requires filling out the FAFSA. After completing and returning the application, the student will receive the Student Aid Report (SAR) that lists the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The EFC is what the family is expected to pay, based on their family income, on top of any financial aid that is awarded.

For students who have been in the child welfare system, the major factor for financial aid is the student's status as "dependent" or "independent." As an independent student, the parent's (parent by birth or foster caregiver) income will not be included in the financial need formula. That typically results in eligibility for more financial aid. The FAFSA student section asks the question "At any

time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?" A youth in foster care or subsidized guardianship can answer yes and would automatically qualify as an independent student. Similarly, youth who left DCFS care through adoption after age 13 can also answer yes and the adoptive parents' income would not factor in the aid decision. Students should talk to their guidance counselors and college financial aid advisors for more specific details.

It is important that each youth complete and mail or e-mail their applications early in the calendar year, in order to secure the maximum benefits. Students can access the application at the website [www.fafsa.edu.gov](http://www.fafsa.edu.gov). The DCFS Education Advisors and Transition Managers can also help families make plans for college. For more information, contact DCFS at 312-814-5959.

### Illinois Student Assistance Commission

[www.collegezone.org](http://www.collegezone.org)

Look for free workshops across the state

### Free Application for Federal Student Aid Commission

[www.fafsa.edu.gov](http://www.fafsa.edu.gov)

### Minority Scholarships

[www.free-4u.com/minority.htm](http://www.free-4u.com/minority.htm)

### Orphan Foundation of America

[www.orphan.org](http://www.orphan.org)

### United Negro College Fund

[www.uncf.org](http://www.uncf.org)

These sites are a good jumping off point for students and families to research the college application process and funding sources. Be wary of any online resource that requires an up front fee for scholarship search.

### College Board

[collegeboard.com](http://collegeboard.com)

The same organization that runs the SAT exam helps students prepare for and explore ways to pay for college.

### Fastweb scholarship search

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

## *Arthur Bishop back as DCFS director*

This year marks the Department of Children and Family Services' 50th anniversary as a state agency. DCFS will go forward in 2014 under new leadership. Governor Pat Quinn announced in January that Arthur Bishop will be the new DCFS director. His appointment follows the November resignation of former director Richard Calica, who passed away in December.



Arthur Bishop's name is one that may be familiar. He started his career as a caseworker in 1995. He rose to become deputy director of Field Operations, which entailed overseeing the DCFS regional foster care programs across the state. In 2010, he was tapped to head the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. His experience with youth in foster care helped to transform that department into one that was more trauma-informed and focused on connecting youth to nurturing community living rather than residing in state facilities.

"I appreciate this new undertaking at DCFS. Every child deserves a safe environment and there is no greater responsibility than keeping our children out of harm's way," Bishop said.

The Governor also thanked acting director Denise Gonzales for stepping up to ensure a smooth transition during the two-month interim period.

## DCFS Scholarship packets due 3/31

*Open to youth currently and formerly in care*

DCFS annually provides 48 college scholarships to youth who are currently under guardianship of the Department or who left DCFS guardianship through adoption or private guardianship arrangements. Scholarship recipients receive up to four consecutive years of tuition and academic fee waivers to be used at participating Illinois state colleges or universities, a \$491 monthly stipend and a medical card.

Applicants must have a high school diploma or GED by the end of the current school year. Applications must

be postmarked by March 31. A review committee will evaluate the applications and make selections based on academic accomplishments, community service and a personal statement.

The application for the Youth in Scholarship program (CFS 438) is on the DCFS youth website [www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov) under the Education tab. Contact the youth's caseworker or call DCFS at 312-814-5959 for more information.



*Jordanne Beaulieu left last year's scholarship luncheon and headed to college with a DCFS Scholarship.*

## MOVIN' ON UP: Resources for youth moving to adulthood

There are several education and employment programs for older youth who are still in DCFS care, offered by the DCFS Youth and Family Development Office. Youth who achieved permanency through adoption or guardianship typically fall outside of eligibility. However, they can apply for the DCFS Scholarship program (above) and the Education and Training Voucher is available to youth adopted after 16.

To clarify eligibility or for further information, DCFS has Transition Coordinators assigned to each region. These individuals can help youth and their families explore different educational and employment resources from DCFS and in the community. Contact them at the nearest regional office or call 312-814-5959 or visit [www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov).

### Youth In College/Vocational Training Program

Students may choose to attend an accredited vocational school, four-year college or community college. They receive a monthly grant in the amount of \$491 provided each month for up to four (4) years. Medical cards are provided to Illinois students until the participant reaches the age of 21. Reimbursement is available for books not

covered by financial aid. Benefits are available until the earlier of four (4) years, or the semester of the 23rd birthday.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Be at least 16, and not yet, 21
- Be under court-ordered, legal responsibility of DCFS
- Maintain at least a "C" average each semester
- Maintain full time status and submit a class schedule and grades each term

### The Employment Incentive Program (EIP)

The Employment Incentive Program is designed to provide financial and supplemental services to help adolescent youth gain marketable skills through on-the-job work experience or through job training programs. Participants receive a monthly stipend in the amount of \$150.00 for a maximum of 12 months and a medical card until age 21. They may also be eligible for start-up funding of work-related items (e.g., tools, work clothing, etc.). Funding is need-based and limited to a one-time disbursement of up to \$200.00.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Be 17 years of age, and not yet 21
- Have a high school diploma or a GED certificate
- Be under court-ordered responsibility of DCFS

- Complete Casey Living Skills assessment
- Be involved in job training through a certified job skills training program or be employed for at least one month prior to applying for the EIP and working a minimum of 20 hours per week

### Education & Training Vouchers

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program assists youth with post-secondary education related expenses not covered by financial aid grants. Qualifying students can receive payment of up to \$5000 annually for education related expenses such as tuition, fees, books, supplies, uniforms, equipment, and/or transportation not covered by other grants or scholarships. Funding is available until age 21. However, if the student is enrolled in a post-secondary program before age 21 and is making satisfactory progress toward completing the program, funding is available until age 23.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Youth for whom DCFS is legally responsible or who aged out of care at age 18 or older OR
- Achieved permanency at age 16 or older through either subsidized guardianship or adoption

## From the Editor

Vanessa James



For the first issue of the year I like to take a moment to address our readers more as a parent than an editor. For a publication like ours, both roles are important. I wonder if you have ever had that “potential child” who is long on talent but short on production. Recently I learned an important lesson from that kiddo. After a lackluster basketball game, husband and I had a car talk with our daughter. Just like it says in the books, words that come out of the back of a driving parent’s head amazingly seem to stick. For the

next game, she was a new player, passing, shooting and scoring points. What happened? She said she stopped being nervous. She finally believed that she had the skills (the skills we had paid for in three summer camps and hours practicing with her in the park!). Then she relaxed and just had fun.

That scenario is one we often face with the kids who come to our homes. They are unsure of their worth and are too worried to enjoy life. We invest time and resources to build them up. We keep trying to find the words to convince them that they can do it. We stay to the final buzzer to hug them even when the ball didn’t bounce their way. Hopefully, we get to cheer that

moment when they discover what we saw in them all along.

This lesson isn’t just for kids. In this extreme parenting called foster care, we too can doubt our own skills. We get worried and forget to have fun. We have to remember that we have been trained; we have the skills to do this. We have read the articles; we’ve been “coached.” Believe it. Now take a breath, have fun and let’s give it our best shot.

Thank you for another year of sharing my parenting journey with you. There is a full team committed to writing and producing this valuable publication that makes your path a bit smoother.

## *Reimbursement program helps avoid going broke when things get broken*



Whether completely accidental or diabolically intentional, where there are children there can be damages. The foster parent often has to pick up the pieces along with the costs. The Foster Child Damage Reimbursement Program provides secondary insurance coverage for property damage and bodily injury caused by a child while the child is “in the care, custody and control” of the foster caregiver.

DCFS automatically provides this coverage at no cost to all foster families and relative caregivers. This is over and above any other valid and collectable insurance the foster families have. Foster caregivers will have to provide documentation and proof as required. Details are found in Administrative Procedure #13.

### What is covered?

- Physical damage to the prop-

erty of the foster family

- Damage caused by a child to other people’s property while the child is in foster care.
- Bodily injury to members of the foster family or to others

### Limits of Coverage

Claims are limited to \$5,000 per fiscal year. For damage to property, payments will be made based on an “actual cash value” basis, which is the amount it would cost to repair or replace the damaged property with material/s of like kind and quality, minus allowable deductions for normal physical deterioration and depreciation based on the age, condition and normal life expectancy of the property.

### Filing a claim

Immediately notify the child’s caseworker that a claim needs to be filed. The caseworker will view the damage and request that a claim form is sent directly to the caregiver. After completing the claim

form, have the child’s caseworker sign it, attach all pertinent receipts and other supporting documents, and make a copy of everything for the caregiver before the caseworker mails it to:

Foster Child Damage Reimbursement Program Coordinator  
DCFS  
James R. Thompson Center  
100 W. Randolph, 6th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60601  
Phone: 312-814-7294

The Program Coordinator will review the claim to ensure that all necessary information is present and will forward it to the Review Committee. Once a decision for payment is approved or denied, the caregiver will be contacted by mail. If payment for the claim is approved, the foster parent will receive reimbursement within 8 to 12 weeks.

## *Foster caregivers and adoptive parents have many tax benefits to explore*

The decision to support children through foster care and adoption can bring benefits as tax time nears.

### **Child Tax Credit**

Caregivers may qualify for up to \$1000 credit per child, depending on the household income, if the child:

- is your son, daughter, stepchild, foster child, brother, sister, stepbrother, stepsister, or a descendant of any of them (for example, your grandchild, niece, or nephew). An adopted child is always treated as your own child;
- was under age 17 at the end of 2013;
- did not provide over half of his or her own support for 2013;
- lived with you for more than half of 2013;
- is claimed as a dependent on your return;
- does not file a joint return for the year (or files it only as a claim for refund); and
- was a U.S. citizen, a U.S. national, or a U.S. resident alien.

See IRS Pub. 972 Child Tax Credit for more details.

### **Charitable Deductions**

If you itemize deductions, you may be able to deduct unreimbursed out-of-pocket expenses to care for a child in foster care.

### **Adoption Tax Credit**

Legislation in 2012 made the Adoption Tax Credit permanent. A family adopting from foster care can claim up to \$12,970, the maximum amount allowed under the credit. Families with incomes under \$194,580 are eligible for the full credit, which diminishes gradually

at higher incomes. Beginning with 2012 tax filings, the credit was no longer refundable. So people who do not owe taxes will not get the credit, which can only be used to offset tax liability.

### **Earned Income Tax Credit**

The federal credit for low-income, working families can be as much as \$496 to \$6,143, depending on the number of qualified children. To qualify:

- the household income must be under \$14,590 - \$52,427, depending on family size and filing status.
- you must have earned income –usually wages or self-employment. In some cases taxable disability benefits qualify as earned income.

See IRS Publication 596 for details.

### **Dependency Exemption**

The exemption for dependents could lower your income tax, and lead to benefits in these areas:

*child care credit* – for working parents (IRS pub. 503)  
*education credits* – based on out-of-pocket college expenses (IRS Pub. 970)  
*head of household filing status for unmarried parents* (IRS Pub. 501)

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These tips can get you started, but are no substitute for expert advice. Be sure to explore these topics more at IRS.gov or with a professional tax advisor. Additionally, the Center for Economic Progress provides free tax preparation services for families with income under \$50,000. To find a location in Springfield or the Chicago area, go to: [www.economicprogress.org](http://www.economicprogress.org).

## *Online course updated to include new adoption tax credit rules*



Adoption Learning Partners offers a broad catalog of online courses for current and prospective adoptive families.

In January the organization updated the Adoption Tax Credit Course to reflect changes for tax year 2013.

The adoption tax credit is one way the federal government promotes and supports adoption. Though the adoption tax credit provides a very valuable benefit to adoptive families, it is also among one of the most complicated tax law provisions.

The Adoption Tax Credit Course will help adoptive families:

- Determine their eligibility for the adoption tax credit
- See how the adoption tax credit works with different types of adoptions and financial situations
- Create a system for tracking and documenting expenses
- Prepare for year-end tax planning and work with a tax professional

This course is available for free. Caregivers can register at [www.adoptionlearningpartners.org](http://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org).

## In-service PRIDE training modules now offered online

The PRIDE in-service curriculum, developed for those who already are licensed, offers nine modules that address specific child development and parenting needs. Now those PRIDE in-service modules are available online, in addition to the traditional classroom format.

### Benefits to online In-service PRIDE for licensed caregivers

- Training needs can be met anytime of the day and anywhere with a computer and Internet access
- Caregivers can easily complete missed sessions, in-service hours, or corrective action training hours to maintain licensure.
- Caregivers can take a refresher course when dealing with a child's changing needs or difficult behavior.

### Registration process

Caregivers can access the online PRIDE modules on the Virtual Training Center (VTC) at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org). Caregivers must have an account for the Virtual Training Center. From the home page of the VTC select the link for PRIDE Online.

To request a VTC account or to ask questions, call the DCFS Registration Line toll-free at 877-800-3393 (TTY: 217-524-2070) or send an email to [dcfstraining@illinois.gov](mailto:dcfstraining@illinois.gov). Be prepared to update your address, phone number and e-mail address.

In order to receive credit for the course, trainees must listen to all videos and complete all activities. A certificate to print will be available after completing an entire PRIDE

module. A report will automatically be submitted to the DCFS Training Office. After review and within seven to 10 business days it will appear on your VTC transcript.

### In-service modules now online

*Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs*  
*Addressing Developmental Issues Related to Sexuality*  
*Responding to Signs and Symptoms of Child Sexual Abuse*  
*Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families*  
*Working as a Professional Team Member*  
*Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity*  
*Promoting Permanency Outcomes*  
*Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family*

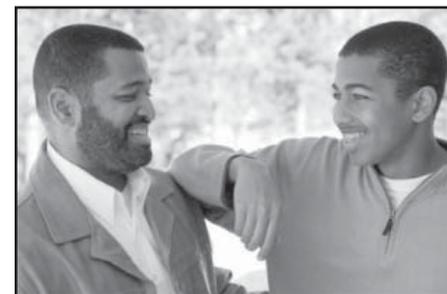
## New training provides grown-up skills to talk to youth about their sexual health

Caregivers can take a new training on the sexual health of children. So often adults avoid this important topic because it can be difficult to find the right words and accurate information.

This new training will make sure that caregivers, parents and staff get trained together on the factors that can affect a child's sexual health. They will learn how to talk with children about what is at stake and how to put children on a path toward long-term well being. Participants will be able to support youth as they make appropriate personal decisions. They will also learn behaviors and attitudes that adults can model so youth in care

can develop healthy sexual values and behaviors. The training will also provide developmentally appropriate information on relationship choices to delay or prevent teen pregnancy and decrease instances of sexually transmitted infections.

Promoting Sexual Health is a six-hour course presented in two sessions. It uses the co-trainer model, where the instructors will be a DCFS staff trainer with a foster parent/trainer. The sessions will be open to staff and parents who will learn together. To design the curriculum, young people from the Youth Advisory Board, members of the Statewide Foster Care Council



and staff who work with youth offered ideas about what the course should cover.

The training calendar has been updated with sessions for the first half of 2014. It is available online on the Virtual Training Center at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org). Caregivers can select the time and location that works best, then call the DCFS Training registration toll-free line at 877-800-3393.

# Holiday festivities spread fun to families across Central Region

*There was plenty of holiday fun happening across the Central Region as staff from many DCFS offices celebrated with the families they support. What follows is a sampling of the spirit of giving.*

On December 17, the Urbana field office hosted their annual Christmas party with games, refreshments, and gifts for children served by the office. The employees of Champaign County graciously donated gifts and CASA of Champaign County volunteered



their time and donated homemade Christmas cookies. Children also were the recipients of Barnes & Noble's book donation program.

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A snowstorm didn't hold back the families and workers of the Galesburg/Canton field offices. They celebrated with a Christmas party at the newly remodeled Discovery Depot on December 13. The event included private agency and DCFS foster parents and was sponsored by Chris and Heather Kanakares. Guests enjoyed pizza and brought side dishes to share.

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On Friday, December 13, the Springfield field office held a Christmas party. Despite the poor weather that night, almost all families were able to make the event, with over 50 people in attendance. Children received gifts donated through an Angel

tree. Jean Chiles, a foster parent support specialist, planned the party and ensured that all children received a gift.

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On December 19, foster parents served by Lutheran Social Services of Champaign County celebrated Christmas with a party hosted by First Christian Church of Champaign. Volunteers from First Christian church provided lots of enjoyable activities for children and their families. There was face painting, an indoor playground, indoor soccer, musical chairs and arts and crafts. Health Alliance employees donated gift baskets for foster parents. Gifts for children were also donated by St. John's Lutheran School and church, Little Hearts Daycare, and Lutheran Churches in the community.

## Customer Service Line

**The number for the DCFS Central Region Foster Parent Customer Service Line is 866-368-5204.**

**The Customer Service Line is designed for calls from foster families whose licenses are supervised by DCFS Central Region. Agency-supervised homes should work directly with the agency that monitors their license.**

**This toll-free line is staffed Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., excluding state holidays. The line is equipped with voicemail.**

**The calls can be about issues or concerns that caregivers have not been able to resolve through normal channels. The goal is to have a response time of 24 to 48 hours for all calls. This is not set up to be an emergency response line. If a caregiver has an urgent request, it is best to call the field office or the after-hours number.**

## Facebook for Champaign County foster homes

Champaign County foster parents can now stay informed with social media. DCFS Foster Parent Support Specialist Julie Cebulski manages a Facebook page committed to helping foster parents from all agencies stay on top of current issues regarding children and foster care. Personal information on specific families or children will not be posted. The page will also feature upcoming training events available to foster parents.

It can be found on Facebook as Foster Family Resources of Champaign County. Like the page and stay informed.

## For 30 years, Frankie Williams is still “grandma” to all

Frankie Williams has been a DCFS licensed foster parent for more than 28 years, since the unexpected death of her son at age 18. She subsequently relocated to a large, five-bedroom house, and sensed the timing was right for foster care. In almost three decades, she estimates that she has had some 70 foster children in her home. It started with seven unrelated children residing in her home. They all eventually graduated from high school and as adults still maintain contact with the woman they came to know as “grandma.”

Through 43 years of marriage with her first husband, Curtis Jones, they approached foster care as a team. Frankie said he took an active role with the foster children; she described him as a patient man, who “had her back.” They had two children together. Frankie adopted

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*“She believes in teens being given a chance to make the most of their circumstances. She will hang in there with many struggling teens...”*

*Marla Abdullah  
DCFS licensing worker*

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one child from foster care, whom she raised all of his life. For the last two years, her husband Troy Williams has joined her in foster care. Troy had been a bachelor with no children of his own. However, he loves children in his new family and relates well with them. Currently Frankie and Troy have one child living with them. Frankie also provided daycare out of her house for five years while still carrying on fostering. “I have been helping children all my life,” she said.

Her persistence, love and patience as her main positive traits that make it possible to care for children. Patience is especially needed when a child initially comes to live in her home. She has learned to grant them the necessary time and space to allow them to process their pain and lessen their spirit of rebellion.

Frankie enjoys sitting back and reflecting on the positive gains her children have made in their lives. It encourages her when she sees that the investment of time, effort and love was not in vain.

Fortunately, Frankie does not believe her lifestyle changed much at all when she made the decision to foster children. She feels her energies have always centered on her home. Ironically, she views the children as giving her more, not less, energy for life.

A good tip she always returned to has been to help the older children learn to be responsible and to share in making things run smoothly in



Frankie Williams

the home they all shared. That helped her to weather the daily strains of caring for so many children through the years. The young people were also prepared to handle adult life when it was their time.

“She believes in teens being given a chance to make the most of their circumstances. She will hang in there with many struggling teens to give them the opportunity to have a caring, stable home life that can be a spring board for their later success,” said Marla Abdullah, her licensing worker.

“Mrs. Williams has grown foster kids who stay in close touch with her, and come to visit her, long after they have left her home.”

It may not have always been easy, but Frankie is grateful that she has had lots of help from church members and from her relatives who live nearby.

## DCFS transition coordinator preps older youth for adulthood

Holly Bitner-Duck, one of four DCFS transition coordinators, is responsible for providing information to Northern Region youth as they transition out of care onto the path to adulthood. She also shares information with workers, foster caregivers and others, regarding the various programs available through DCFS. In addition, Bitner-Duck can also help youth in foster care or in the Youth In College program with school matters, the DCFS scholarship program and employment opportunities.



Bitner-Duck is also the point person for the Life Skills training. She can be reached at 630-801-3446 or Holly.Bitner@illinois.gov.

For additional growth and leadership development, all youth between 14 and 21 can participate in a Youth Advisory Board. The Northern Region Youth Advisory Board hosts monthly meetings that promote youth empowerment, self-advocacy and information exchange. Youth learn to work collaboratively and employ Roberts Rules of Order in their meetings. Those young people who are elected to leadership positions will then represent the Northern Region on the Statewide Youth Advisory Board. Caregivers should encourage youth in their care to get involved with the advisory board. Arrangements for transportation to meetings are available.

Much more information on transition resources for older youth is at the DCFS-sponsored website [www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov).

### *Life skills training gets youth ready for adulthood*

The DCFS Northern Region is offering new and innovative Life Skills programming as of last November. The Life Skills Program was revamped to ensure that older youth have practical information to prepare for adulthood. Three vendors: Omni, Parents with Promise and Youth Services Network will provide group programming to DCFS youth, based on the county they live in. The life skills curriculum is for young people age 14 to 20 who are in foster care, youth in college, residential program.

Each youth will begin the process by taking the Casey Life Skills Assessment. Their caseworker will submit a referral packet for life skills. Youth are then connected to a life skills provider. Each program addresses the following eight life skills categories identified by DCFS and the Casey Foundation as key areas of need:

- Daily living
- Career and education planning
- Work and study skills

- Housing and money management
- Relationships and communication skills
- Self care
- Looking forward
- Permanency

The life skills providers have created new and engaging group learning environments that meet weekly. The group sessions will enable youth to connect with and learn from their peers. Hands-on activities and field trips will also occur. If appropriate, one-on-one sessions will be provided. All programs will provide young people with incentives linked to their participation.

For more information on life skills training, contact the youth's caseworker or Northern Region transition manager Holly Bitner-Duck at 630-801-3446 or [holly.bitner@illinois.gov](mailto:holly.bitner@illinois.gov).

### *Be listed in the 2014 directory for foster parent associations and support groups*

If you lead a support group or association for foster or adoptive families, you can be included in the directory of support groups, published in May in the Foster Parent Appreciation Month issue.

Please send the following information by March 30. New listings and updates should be sent in writing by email or post to:

Vanessa James, DCFS  
100 W. Randolph, 6th fl.  
Chicago, IL 60601  
[vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov) (there is a dot before "james")

Be sure to include:

- Name of group
- Meeting schedule (e.g. second Tuesday of the month at 10 a.m.)
- Meeting location
- Contact name with phone number/email
- Any other notes (e.g. potluck dinner, child care provided, RSVP required, etc.)

## Holiday festivities spread fun to families across Northern Region

*There was plenty of holiday fun happening across the Northern Region as staff from many DCFS offices and private agency foster care programs celebrated with the families they support. What follows is a sampling of the spirit of giving.*

Families served by the DCFS foster care program in Northern Kane, DuPage and DeKalb counties were fortunate enough to have their Holiday Party sponsored by It's Our Little Secret (IOLS), a private agency co-founded by Kristie Sams-Faulkner and Maebelle Obispo, two women who were formerly in DCFS care. Both women feel it is essential that foster families and children are able to celebrate the season in a grand way that honors the families who open their doors and hearts to children.

Erika Martinez from It's Our Little Secret organized a Christmas celebration at Christ Community Church with the help of foster parent and youth pastor Pete

Sutton. Music was provided by DJ Ope-ski, and he worked his magic to get young and old out on the dance floor. The children all left the party with a gift from IOLS, filled up with food and fun.

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Approximately 60 adults and 120 children attended a combined DCFS/private agency foster family holiday party held at the Eola Community Center in Aurora. Santa was on hand to greet families; a raffle was held for high-demand items such as bikes and scooters; and water-based tattoos were the hit of the night. Toys and games were supplied through the Walter and Connie Payton Foundation and many community supporters. Oakhurst Homeowners Association provided beverages, dessert and pizza, which Connie's Pizza offered at a reduced cost. Children and families were able to select gifts of their choice from Santa's Secret Shop to make their holiday season a little brighter.



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The DeKalb Area Friends of Fostering (DAFF) support group sponsored a "mitten tree" for the DeKalb DCFS field office. Members of the group, made up of foster and adoptive families from DeKalb and the surrounding counties, decorated the lobby and put up a tree covered in mittens and hats. Families could select free items to stay warm all winter. For more information, call Patty Ihm at 815-751-4061.

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### *Join the Northern Region Foster Care Advisory Council*

DCFS sponsors the Northern Region Foster Care Advisory Council. The regional council addresses DCFS policy and gives caregivers a platform to voice concerns that are systemic and could affect homes throughout the region. The advisory council is an important platform for caregivers to stay informed and to have a say in new policies and procedures.

The council meets on the second Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. in the DCFS Aurora Regional Office, located at 8 East Galena Blvd.

The meetings often feature topic experts. There is also time for individual problem solving. Training credit hours may also be offered. Due to the meeting structure, children cannot attend.

If an issue has the potential to affect foster care homes

across the state, the regional representatives can elevate it to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council. The Northern Region is represented on the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council by foster caregivers Cathy McCoy (chair) and Judi Enix. Both representatives regularly attend the local meetings to report DCFS and statewide news and to hear from other caregivers.



Cathy McCoy



Judi Enix

The region's administration encourages caregivers to take an active role in these meetings each quarter. Key staff also attend to aid in answering questions and resolving concerns.

## Northern Region Training

The 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 at [www.DCFstraining.org](http://www.DCFstraining.org). Click on any of the links under Training Schedule to access course descriptions, in-service training and Educational Advocacy Training or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during business hours.

The Virtual Training Center (VTC) is your tool to:

- Get training news and information;
- Check available trainings;
- View/print your training transcript;
- Register and take on-line courses;
- Download course materials to use in class or to access after training; and
- Get alerts for changes in course schedules.

### DIGITAL TRAINING MATERIALS NOW AVAILABLE

As we move into the digital age and aim to use fewer printed resources, DCFS Training has made many PRIDE materials easily available on the home page of the Virtual Training Center at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org).

Anyone may print the materials or download them onto almost any electronic device and bring their device to training class. Trainees who have no digital access should speak with their trainers when they arrive in class, so we can accommodate everyone.

## Who do you call when....?

### **...A child in your home is having a psychiatric crisis that may require hospitalization?**

Call the CARES line at 800-345-9049. However, if a child is a danger to himself or others, call 911 first. The CARES line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### **...You want information on becoming a foster parent or on adoption?**

The Adoption Information Center of Illinois (AICI) can answer your questions and connect you with a licensing agency. The toll-free number is 800-572-2390. AICI also maintains information about the children who are featured in the newsletter.

### **...You have questions about your board check?**

Call the DCFS Central Payment Unit at 800-525-0499 if your check comes from DCFS. If your check comes from a private agency, contact the agency.

### **...You need to report a child missing or have information about a youth who has run away?**

To report information on missing youth call 866-503-0184. The toll-free number is available 24 hours a day every day of the week. If you feel the child is in danger, call 911 first.

### **...Your adoption or guardianship is final but you have questions about the subsidy?**

Call the subsidy worker assigned to the case or the Adoption Support Line at 888-96-ADOPT so you can be connected to the right individual for help.

### **...You are having family problems with your adopted child?**

Contact the Adoption/Subsidized Guardianship Preservation Program that serves your area. Call the Adoption Support Line at 888-96-ADOPT.

### **...You have questions about your child's medical card?**

Call 800-228-6533.

### **...You need to find a phone number for a caseworker?**

Call the main switchboard in Chicago at 312-814-6800 or the State of Illinois Operator at 312-793-3500.

### **...You feel you aren't being treated fairly by DCFS or a private agency?**

If you've already tried to resolve the issue with the caseworker and his or her supervisor and are not sure where to turn, call the Advocacy Office at 800-232-3798.

### **...You are having a hard time getting services for your child at school?**

Most private agencies have an education liaison, and each DCFS region has education advisors who can help. Call your agency or nearest DCFS office to be connected to the right educational resource for your area.

### **...You have questions about programs for youth approaching adulthood?**

Contact the transition coordinator that serves your area, by calling the nearest DCFS regional office. The transition coordinator can advise on programs such as life skills training, preparation for higher education and employment assistance. Details on these programs can also be found at the Get Goal'd website [www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov).

### **...You have an idea for an article in the newsletter?**

Each region has reporters to help gather local news. The names and contact information are listed on the back page of each edition. You can contact the Editor, Vanessa James, at 312-814-6800 or send an e-mail message to [vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov).

## A family for me: Call 1-800-572-2390 for more information



Crystal (C8062)

**Crystal [8062]** Crystal, 13, is a sensitive young lady who is aware of herself and her surroundings, and who strives to make and maintain connections with people. She is able to identify her feelings, but would benefit from continued guidance on how to best process and express those feelings. Crystal enjoys writing and listening to music, and also enjoys being active. She is particularly fond of dancing, jumping on trampolines, and participating in gymnastics.

Crystal's worker says she is a diligent student who puts forth a lot of effort in school. She enjoys having conversations with adults and peers alike, and is eager to form positive, trusting relationships.

The right parents for Crystal can provide a loving, structured home for her. You can encourage her as she learns to express her feelings appropriately. You can also establish and enforce boundaries with respect to personal space and appropriate topics of conversation. Crystal would like to have a "mom that cares." She would also like to join a family with other children, particularly girls who are close to her in age. Other children in the home should be older than Crystal.



Dallas (C8092)

thoughts and feelings of others, and does his best to make others happy. When he is not engaged in conversation, he enjoys reading fantasy books, playing sports, and collecting Pokémon and Bakugan cards.

Dallas' worker says he is an expressive child who is able to clearly communicate his wants, needs, and emotions.

Dallas would benefit from parents who can establish clear boundaries and enforce the rules of your home in a fair, consistent manner. You can also encourage Dallas as he works to establish relationships that are based on mutual respect. Dallas would like to connect with a family that includes a mom, a dad, and, possibly, older siblings.

**Kevin [8104]** If there's a professional wrestling show on TV, Kevin, 13, will want to sit down and watch. If there's a professional wrestling event coming to town, Kevin will want to attend. If there's a professional wrestling aisle at the store, Kevin will want to spend a lot of time browsing. This young man is a huge fan of the wrestler John Cena and has decorated his room with dozens of WWE posters, magazines, and action figures. Kevin is developmentally delayed, and while he sometimes struggles to remain on task, he is generally friendly, capable, and independent. He maintains regular contact with his birth mother and older sister, a practice that should continue as he transitions to a new family.

Kevin's teachers say he has made significant strides over the past two years in terms of his focus, his behavior, his social

skills, and his ability to work independently.

The forever family for Kevin can help him stay organized and on task by giving him prompts, reminders, and time limits, and by stressing the importance of his daily routine. You can provide plenty of opportunities for him to play with children his own age. You can also work with various professionals who can help you understand, and meet his educational, social, and academic needs. The ideal family would consist of two parents living in a rural community.

**Marcus [8055]** "I could really use a hand." With Marcus at your side, get used to saying that less and less. This young man loves to be helpful, and he is often eager to pitch in around the house. He enjoys spending time with adults, playing with other children, and taking care of animals. Marcus, 14, also has a lot of creative energy, which he channels into singing, dancing, and various art projects. Whenever he has downtime, he enjoys reading, playing board games, and playing video games.

Marcus' worker says he is an affectionate child who loves his sisters and would benefit from ongoing contact with them, including regular visits.

Permanent parents for Marcus should be able to encourage him to give voice to his feelings, and to embrace the changes in his life. You can also work with various professionals who can help you understand and meet his emotional and academic needs. The ideal family would include a female head of household. Other children in the home should be older than Marcus.



Kevin (C8104)



Marcus (C8055)

Please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390, or see the AICI Web site – [www.adoptinfo-il.org](http://www.adoptinfo-il.org) if you are interested in adopting one of these children or learning about other children waiting to be adopted.





# Illinois Families Now and Forever®

Pat Quinn, Governor  
Arthur Bishop, DCFS Director  
Published by: DCFS Office of  
Workforce Development, Parent  
and Caregiver Support

Editor: Vanessa James  
Phone: 312-814-1307  
Fax: 312-814-4131  
vanessa.james@illinois.gov

Sponsor: Marilyn Arnold, DCFS  
Northern Regional Administrator

### Regional Reporter

Norm Suire  
800 W. Roosevelt Road Bld D  
Glen Ellyn, Illinois 60137  
630-790-6824  
Fax: 630-790-7831  
Norman.Suire@illinois.gov

Graphics: Jenny Florent  
Produced by: DCFS Print Shop

Purpose: To help busy families more effectively parent children currently or formerly in DCFS care. To bring them the best information from the most knowledgeable sources. To promote statewide teamwork in finding permanency for children.

Address Changes: Families must notify their licensing representative, who will notify DCFS. Agencies should change office addresses or request staff copies through the Editor.

*Illinois Families Now and Forever®* is published six times a year, bi-monthly, and mailed to licensed foster parents, unlicensed relative caregivers, and adoptive and guardianship families receiving subsidies. An electronic version is sent to all DCFS and private agency staff.

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Department of Children and Family Services©

Illinois Families Now and Forever®  
Vanessa James, Editor  
Department of Children & Family Services  
100 West Randolph - 6th Floor  
Chicago, Illinois 60601

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Children and Supporting Families*



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Current and back issues of *Illinois Families Now and Forever®* are available online in English and Spanish at [www.DCFS.illinois.gov](http://www.DCFS.illinois.gov)