

Foster care career of 30 years shifts to training others

Mona Crim is well known for her work with children, spanning more than 30 years. Her family devotion includes birth children, foster children, adopted children, and generally just children in need. Children seem to know instinctively they can receive love and support at the home of Mona and Prentiss Crim. Now for the first time in 30 years, the house is empty, yet her life is still full helping train caregivers.

Mona met her husband-to-be when she was 11 years old. He was an “older” man of 15. At the time he had attended a church where her father was pastor. She told her family that she was “going to marry that man!” When she turned 15, they started “seeing” each other at church functions, and always had family around. It was like dating Prentiss and “my daddy!” They had similar values and morals. As it turns out, Prentiss shared Mona’s love and compassion for children. They were married on December 1, 1972, when Mona was 18.

It was during the early days of their marriage that their first “foster child” found them. Mona remembers when a 10-year-old neighbor child knocked on their door and told the Crims, “I need a mom and dad!” The child’s mother was an alcoholic, and her father was out of the country. The

child and her siblings had been fending for themselves, until the Crims stepped in. That little girl has now graduated from college and is preparing to be married this spring.

The Crims were licensed as foster parents 29 years ago, after the birth of their sons Bryan and Darryl. Mona was told not to have any more children, but the family wanted a little girl. Their prayers were answered with Keysha, who became their daughter by adoption. When Keysha was ten, she informed the family she wanted a little sister. Keysha’s prayers weren’t exactly answered, but the family was blessed with the adoption of a son, Jor’Dan. Next, the family grew to eventually include sisters Kasheena and Sashia in their lives. Those girls were toddlers when they came into the family and are now grown.

In addition to the children they adopted, Mona and Prentiss took on many types of foster care through the years. Most recently they were involved in a professional foster parent program, where they focused full-time on caring for adolescents



Mona Crim started in foster care 30 years ago, when she was not much more than a child herself. Now she is a PRIDE trainer.

for two years.

Along with taking care of the children under her own roof, Mona also has served youth in the community and been an advocate for young people. She went back to school as an adult to earn a degree in child development. Soon after, she started an after-school program for children in Carrier Mills. This is the first year she has not been involved with that program. Mona was also a recruiter for One Church, One Child for 12 years, and she is now a Foster PRIDE trainer for the Southern Region. Mona shares her knowledge and experiences with prospective foster parents. She shares her stories, both positive and negative, to ensure

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families become foster caregivers with their eyes wide open. Mona feels that every child she has had in her home is a success story. She said it is important to remember that sometimes success comes in different sessions of one's life. She feels each child has been placed in her home for a reason and at some point they will find that reason and respond to the things they learned with the Crim family.

"God does not make mistakes. He is the one who has brought each child through our doors and we know that," said Mona.

Mona and Prentiss recently surrendered their license. This is the first time in their marriage that they have been "childless." They are looking forward to slowing down and enjoying grandchildren and traveling in the future. Mona hopes others will see the needs of children and get involved. She said she likes to see the new families coming into foster care with excitement and commitment that will benefit the children and the problems that they face today. That is what will change their lives for tomorrow.

Open agency training

Lutheran Family Services in Mt. Vernon sponsors occasional training events throughout the year. These events are open to all foster parents, regardless of agency affiliation.

In January, the agency provided training on CPR for foster parents who have pools, ponds, and hot tubs as now required by DCFS policy. Specific training topics change according to need.

Training events are typically held on the 4th Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. Most meetings are held at Lutheran Family Services, located at 800 S. 45th Street, Wells Bypass in Mt. Vernon. However, it is best to call in advance in case a meeting is moved to another community location.

Contact Kim Holder at 618-997-9196 or 800-455-5774 to confirm or to ask about the agenda.

Look to LAN for local help with school problems

Each Local Area Network (LAN) in the Southern Region has programs that focus on supporting youth and their families where truancy, suspension, expulsion, school moves due to behavior, or risk of school action are issues.

One option are the Family Centered Services (FCS) programs that are administered by an agency selected by the LAN and DCFS. All FCS programs focus on services to youth who are at risk of or are already experiencing school issues related to truancy, suspension, or expulsion. These programs work with school personnel and the student's family to determine a plan to address problems or connect families to services.

The second option is LAN screening and wraparound. Many caseworkers and caregivers may believe that wraparound is no longer available, but that is not true. WRAP services continue to be an option for youth who experiencing the educational

issues noted above. A worker, foster parent, or community person may refer a youth to their local LAN screening committee. The committee will then identify any known services and supports and review the referral for eligibility. The next step is developing a family/child team to work with the caregivers and child to identify strengths and needs and to develop a comprehensive action plan.

For families with Internet access referral forms are available at www.umchome.org. Although caregivers can make a referral directly to their LAN, it is advisable to consult with the caseworker beforehand. Families who are interested in pursuing either one of these options for their youth may contact the DCFS Southern Region LAN liaison, Duane Phillips for more specific information. Phillips can be reached in the Fairview Heights Field Office at 618-394-2125.



Head Start gives kids in care a solid beginning for early learning

The educational, social and behavioral benefits of quality education before kindergarten are too important to miss. DCFS continues to develop its School Readiness program throughout the Southern Region by establishing cooperative agreements between the Department and Head Start agencies. As part of these agreements, Head Start will make every effort to give enrollment priority to children in foster care. This reflects the Department's continuing commitment to provide quality early childhood education to all youth in care. Caregivers with children in DCFS care, ages three to five, should discuss enrollment with the caseworker. Either the worker or the caregiver can enroll the child.

Individual Head Start programs are coordinated by grantee agencies, which are often responsible for operating programs in multiple counties and multiple locations. Following is a list of the Head Start grantee agencies throughout the Southern Region. Information on individual programs throughout the service area can be obtained by calling the agency.

BCMW Head Start, Central Office

618-532-4890

Serving: Bond, Clinton, Franklin, Marion and Washington counties

DEFS Economic Opportunity Corporation

217-4342-2193

Serving: Christian, Clay, Effingham, Fayette, Montgomery, Moultrie and Shelby counties

Embarras River Basin Agency

217-923-5141

Serving: Clark, Coles, Crawford, Cumberland, Douglas, Edgar, Jasper, Lawrence and Richland counties

The H Group

618-997-5336

Serving: Franklin and Williamson counties

Mt. Vernon School District

618-244-8087

Serving: Jefferson County

Southern Ill. University-Carbondale

618-453-6448

Serving: Jackson and Williamson counties

Southern Seven Health Dept.

618-634-9340

Serving: Alexander, Hardin, Johnson, Massac, Pope, Pulaski and Union counties

Wabash Area Development, Inc.

618-963-2387

Serving: Edwards, Gallatin, Hamilton, Saline, Wabash, Wayne and White counties

Community Link Early Head Start

618-526-8800

Serving: Clinton and Washington counties

Riverbend Head Start

618-463-5950

Serving: Madison County

Southern Ill. University-Edwardsville

618-482-6955

Serving: St Clair County

Western Egyptian Economic Opportunity Council

618-965-3313

Serving: Monroe, Perry and Randolph counties

Our Kids

Sponsor

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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 Preeteen 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.