

## Foster care works with family and community help

Brenda and Roger Hails, foster parents in Jefferson County, never expected their family to expand so dramatically when they were first licensed three and a half years ago by Lutheran Child and Family Services in Mt. Vernon. Though they were blessed with two children of their own, and were prepared for future additions, they decided that fostering was a perfect way to satisfy their continuing commitment to parenting and helping others.

“We felt it was selfish to have another baby when there were other children out there who needed our help,” said Brenda.

With both sides of their extended families very supportive of this idea, it helped make the foster care decision easier. The first children placed with them were siblings age four and one and a half. The pair arrived two weeks before Christmas and created such an outpouring of support from family and church members that they were compelled to donate many gifts to local charitable organizations and Lutheran Child and Family Services.

“We literally had gifts stacked to the ceiling,” Brenda said. “It was really amazing the way people responded.”

Three months later, the siblings’ newborn brother joined the Hails household, and things became even busier. Though Brenda is a stay-at-home mom, she found herself stretched

thin attempting to meet the needs of all the children.

“We knew it would be a challenge,” Roger said. “But we also knowingly accepted the responsibility. That’s what fostering is all about.”

The Hails worked cooperatively with their agency to support a return home goal even as their attachment to the children grew. They became closely involved with parent-child visits and developed positive relationships with members of the extended biological family. They occasionally hosted parent/child visits at neutral locations in the area. Brenda felt this was a positive experience. “I learned that the mother and I had one thing in common – the children,” she said.

In addition to the challenges of raising their family, Brenda and Roger became increasingly committed to promoting foster parenting as a worthy pursuit. Brenda has become involved with Lutheran’s Foster Parent Advisory Council, providing resources and support for the agency’s families. She has also spoken at recruitment events.

“We know we’ve been able to make a difference,” she said. “Now we’re speaking out to others about it.”

As the probability of adopting their three foster children increases, Brenda and Roger have decided to move to a more spacious home. De-



**Roger and Brenda Hails appreciate the outside help they receive to take care of the three children who joined their family.**

spite their busy schedules, they are open to the possibility of caring for another child.

“We’re licensed for four children,” Brenda noted. “We feel we have a lot of love to give.”

Though the Hails consistently underplay their work and efforts on behalf of their foster children, their willingness to accept increasing challenges makes it clear that there is something unique about this family. Brenda summed up their perspective when she said, “We don’t think of ourselves as special – we’re parents doing what we have to do.”

## Families find help in Local Area Networks

In 1992 Local Area Networks were formed throughout Illinois with the goal of reducing out of home, school and community placements for at-risk youth. The LANs are inclusive networks in specific geographic areas that promote collaboration between agencies, parents, schools, and community groups.

In the 34 counties that make up the DCFS Southern Region, there are 11 Local Area Networks. Several years ago the 11 networks joined together to form a Southern Illinois Local Area Network Council with the goal of providing support to each other and working together to address barriers and gaps in service that affect the families of southern Illinois.

Since 2004, DCFS has asked that the LAN providers focus on services that address children in the school setting who are at-risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion. Providers have responded with many unique approaches to stabilize students at school. Additionally, each LAN receives a small amount of “flex funds” from DCFS and the Illinois State Board of Education. The flex funds are used to provide services that a child and family team determines to be needed but are not available through state, federal, or community programs. These funds are granted through a process called wrap-around services.

Any family can go to the LAN serving their community. Caregivers can take part in the regularly scheduled meetings to have input on the services delivered in their LAN. They can also request services on behalf of children in their home, whether they are in foster care or have moved to adop-

tion or guardianship.

Working with a LAN can benefit families in many ways that might not be readily apparent, but could be helpful:

- The LAN provides a means to identify resources that may be unknown to an individual worker or foster parent
- The LAN can assist a worker or foster parent in accessing needed services
- The LAN looks for donated items that may be needed by individual youth and families
- The LAN pays for tutors and mentors for youth who are at risk of truancy, suspensions, and expulsion
- The LAN is an example to the youth of community commitment and support
- The LAN promotes “creative out of the box” ideas to address youth needs
- The LAN uses the child and family team model, where a group of advocates works on behalf of youth and families and increases collaboration among services providers, schools, and parents.

Foster families are welcome and encouraged to become members of their Local Area Networks. For information of Southern Illinois Local Area Networks go to [www.umchome.org](http://www.umchome.org) and look under SILAN. Additional information can be obtained by contacting the Southern Region LAN liaisons, Kay Teel in Marion area at 618-244-8439 or Duane Phillips in East St. Louis at 618-394-2100.

## Christmas Thanks

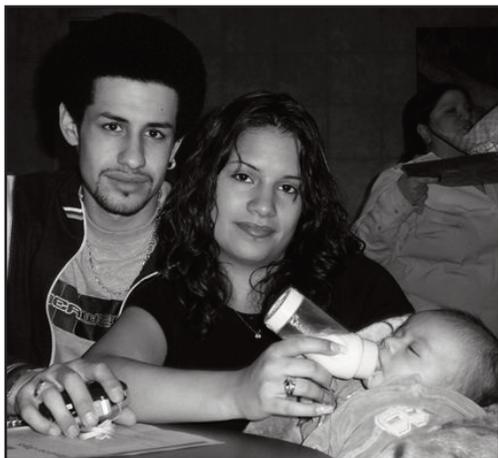
The Union County Christmas Project has been in existence for more than 25 years. Currently, it is the dedication and volunteerism of Debbie Jackson and Karen Funkhouser who make sure the Project comes together each year. Jackson and Funkhouser are Addus homemakers who have worked in Union County for many years. They collect referrals from foster families, intact homes, schools, churches, and community providers and agencies.

The crux of the giving program is an Angel Tree displayed at the Anna Wal-Mart store where community members can sponsor a child or family. Individuals, businesses and organizations also make donations. Jackson and Funkhouser work untold hours to match sponsors with families, organize the gifts as they come in and ensure that the gifts are picked up or delivered in a timely manner. They apply all the last minute touches and meet the unexpected needs while ensuring the family’s privacy. The Union County Christmas Project coordinates services with other providers in the area to avoid duplication and assure that more families can be served. This year the Project served 340 children and 136 families in Union County. Children and families received clothing, toys, more than 30 bicycles and food baskets to enable them to have something to brighten Christmas Day.

## DCFS offers programs for teen parents

For a teenager, making the transition to adulthood while in DCFS care can be complicated. Making a transition to being a parent at the same time, adds another degree of difficulty. Fortunately, DCFS has resources to help teens who are pregnant or parenting.

DCFS Division of Service Intervention oversees the five agencies in the central and southern areas of the state. They handle cases for more than 100 young women and nearly 10 young



men. The providers ensure that they bring together the community's best resources to provide pregnant and parenting youth with comprehensive care and services, while encouraging them to nurture and care for their babies. These services are available to youth who are still under DCFS custody in foster care, residential or independent living situations.

When a pregnancy occurs, the caseworker for the mother or the youth who is the father files an Unusual Incident Report. After receiving the referral, one of the regional service providers will assess the services the young person needs and coordinate local resources.

The providers keep the focus on four goals for those who become young

parents:

1. Develop a support network of personal and community resources
2. Prepare for independence with an emphasis on education and vocational development
3. Develop their parenting abilities and family choices including subsequent pregnancy prevention
4. Ensure safety and well being of teens and their children while in the program, addressing both physical and emotional needs.

When a young person becomes pregnant while living in a foster home, the caregiver role shifts in important and sometimes complicated ways. Along with parenting the younger new parent, caregivers have to help the youth learn to be a parent as well. In cases where the youth has custody of his or her baby, caregivers should remember that DCFS has no jurisdiction over the child. DCFS will attach a payment of \$107 to the caregiver's board check and the caregiver is required to give the \$107 to the parent to buy items for their child. DCFS also starts a medical card for the baby as soon as DCFS Central Office is notified of the delivery.

The caseworker from the provider agency can support the youth parent in putting these resources in place and identifying others. With the added layer of supportive caregivers, the young person can get on track to successful parenting. Questions about the pregnant and parenting teen services can be directed to the youth's caseworker or Marilyn Peebles at 217-557-2689.

## Youth Board changes schedule

Changes have been made to the Southern Region Youth Advisory Board's meeting schedule. Meetings will now be held on the first Tuesday of every month at United Methodist Children's Home in Mt. Vernon from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. This board is an excellent opportunity for older foster youth to have input into the policies and procedures that directly affect them. For example, the regional YAB along with other similar groups throughout the state have recently been given the responsibility to review and revise the Department's life skills program.

The state boards are reinvigorating themselves and moving towards increased peer involvement in the actual training activities. The board conducts business according to Robert's Rules of Order, exposing youth to valuable leadership skills. Youth can be elected to offices and participate in the Statewide Youth Advisory Board.

The Southern Region Youth Advisory Board is open to youth age 14 to 21 who are or were involved in the child welfare system. This includes youth who have been adopted or moved to guardianship, along with youth in residential programs. Caregivers are encouraged to have youth in their homes become part of the Youth Advisory Board. Transportation is available to youth who are interested in attending the meeting regardless of their location within the Southern Region. For more information, please call the coordinating office for youth boards at 312-401-5462.

**Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.  
Call the DCFS Office of Training 877-800-3393 • toll free**

## Southern Region Training Calendar

### Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers can attend PRIDE In-Service Training. Advance registration is REQUIRED. Detailed address information will be provided with registration. Information included here is accurate at the time of publication. Training dates, times and locations may change based on enrollment and other circumstances. For the most up-to-date schedule information, 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 2- Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs

(9 training hours)

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

#### Mount Vernon United Methodist Children’s Home

March 11, 18 (Wed) 9 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

#### 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.

#### Mount Vernon Rend Lake College

April 25 (Sat) 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

### Educational Advocacy

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.

#### Ullin Shawnee Community College

March 7 (Sat) 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

#### Fairview Heights DCFS Office

March 17, 24 (Tues) 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

#### Granite City Gateway Regional Medical

April 4 (Sat) 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

#### Carbondale Adolescent Health Center

April 9, 16 (Thu) 6 – 9 p.m.

#### Olney DCFS office

April 9, 16 (Thu) 6 – 9 p.m.

#### Mt. Vernon DCFS Office

April 20, 27 (Mon) 6 – 9 p.m.

#### Effingham DCFS Office

May 4, 11 (Mon)

#### Harrisburg Medical Center

May 7, 14 (Thu) 6 - 9 p.m.

### 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.

