

## Foster care ends after 30 years, but parenting keeps going

After 30 years of fostering and eight adoptions, Sharon Eggemeyer of rural Sparta, reluctantly decided that her years of service to Illinois children had to end.

“This was one of the hardest decisions I’ve ever made,” she reflected.

The end of her foster care license doesn’t mean she is done parenting. She is still taking care of six children from two sibling groups of three, who joined her family through adoption. She is also providing a home for one of her children from foster care, who is now an adult. And she won’t give up her part-time job at the school library.

Sharon started on this foster care road in 1980 when she was teaching first grade at a local, one-room school. She decided that fostering was an admirable vocation, and felt drawn to it. Although she was single at the time (and remains so) she enjoyed enthusiastic support from her extended family, as well as friends in her church and community. With their help she built a log cabin that has seen considerable modification, but still retains a warm, homey atmosphere.

For the first 10 years, Sharon accepted children of all ages and

with various needs. She viewed new placements as challenges that needed to be met, not obstacles.

“It was fun to welcome new children,” she said. “It was rewarding to see how appreciative they often were.”

Children weren’t the only ones who were appreciative. Direct service staff in the Sparta office knew that Sharon could be counted on when needed. Marsha Thomas, now an adoption specialist, worked with Sharon often.

“She was always so warm and nurturing,” she noted. “Her children were always involved with 4-H, church, softball – many different activities. She is one of the best foster parents I worked with over the years.”

The admiration apparently flows both ways. Sharon said, “There have been problems of all kinds, but I always enjoyed working with the Sparta office. I felt completely supported at all times.”

After Sharon adopted the first group of three, she scaled back on traditional foster care, taking placements only occasionally. When children left her home to return to their biological families, “that was hard at times,” she said.

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*– Sharon Eggemeyer*

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It was hard to know how things would turn out. Sometimes she knew the children’s parents, but not always. Nonetheless, she was supportive of the children’s connections and worked with the parents to maintain relationships where they could.

Sharon still faces the challenges of raising her six adoptive children. She keeps an old-fashioned rocking chair in the living room as a tool to relax herself and to soothe a hurting child. Rocking is one of her favorite things to do.

“I think it’s important to hold them and rock them,” she said. “Even bigger kids need to be held – that’s what they all need.”

## Southern Region administrators show appreciation for caregivers

Each year during the month of May, as a state and a nation, we unite to celebrate, congratulate and honor foster parents. Foster parents strive to become partners with licensing workers, child protection investigators, child welfare intact and placement workers, supervisors, managers, school staff and other community providers. You join us to give the children in the Southern Region an opportunity to be part of a safe and loving family.

You have opened your homes without reservation or judgment for the children whose tears flowed and hearts ached over the loss of parents, siblings and other relatives. You found creative ways to help them through the grieving process. You became mother and father or grandmother and grandfather; your children became their siblings and your relatives theirs. You taught them to honor their parents with love and respect. You helped educate them and aided them to start careers and families. When it was time to return home, you supported our children all the way-- giving them that same love so they knew you would always be there.

“Thank you” are two very small words but we offer them with love and appreciation for all you do everyday. We hope you are encouragement by the events planned on your behalf during this month.

On behalf of the entire Southern Region we congratulate all of you and say, “Job Well Done.”



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

## Youth Summit offers teens resources for jobs, health and education

The Southern Region will be holding its annual Youth Summit on June 4th at Kaskaskia College in Centralia. This year's event is being planned by youth with input and support from various DCFS and private agency partners, including the Division of Education and Transition Services, and several agency partners.

The planning committee turned in a program that covers a variety of topics relevant to youth who are preparing for life as adults. There will be information on education, health, career choices, financial planning, and other topics to help them successfully achieve independence. Later in the day, youth

will enjoy a social activity so they can have fun, as well as the chance to meet other young people.

DCFS sent invitations by mail to all teens so they can register for this event. Foster parent caregivers are encouraged to support youth in their care, and are welcome to attend the event.

If invitations and registration instructions are not received, youth should contact their caseworker to obtain the relevant information. Youth who have been adopted or moved to guardianship can attend the Youth Summit. Contact Kim Peck at 217-524-1982 for more details.

**Correction:** The agency providing training to caregivers should have been stated as Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) in Marion. LSSI welcomes caregivers to its monthly training meetings. Contact Kim Holder at 618-997-9196 for details.

### Our Kids

Sponsor: 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.



## *Madison recruitment spreads the word for more foster homes*

Thanks to the efforts of an Alton-area church, DCFS representatives could further spread the news of the need for new foster homes in Madison County.

The Emmanuel Free Methodist Church in Alton “adopted” foster children placed in Madison County as a congregational challenge last year. Their first effort was to contact the placement team in Madison County and offer to sponsor the team’s annual Christmas party for foster families and children. Wanting to do more, the church enthusiastically invited Cindy Lolley, a DCFS supervisor, to talk to interested congregation members about becoming licensed foster parents. The Madison County recruitment council endorsed this activity.

On a wintery Sunday, Lolley and Alton-area adoptive and foster parent Tonya Duke held an informal discussion with about 20 interested church members. Lolley provided an overview of DCFS activities, focusing on how children enter foster care, the role of foster parents in reunification and other permanency related activities. Duke then added a personal touch, as she reflected on the rewards of fostering and her experiences with adoption.

A number of interested families have since contacted DCFS to request more detailed information on fostering and licensing.

## Families can find support in a nearby group

One of the responsibilities in the Foster Parent Law is to “Be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent associations.” DCFS, private agencies and community organizations sponsor many support groups and associations to assist foster and adoptive parents. The following list can help identify a group that may suit your family.

This list is a beginning and will be updated annually. Please contact the Editor at 312-814-6824 with any corrections or information on other groups that should be listed next year.

### **Community Kids**

Contact: Margie Fink at 618-534-4969

margie\_fink@hotmail.com

Meets second Friday at 6 p.m.

Christ Community Church

473 W. Harrison Rd., Murphysboro

Potluck dinner served and childcare is available with RSVP.

### **DCFS Southern Region Foster Care Advisory Council**

Contact: Michael Bollman at 618-394-2100

Meetings held quarterly in various DCFS offices and connected via teleconference. Call for a schedule. Open to all DCFS-supervised foster and adoptive families.

### **Home Advantage South**

Contact: Kim Hutchcraft at 618-435-8293. (Please leave message with Tiny Tots Day Care)

Meets second Monday at 6:30 p.m.

800 Joplin, Benton

### **LSSI (Lutheran Social Services of Illinois) Adoption Support Group**

Contact: Beth Richardson at 618-997-9196, ext. 817

beth.richardson@lssi.org

Meets quarterly. Call for more details.

1616 West Main, Marion

Training credits and childcare provided.

### **Southern Region Adoption and Subsidized Guardianship Preservation Program Support Group**

Contact: Julie Fritzler at 618-988-1330, x. 103

Open to all adoptive parents and immediate family members.

Call for schedule details.



# 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](http://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.