# Our Kids

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*News for Southern Region Families*

## "Short-term" foster care leads to long-term rewards

When Khadija and Marlon McGee began foster care in the spring of 2008, they intended to focus on older youth who were involved with CHASI's youth service program. These youth, who were experiencing difficulties at home, would typically require short-term care for up to three weeks, and then hopefully would be able to return home. However, when case managers saw how effective they were in providing a stable and structured environment, they urged the McGees to consider longer-term placements. It was an offer they couldn't refuse.

Both Khadija and Marlon brought extensive experience in child welfare with them when they decided to foster. Khadija had worked in a variety of capacities in residential treatment programs, before becoming a "stay at home mom." Marlon continued his work with delinquent youth in a juvenile corrections program. Both felt that their professional experience as well as their commitment to young people provided them with a unique perspective on what children need from their foster placements.

"It's important that these kids have a chance," said Khadija. "For the ones that want to embrace the opportunity, we want them to have a stable place to live."

The McGees have put their philosophy into action. After a parenting teen they were fostering was sent to the Department of Corrections despite their advocacy with the court, they volunteered to become the foster parents for the youth's baby. They have facilitated visits between the youth and her child, driving over 300 miles to the juvenile justice facility to supervise the visits. In another instance, they made a home for a 16-year-old boy, arranged for sibling visits with his 13-year-old twin sisters, and then brought the twins home when they needed a new placement.

Though the McGees are unable to accept additional children at this time, they still have plenty of work to do. Their commitment to education permeates much of their activity. Khadija is in constant contact with schools, advocating and ensuring that educational programs are meeting the children's needs.

"Education is so important," she emphasized. "Sometimes it's been the only thing they've had that's been consistent." For Marlon, education is more than just academic performance. He approaches his responsibilities with a self-described "coaching" style.

"Every kid needs guidance," he said. "I want them to be OK with the fact that it's a challenge to be successful, but they can do it with the right support. We're that support."

*Khadija and Marlon McGee focus on providing care for teens.*

For their consistent efforts on behalf of their foster children, and their willingness to go beyond "normal" expectations, the McGees were honored in 2008 as CHASI Foster Parents of the year. Ellen Constance, supervisor for CHASI's traditional foster care program, is very appreciative.

"There is not one worker in the agency who is not extremely thankful to them for all they do for the children placed in their home and for their cooperation and assistance to the workers. They have been incredible foster parents for our youth," she said.

# Southern Region licensing reps for DCFS and private agencies

There have been a number of changes to the licensing representatives in the Southern Region, for both DCFS and private agencies. DCFS has had to adjust the areas covered by their representatives due to on-going staffing challenges. Private agencies have experienced some turnover in their staff as well.

Foster caregivers are encouraged to contact their licensing representatives first if they have questions or concerns. Sometimes, caregivers whose licenses are supervised by a private agency will contact a DCFS supervisor or other staff in an effort to resolve issues or obtain information. Those inquiries should be directed to the appropriate licensing representative at the agency that licenses them.

Following is a list of licensing workers. Please note, DCFS workers are assigned by county, and private agency workers are typically assigned by their office location, which may also include a number of counties, particularly in rural areas.

## DCFS Foster Care Licensing Staff

Cindy McCleary, Supervisor – Mt. Vernon
Ardi Ancona – Mt. Vernon
Counties: Alexander, Franklin, Jackson, Pulaski, Union and Williamson

Bev Rightnowar – Olney
Counties: Clay, Crawford, Effingham, Fayette, Jasper, Lawrence, and Richland

Tom Arnold – Mt. Vernon
Counties: Edwards, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jefferson, Johnson, Massac, Pope, Saline, Wabash, Wayne and White

Cathy Lang – Fairview Heights
Counties: Bond, Perry, Randolph, Washington, St. Clair (Belleville field office area only)

Ruth Townsend – Fairview Heights
Counties: Clinton, Marion, Monroe, St. Clair (ESTL field office area only)

Chandra Pillai – Fairview Heights
Counties: Madison

## Private Agency Foster Care Licensing Staff

**Illinois Mentor**
Marion: Courtney Muncha
O'Fallon: Linor Williams

**Catholic Charities**
Alton: Carolyn Yinger
Effingham: Jill Collins

**Catholic Social Services**
Belleville: Sharon Siewert, Pam Fiscus, Tina Bilzing or Leslie Boyd

Carbondale: Kendra Barnes, Mallary Allen

Mt Vernon: Kaelin Pierce

**CHASI**
Alton: Holly Kieu
Belleville: Michelle Camden

**Hoyleton**
East St Louis: Tijuana Ingram; Sherry Knox

**Lutheran Child & Family Services**
Belleville: Paula O'Neil-Wade
Mt Vernon: Mary Lutz

**Lutheran Social Services of Illinois**
Marion: Kim Holder, Kim Davis, Sarah Harris

**United Methodist**
Mt Vernon: Audrey Buescher

# Staff spread holiday cheer to families Southern Region families

There was plenty of holiday fun happening across the Southern 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.

Children's Home and Aid held a holiday skating party for the third successive year at the YMCA in Edwardsville, which donated the use of their facility. As always, Santa was on hand to distribute gifts to all the children. Approximately 75 people attended the event.

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Catholic Social Services in Belleville sponsored a skating party for foster families and children on December 10 in Belleville. Along with free skating, participants had pizza, soda and dessert. Santa also distributed gifts. This was the fourth year for a skating event, but CSS has always had holiday celebrations for foster families.

CSS also sponsored a Secret Santa as they have for the last 15 years. A foster child was linked to a local family who agreed to purchase gifts from that child's wish list.

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Catholic Social Services in Mt. Vernon held a bowling party on the afternoon of December 5 in Salem. Foster families and children bowled for free and received complimentary drinks. Each child received a "goodie" bag to take home. Approximately 120 people attended this event.

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A 20-plus year tradition continued in the DCFS Anna Field office. Union County Addus Healthcare homemakers again coordinated a county-wide food and gift distribution for foster families and children. Community interest in this activity is very high and referrals for children and families are accepted from other agencies and organizations. Children were matched to various community businesses, organizations, and individuals. The team arranged to deliver gifts in time for Christmas. The program also includes referrals for food vouchers and an Angel Tree at Wal-Mart.

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The DCFS Marion Field Office continued its holiday tradition with its "Share the Blessing" program. This is a community-wide effort coordinated by Tim Rice, a case manager in the Marion office. Intact families involved with DCFS are the primary focus, although foster families with extenuating circumstances and children who come into substitute care right before Christmas are also included. Referrals and wish lists are solicited from DCFS case managers and other agencies. Individuals, businesses, and DCFS employees, are matched to qualifying families. Gifts and food baskets are then purchased, wrapped, and delivered by DCFS employees.

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The Emmanuel Free Methodist Church graciously sponsored the Madison County foster parent Christmas Party on Tuesday, December 8th. Dinner was provided by the church with Santa's arrival following. All children received gifts from Santa. Family activities, games, and crafts were also available.

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DCFS Southern Region Administration

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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.