

# Our Kids

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News For Southern  
Region Families

## Dreams of a baby lead to reality of reunification

When Barb and Terry Wittenauer of Belleville were first licensed in 1999 by Catholic Social Services they were set on adopting a child. "I wanted a baby," said Barb of their feelings at the time. However, it wasn't long before they realized that it might be a long time before that happened. They decided to open their home to foster children, and they agreed to accept older children and sibling groups.

Shortly after this readjustment, two siblings, Carl and Kathy, who were seven and eight years old came to their home. Although the children's mother was imprisoned, the Wittenauers immediately realized that despite the family's circumstances, the children needed to see their parent.

"We knew it was important for the kids to maintain the connection with their mom," said Barb.

Barb and Terry supported consistent visitation. After the children's mother was released and returned to the community, they found themselves developing a closer relationship with her, one that eventually grew into a mentoring and support role.

"We had our ups and downs," said Barb. "But we felt we needed to work with their mom and the agency as a team if the kids were going to return home."

Their patience and diligence was rewarded when Carl and Kathy were returned home after almost four years in foster care. Unfortunately, the issues that initially brought the children into care re-emerged, and their mother was again incarcerated. The children came to live with the Wittenauers again.

Throughout this second placement Barb and Terry again supported parent/child visitation, even as they adjusted to having young teens in their home. Carl and Kathy became involved in community and school activities like scouting, soccer, and gymnastics and they participated in family vacations.

History repeated itself once more as their mother was released and returned to the community. The Wittenauers again found themselves actively assisting and supporting her through visitation and mentoring. "We even helped her out with getting furniture," said Barb. Their efforts were again rewarded earlier this year when



Barb and Terry Wittenauer

Carl and Kathy returned to their mother's care.

Barb and Terry have no intention of letting their relationship with the children evaporate. They have elected to temporarily suspend further foster care placements so Carl and Kathy can visit any time. They also know that the children's mother will continue to rely on them for support, and they are comfortable in that role.

Even after nearly eight years of work with the same children and parent, the Wittenauers know they've done the right thing.

"We'd do it over again, no question," said Terry. "It's life altering to think you've had the privilege of helping this family get back together."

## A message from the regional administrator



Bill Peyton  
Regional Administrator

*It is with the utmost admiration and appreciation that I recognize the work of Southern Region foster parents, even moreso during Foster Parent Appreciation Month.*

*As we progress in our work at DCFS, I recognize that foster parents are called to deal with situations that are more challenging than ever before. We are also asking foster parents to become closer professional partners in our attempts to improve our reunification efforts statewide. As parents work toward a return home goal, you will be a critical link between the child, their family, and the caseworker. You also play an important role in accessing the right level of services and resources through the CAYIT process.*

*Children coming to DCFS with extensive traumatic histories require a renewed dedication to work together to best serve and treat them and their families. By equipping our workers with resources and training, we will continue to improve and be better partners with you in this effort.*

Bill Peyton  
Regional Administrator

## Caregivers get preview of reunification

The 2007 Caregiver Institutes this year focused on *Building Families: Connecting Caregivers, Parents and Youth*. The DCFS Clinical Division's Office of Foster Parent Support Services presented the daylong training that previewed the Department's new emphasis on reunification.

Caregivers attended Institutes in Fairview Heights and Rend Lake. The morning opened with several young people and a foster parent sharing what it was like to maintain connections to families of origin while in foster care. After their moving personal testimonials, Regional Administrator Bill Peyton gave an overview of recent changes at the Department and how they affect foster families.

For the remainder of the day, caregivers had an opportunity to learn how they can interact with parents, collaborate with caseworkers and support children's emotional needs when the goal is to return home. A video presentation of parents whose children had been in DCFS care dramatically described what it was like while they were apart from their children and how they worked to reunite their family.

"It was a wonderful chance to have caregivers, staff, and youth in the same room learning how to work together to achieve the best outcome for children," said Ray Gates, Administrator for the Office of Foster Parent Support Services.



Regional Administrator Bill Peyton spoke with caregivers during the break at the Rend Lake Institute.

DCFS held nine institutes in locations throughout the state, from February through April. Many DCFS staff representing several Department divisions and agencies assisted with planning the event and they traveled to present workshops at the institutes.

"Each year, we sponsor these institutes so our caregivers can have first hand information about DCFS initiatives that will help them care for children more effectively," said Deputy Director Velma Williams. "I am pleased that the feedback from caregivers was so positive."

## Southern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council

The Southern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council agreed to continue the practice of holding teleconferenced quarterly meetings at various sites throughout the Region. It also voted to expand the number of sites hosting localized meetings. This change will maximize foster parent participation and reduce travel inconveniences. Regional Administrator Bill Peyton directed field offices to convene at least one meeting per year inviting foster parents and staff associated with each office to discuss any issues related to Council activities.

The next quarterly meeting will be August 7, drawing from the offices in Alton, East St. Louis, Anna, Marion, and Salem Field at 10:30 a.m. On November 6, all members will meet at the Mt. Vernon Field office at 10:30 a.m.

Caregivers who would like more information about the Advisory Council, including a schedule of additional meetings in the field offices, can contact Michael Bollman, Co-Chair, in the Fairview Heights office at 618-394-2100.

## Groups and associations offer advice and assistance statewide

DCFS, private agencies and community initiatives sponsor many support groups and associations to assist foster and adoptive parents. The following lists can help identify a group that may suit your family. This list is a beginning and will be updated. Please contact the Editor at 312-814-6824 with any corrections or information on other groups that should be listed.

### ALL-DOPT

Contact: Susan Koniak  
618-667-2493  
654 Bauer Road, Troy  
Includes International adoptions.

Meets second Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m.  
800 Joplin, Benton

### DCFS SOUTHERN REGION FOSTER CARE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Contact: Michael Bollman  
618-394-2100  
Meets quarterly in the DCFS Regional Offices and monthly in several local offices. Call for a schedule.

### LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF ILLINOIS, SOUTHERN REGION

Contact: Beth Richardson  
618-997-9196, ext. 817  
Meets second Thursday of each month from 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.  
Lutheran Social Services of Illinois  
1616 West Main, Marion  
Training credits and childcare provided.

Open to all DCFS and private agency foster and adoptive families.

### HERRIN ADOPTION/GUARDIANSHIP PRESERVATION PROGRAM SUPPORT GROUP

Contact: Julie Fritzler  
618-988-1330  
Meets third Thursday of each month from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.  
Group does not meet during the summer months  
Matthews and Associates  
109 Lou Ann Drive, Herrin  
Dinner included, RSVP required.  
Open to all adoptive parents and family members.

### HOME ADVANTAGE SOUTH

Contact: Kim Hutchcraft  
618-435-8293, Please leave message with Tiny Tots Day Care

## OUR KIDS

### Sponsor

Bill Peyton, DCFS Southern Regional Administrator

### Regional Reporter

Michael Bollman  
DCFS Reporter/Editor  
10251 Lincoln Trail  
Fairview Hts., IL 62208  
Phone: 618-394-2100  
Fax: 618-394-2123  
Michael.Bollman@illinois.gov



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.

## DCFS Contact Information

### Chicago Headquarters

100 West Randolph Street  
6-200  
Chicago IL 60601  
312-814-6800  
TTD 312-814-8783

### Springfield Headquarters

406 East Monroe Street  
Springfield IL 62701-1498  
217-785-2509  
TTD 217-785-6605

### Child Abuse Hotline

800-25-ABUSE

### Missing Child Helpline

866-503-0184

### Advocacy Office

800-232-3798

### Day Care Information

877-746-0829

### Foster Parent Hotline

800-624-KIDS

### Inspector General

800-722-9124

### Youth Hotline

800-232-3798

### Medical Card Hotline

800-228-6533

## Southern Region Training Calendar

### Transition to centralized training to finish in June

Starting July 1, the DCFS Office of Training & Professional Development will oversee and deliver all courses for caregivers. The transition from the local Pride colleges and universities that were performing this function in the past will be completed June 30.

Bringing it all under the roof at DCFS will allow the state to increase the amount of Pre-service and the variety of In-service training classes offered to meet the needs of caregivers.

Going into the new fiscal year, the DCFS Training Office is prepared to continue training offerings as caregivers have been accustomed, with some improvements. There is now one main number to call for customer services including registration, transcript requests and training-related questions. That number is 877-800-3393. The course schedule for pre-service and in-service training is on the DCFS Web site at [www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs). It is updated frequently and subject to change, so caregivers should always call first to register.

The Lending Library continues, but request forms should be faxed to Springfield at 217-557-4349 or 217-782-9301. Caregivers with training credit approval forms should mail them to:

DCFS Office of Training  
ATTN: Jean Maher  
406 E. Monroe Station 122  
Springfield IL 62701

## Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hrs.

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. 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.

### SIU-Edwardsville Area 618-650-3213

<b>Fairview Heights</b>	<b>DCFS Office</b>
June 18 & 25 (Mon)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
June 23 & 30 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.