

# Our Kids

2005 • Vol. 6

News For Southern  
Region Families



*Regional  
Administrator  
Bill Peyton*

The DCFS Southern Region administration and staff want to thank all of our foster and adoptive parents, relative caregivers and service providers for all of the loving care that you provide to our children and families throughout the year. As the needs of the children in care have changed, we have also made changes in the region. However, we continue to keep our eye on the target of providing excellent service to youth and the families who provide their care.

This year the region reshaped the Foster Parent Advisory Council to help you advocate more effectively. I invite you to join us as the meetings rotate among the local communities. We have also had more input from caregivers as we developed the region's Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan. The current plan reflects many of the needs you have brought up.

In the coming year, we look forward to working with you and your children. Best wishes for a safe and happy holiday season from all of us in the Southern Region.

*Bill Peyton*

## Holiday memories build a new family for the Palmer boys

The holidays are especially poignant times for Karen Palmer and her sons. The Washington Park foster mom used the holiday season as a way to reach the hearts of two little boys and begin a lifetime of good memories.

It started when she got "The Call" in October 2003 asking if she would be willing to accept two brothers, ages seven and nine. The boys were homeless and living on the street. Palmer was immediately touched and readily agreed to the placement.

As Thanksgiving approached, Palmer wanted to make sure the boys would have a day to remember. She allowed them to help plan the menu and even pick out the turkey. Neither of the children had ever had a Thanksgiving dinner, let alone helped to plan and shop for the meal.

By the time Christmas arrived, the boys felt right at home with Palmer. She had encouraged their participation in her church and they were chosen to perform in the Christmas play and sing solos for the choir. Christmas had not been truly celebrated in their family because they were usually homeless. They took great pride in even having a tree. They each

got to help decorate—something they had only done at school. This tree was one they could enjoy each day during the holiday, and they were so proud of it. Christmas 2003 was the first Christmas that they woke up to find presents under the tree. The boys were delighted to find two bicycles. Neither had ever had a bike of his own.

Palmer's commitment to the boys did not stop with the holidays. She remained dedicated to their welfare. She worked diligently with the school, as one of the boys has special learning needs. She helped both of them with their homework and ensured that they got to participate in after school activities. They had never had the opportunity before to go to a community center and work on computers, play basketball with other children, or just "hang out". Palmer gave them a sense of family and community they probably would never have had.

The family feeling is there to stay since the boys' adoption became final in May of this year. Now at 11 and nine years old, they can think back to their first Christmas as the Palmer family, and look forward to many more.

## Parents shape implementation plan with staff

The Southern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council met in Mt. Vernon on November 3<sup>rd</sup> to sign off on the region's 2006 Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan. Before the plan was finalized, the caregivers on the regional advisory council and staff came together in September. After a morning spent reviewing the plan in small work groups, the entire group gathered for an afternoon session where the suggested changes were discussed and incorporated into the 2006 plan. The plan was submitted to the Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Council at the end of November for review and scoring.

The process for writing the 2006 Implementation Plan seemed to benefit this year's shift to smaller regional council meetings held at Department field offices throughout the year. This allowed more foster parents to participate in the process. Each site was able to tailor their meetings to address local issues, provide training or update participants on changes to DCFS programs and services.

All foster parents will receive a schedule of site meetings that will be held throughout the upcoming year. For more information, contact Michael Bollman at [mbollman@idcfs.state.il.us](mailto:mbollman@idcfs.state.il.us) or 618-392-2100.

## Holiday giving lasts all year with foster parents' mobile food ministry

Foster parents Willie and Evelyn Miller of Xenia believe in the spirit of giving all year. The Millers have fostered over 14 children in more than seven years and have adopted three of them. In addition, they have organized and supported an outreach food ministry that serves Clay and Marion counties.

The ministry started out in November 2000 in conjunction with the Twin Counties Foster Parent Support Group. It was initially intended to thank foster parents for their efforts. However, word spread quickly, and soon the program was responding to the needs of other families. Over 100 families a month were being served at that time and the need continued to grow.

By November 2004 the program had expanded into a 2,000 square foot warehouse with walk-in coolers and freezers. The number of families served each month had grown to nearly 500. The schedule included distribution days on the second Wednesday in Clay County and the fourth Wednesday in Marion County. Emergency needs could also be met on an as-needed basis.

Most recently, their effort has turned into a truly mobile outreach program, distributing food to over 500 families in Granite City, over 60 miles from their home base.



*Willie and Evelyn Miller*

Willie and Evelyn have received help from their foster parent support group, community volunteers. Xenia Community Church and Xenia United Methodist Church both make monetary and equipment contributions. Nonetheless, demand frequently strains their financial and labor resources. Increases in fuel prices also threaten to curtail their ability to meet the needs in other, more distant areas.

The Millers do not plan on suspending their work. They continue to rely on the strength and dedication of their community and volunteers. They will gladly accept contributions and always welcome volunteers. As Willie said, "Come and see what happens on distribution day, but watch out, someone may put you to work." For more information, contact: Community Outreach, 165 Silver Maple Drive, Xenia, Illinois 62899 or call 618-678-2837.

## Holiday spirit spreads through Southern Region field offices

### Anna Field Office

The Anna Field Office is a very busy place during the holiday season, serving as the hub of activity for the Union County Christmas project. Coordinated by two Addus Family Support Specialists, Karen Funkhouser and Debbie Jackson, the project receives donations of food and gift certificates from local churches, schools, businesses, community organizations, and individuals. The women build a “wish tree” and coordinate a drop off schedule at the Anna Field Office. DCFS workers then distribute the gifts.

This effort typically serves over 300 children and families throughout Union county. It also builds rapport and relationships throughout the community. It is a long-standing tradition that many DCFS workers and community members anticipate.

### Cairo Field Office

In the true spirit of “giving is better than receiving,” employees of the Tamms Correctional Facility and the DCFS Cairo field office have worked cooperatively to sponsor “Christmas for Kids” in Alexander and Pulaski Counties for the past several years.

Each year DCFS staff provide only the ages and gender of children who are in care or have in the past received DCFS services. Dedicated Correctional employees then manage to deliver

approximately 150 beautifully wrapped, age appropriate gifts to the Cairo field office by mid-December, just in time for DCFS “Santas” to make Christmas deliveries.

Unfortunately, for some of our children these are the only gifts they receive. However, through this cooperative effort not only do the children have an opportunity for a memorable Christmas. Those who have given of their time and efforts are also able to appreciate that they are making a difference in the lives of these children.

### Marion Field Office

This year marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Marion Field Office’s Share Your Blessings Program, which helps ensure that the families and children the Department serves have a happy holiday.

This year the program was coordinated by a community volunteer, Debbie Forbes, who located and secured a list of citizens, civic groups, churches, and organizations who wanted to sponsor a child, a sibling group, or an entire family. They were asked to contribute at least \$70.00 per child, though frequently they were much more generous.

The Department provided a “wish list” of children and families to Forbes, making sure to

maintain confidentiality. The recipients were matched with sponsors who then purchased gifts, wrapped them, and delivered them to the Marion Field Office. Department child welfare specialists then distributed the presents to the families in time for Christmas.

This long-standing tradition shows no signs of decline. This year over 180 children were served by the Marion office.

### OUR KIDS

#### Sponsor

Bill Peyton, DCFS Southern Regional Administrator

#### Regional Reporter

Michael Bollman  
DCFS Reporter/Editor  
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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

## Southern Region Training Calendar

### Integrated Assessment Training

**Marion**  
**618-536-7751**

**East St. Louis**  
**618-650-3213**

**MARIOIN**      *State Office Building*  
Feb. 11 (Sat)      9-11 a.m.

**ALTON**      *DCFS Office*  
March 29 (Wed) 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS**      *Caseyville Township Building*  
Feb. 22 (Wed)      6:30-8:30 p.m.

### Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions =  
6 training hours

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be relicensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

### Non-PRIDE Inservice Training

**Marion**  
**618-536-7751**

**East St. Louis**  
**618-650-3213**

*What You Really Need to Know About IEPs*

*What You Really Need to Know About IEPs*

**MARION**      *State Office Building*  
March 14 (Tue)      6-8 p.m.

**ALTON**      *DCFS Office*  
Feb. 7 (Tue)      6:30-9 p.m.

*ABCs of Substance Abuse for Foster Parents*

**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS**      *Caseyville Township Building*  
Jan. 24 (Tue)      6:30-9 p.m.

Date and location TBA

*Children Living with Substance-Abusing Parents*

**ALTON**      *DCFS Office*  
March 7 (Tue)      6:30-9 p.m.

**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS**      *Caseyville Township Building*  
Jan. 12 (Thu)      6:30-9 p.m.

**Marion**  
**618-536-7751**

**MT. VERNON**      *DCFS Office*  
March 25 (Sat)      9 a.m.-4 p.m.

**East St. Louis**  
**618-650-3213**

**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS**      *DCFS Office*  
Jan. 3 & 10 (Tue)      6:30-9:30 p.m.  
Feb. 2 & 9 (Thu)      6:30-9:30 p.m.  
March 13 & 20 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.  
March 11 & 18 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.  
(Sat)

The DCFS Lending Library is a resource to allow foster and adoptive parents access to a multitude of books, audio cassettes and videos for self-directed training in parenting and family life. The materials span 17 categories. Licensed foster and adoptive parents can borrow materials for a two-week period at no charge. The order form is available in the 3rd Edition of the Lending Library Catalog, which can be viewed on the DCFS web site at [www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs).



**For more information call:**

Marion ~ 618-536-7751

East St. Louis ~ 618-650-3213