

Kukorola family finds rewards even when plans change

When Charlie and Pam Kukorola were first licensed in 2001 they were focused on traditional foster care. They had both raised families of their own, three children each. They figured that working with children who would eventually be returned to their families would complement their own skills. Now, eight years later, they find that they have been on a different, but still rewarding, path. The Kukorolas are proud parents of five children through adoption, and they are looking forward to consummating the adoption of a sixth child soon.

The journey began with foster care for just one child whom they eventually adopted. That experience was so positive that they began searching other states' databases for children who were free for adoption. They found a sibling group of four in Texas and decided that they could be a family. After many delays due to Interstate Compact requirements and pre-placement visits, they were successful in finalizing the adoption. Suddenly, their previously empty home was full of children!

The Kukorolas extended their license and opened their home to two more children in foster care, making the household very busy. All the children are involved in a variety of activities that keep everyone on the

run. Pam and Charlie juggle their full time jobs in order to keep everything running smoothly, and rely on their extended family for support. Their adult children are heavily invested in assisting them, as well as other family members. "It's not just a one-person job, it's an extended family responsibility," said Pam. "When you adopt, everybody adopts."

The Kukorolas have also enjoyed consistent support from their licensing agency and the case managers. Services have been provided promptly and thoroughly.

"It makes you feel very safe," said Pam. "We've always felt we were part of the team."

The feeling appears mutual, as caseworkers have called the Kukorola family one of the most committed and devoted they've encountered. Tina Bilzing first worked with them as a case manager and is now their licensing representative. She noted that the family relies on positive reinforcements to create structure, treats all children equally, and vigorously pursues age appropriate activities.



The family's devotion is soon to be tested in a way they have not encountered since they started foster care. One of the children is due to return home after two years with them.

"This one is going to be tough," said Charlie. Pam agreed but understands that children should be returned home whenever possible. "We want this child's family to be successful," she said. "We have to trust that people are making the right decisions."

The family plans to take a break after this transition, but their home will continue to be a vibrant and active place. "I can't imagine having an empty house," said Pam. "Having a house full of kids...that's what life's all about."

From the DCFS Assistant Regional Administrators

Greetings and Happy Holidays to our foster, adoptive and relative care providers. This has been a challenging but progressive year. We want to thank each of you for a job well done, and for the efforts you have put forth in caring for the children of the Southern Region in 2009. You have shared your homes and your families with others, and for this we are eternally grateful.

You are an important part of our team as we serve the children who have come into our care. Together, we strive to meet the educational, physical, emotional and behavioral health needs of our children as we make their well-being and safety our focus and aim.

It is our hope that you feel your voice is heard and that you receive the responses you need in order to provide for the needs of the children in your home. Please let us know your ideas, because your input is very valuable to us.

As you go through this festive season, our wish is that you and your family will receive multiple blessings and that 2010 will be filled with all your hearts' desires.

*Valda Haywood and Susie Selock
Southern Region Assistant
Regional Administrators*

Advisory council gives caregivers a voice

The Southern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council finished the calendar year by holding a series of trainings on the Foster Parent Law at locations throughout the region. Then the council approved the region's Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan before it was submitted in advance of the November 30 deadline.

Foster parents are reminded that the Regional Advisory Council is also the conduit to the Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Council. Issues raised at the local level can be heard by the statewide group, which can seek solutions to situations that have a far-reaching impact on many caregivers. Participating in the quarterly regional meetings gives foster parents the opportunity to be heard and to be involved in problem solving.

The council has long used a teleconference format for its quarterly meetings, linking eight different offices in the region. It also tried a different approach and allowed foster parents to call in from their home or cell phones. Hopefully, these accommodations will allow more caregivers to learn and contribute to the council business. Details on the Council's 2010 schedule will be available after the beginning of the year, and will be mailed to all DCFS-supervised homes. Caregivers can contact Michael Bollman of DCFS at 618-394-2100 from more details.

New Southern Region Rep

Kay Kizer of Marion has been appointed to a three-year term as the Southern Region's newest representative on the Statewide



Foster Parent Advisory Council. Kizer joins Andrew DeLao as the region's second member on the council.

Kizer has been fostering for ten years in number of states, including Texas, Missouri, and now, Illinois. Her license is supervised by Lutheran Social Services of Illinois.

She has previously worked as a parent educator and is currently a substitute teacher in the Marion School District. She has one adopted child and is in the process of adopting a second child from the Missouri child welfare system.

Kizer wanted to become an active member of the council in part from her own personal history; she was a foster child herself. She feels that her experiences in foster care can be useful.

"I look at things a little differently than other people. I think I can be an asset because I've been there," she said.



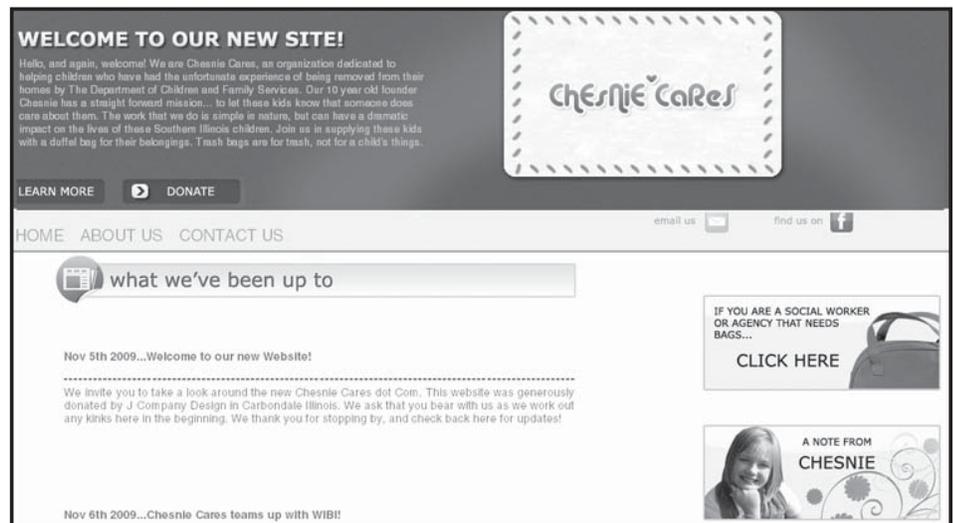
Youth spearheads luggage donation to assist children in care

Thanks to 10-year-old Chesnie Johnston, children in Wayne City and surrounding counties are being helped through very traumatic experiences.

While reading the book *Chicken Noodle Soup for the Soul*, Chesnie discovered that many children who are removed from their homes by DCFS child protection investigators often lack something to use to transport their belongings. Enlisting the support of her mother Teri, the pair emailed an athletic supply company and requested a luggage donation. They also contacted schools in Wayne City with the same request. Nearly 70 bags have been donated so far.

The generous response surprised and heartened Chesnie and her mother, and arrangements were made to provide recently removed children with a bag, teddy bear, and a special note from Chesnie.

This effort definitely fills a need said Cindy Draege, DCFS permanency



worker. "It's really huge. It can be traumatic when children are removed, so this helps minimize the transition."

According to DCFS child protection manager Don Rose, in Jefferson, Hamilton and Wayne counties about 60 children are removed every year.

"We appreciate that a young person like Chesnie took the time to collect the bags," he said. "Kids like to have

something to call their own. This is very important."

Teri indicated that despite the huge response, they are still collecting bags for the future. "The response has been wonderful," she said. "But we need more."

Individuals interested in helping Chesnie ease the trauma of children as they transition to new placements can call 618-267-9749. There is a new Web site at www.chesniecares.com.

Region awaits results on re-accreditation

The Council on Accreditation finished its review of Southern Region's foster care program with the evaluation of the Marion sub-region. The council had previously reviewed DCFS in the Alton and Belleville areas.

In their exit interviews COA reviewers were unanimous in their praise of DCFS staff and especially its dedicated foster families. Selected foster parents were interviewed and completed surveys for the COA review. Through the process, it was consistently noted that the level of cooperation between foster parents and caseworkers is commendable. Likewise, reviews of case files and personal interviews with workers and licensing staff were positive in evaluating the work and commitment of the region's foster families.

The results are forthcoming and will be shared with the region as soon as they are available. Meanwhile, the region's administration is thankful to the caregivers who contributed so willingly during the review process.

Our Kids

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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 Caregiver Training

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Training. The descriptions below will allow you to decide which classes fit your family's needs or circumstances. Advance registration is required for all classes. In addition to the slate of classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of Digital Pride modules on CD and the full offering of Lending Library materials.

For the most up-to-date and complete schedule information for classes offered in your area, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center anytime at www.DCFStraining.org or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during regular business hours.

Module 1 - Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk (12 training hours)

This module focuses on building self-esteem in children. It covers how kids act when they need recognition, power, freedom, enjoyment, and a feeling of belonging. Caregivers will learn how to listen to what kids say and not what we think they say.

Module 2 - Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs (9 training hours)

This workshop provides practical information to foster parents about how to use effective discipline techniques such as I-messages, natural and logical consequences, time out and how to catch kids being "good" and what to do to encourage positive behavior.

Module 3 & 4 - The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (9 training hours)

Participants learn to differentiate normal from problematic sexual behaviors in children and youth, signs and symptoms of sexual abuse and ways to help sexually abused children recover.

Module 5 - Supporting Relationships between Children and Their Families (9 training hours)

This training focuses on helping foster parents learn how to help kids attach to caregivers and at the same time stay loyal to birth families. Caregivers learn about how to prepare and support children for and after visits with the birth family and how to share the parenting role with birth parents.

Module 6 - Working as a Professional Team Member (9 training hours)

Foster parents learn team members' roles, when and how to be an advocate for children, what conflict is and their own

personal style for managing it, and how conflict can be a "win - win" situation for everyone involved.

Module 7 - Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity (6 training hours)

Culture includes traditions, values, customs and history. What "culture" means to a child's self-esteem, how to manage cultural diversity in a foster home, how to discuss sensitive issues with children and how to help a child record his or her history are topics covered in this module.

Module 8 - Promoting Permanency Outcomes (9 training hours)

The focus of this training is on families who have children in care and supporting reunification of the children and parents.

Module 9 - Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family (6 training hours)

In this training, caregivers learn how fostering children can affect family relationships and how to minimize stresses that can result. They also learn about the supports that are available.

Module 10 - Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children and Families (15 training hours)

Foster parents study the risk factors for chemical use, abuse, and dependency and understand relapse and recovery and be able to acquire skills necessary to be an active member of the team to support recovery in birth parents.

Module 12 - Understanding and Promoting Preteen and Teen Development (6 training hours)

This new course assists caregivers to identify developmentally appropriate ways to best

promote healthy development for preteens and teens who have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma. This six-hour module will help foster/adopt caregivers understand teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use when fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.

The Teen in Foster Care: Supporting Attachment (6 training hours)

Attachment and the Teen in Family Foster Care will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand how early attachment experiences have impacted the teen's development. The training covers the teen's perspective on how the accumulation of loss, separation and trauma impacts his or her beliefs, feelings, behaviors and relationships. Participants will learn specific tips for helping manage behaviors that develop over time from the teen's adaptive responses to trauma, grief and loss.

Educational Advocacy 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.