

Simpsons spread love through Twin County area

Robin and Jeff Simpson have been licensed for less than four years, but they have already had an impact on the foster parent community in and around their rural home near Odin. Not long after licensure, they became involved with the Twin County Foster Parent Support Group, and recharged the organization.

Robin took on the task of organizing a back-to-school event in August 2005, and has continued that tradition each year. In 2006, a local Pizza Hut agreed to sponsor the event, and over 70 people attended. The next year, she organized a swim party and provided school supplies for another 70 children.

"We try to do something new every year and alternate locations," said Robin. "People are really

appreciative when they receive things that help their kids."

Christmas activities are also a major event for the Twin County group, and the Simpsons are closely involved in making the arrangements to encourage foster families. The Grace Church in Salem donates meeting space, and Robin energetically solicits gift donations and additional community support. In 2007, the Midwest Street Machine Club, a civic-minded motorcycle group, sponsored the event and provided many toys, games, and food for the gathering. Robin was especially pleased with the event because several newly-licensed families attended.

In addition to supporting current foster parents, the Simpsons are committed to reaching out to other families and encouraging them to foster children. Through various community connections, Robin has recently "recruited" two new families who are currently completing their PRIDE training.

"I tell them that all the hugs and kisses the kids dish out make it all worthwhile," said Jeff.



Jeff and Robin Simpson

With four children now placed in their home, the Simpsons are a busy family. Robin is a professional mom. Jeff juggles two jobs, as well as sharing child care responsibilities. They have fostered nine children in the short time they have been licensed, and have never turned down a placement.

"We take all kinds," said Robin. "Teens, sibling groups, or medically complex...we have a hard time saying no."

Having a houseful can be a challenge at times. It's serious work but requires a light-hearted approach.

"The only bad thing is that we all cannot sit at the table at the same time," said Robin smiling, while Jeff added, "And we only have one bathroom."

"I tell them that all the hugs and kisses the kids dish out make it all worthwhile."

-Jeff Simpson

From your RA



This is the first occasion in my time as Regional Administrator to celebrate Foster Parent Appreciation Month

with you. Since my appointment in August, I have made it a priority to meet the caregivers who make our work with children possible.

Recently, I attended the regional Foster Parent Advisory Council meeting. I was certainly impressed with the enthusiasm of the board members to reach out to other foster parents to share their concerns and insight. This is exactly the kind of dialogue that we need to keep our foster care program strong and relevant.

I continue to visit foster parent PRIDE trainings in the area. Your willingness to make learning a high priority is inspiring. We are truly blessed to have such committed people helping our youth.

As I approach my first anniversary, I fondly think back to last summer when I first met caregivers as they and their families enjoyed the DuQuoin state fair. I plan to continue as I started, visiting sites around the region and attending your council meetings. This is how I can ensure that what we do at DCFS will make a difference in your homes. I hope that soon I can offer my thanks face to face.

Mike Ruzicka
Regional Administrator

Foster Parent Appreciation Month events

Many DCFS offices have planned events to honor the families who serve in DCFS-supervised foster care programs. DCFS homes will receive invitations to the appreciation events; however, the list below can help families make plans to enjoy the events. Scheduled events may change. Go to the DCFS Web site at www.state.il.us/dcfs for updated calendars, or call the contact listed. Families served by private agencies can contact their agency for information on foster parent appreciation events that may be planned.

Salem/Mt. Vernon Appreciation Dinner

Tuesday, May 6, 6 p.m.
Grace Church of the Nazarene
1900 N. Broadway, Salem
Contact: Willie Miller at
618-508-2426

*Reservation required

Olney Field Office Appreciation Event

Caregiver training on stress reduction
Thursday, May 8, 9 a.m. to Noon
DCFS Office
1408 Martin, Olney
Contact: Janet Redeker at
618-303-2979 or 217-347-5561

Marion/Harrisburg Appreciation Picnic

Saturday, May 10, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Ashley Park, Marion
Food, resource fair and car seat safety information
Contact: Courtney Sellars at
618-993-8369 (Marion) or
618-253-7604 (Harrisburg)

East St. Louis Appreciation Luncheon

Wednesday, May 14, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Golden Corral
3360 Greenmount Crossing Dr., Shiloh
Speaker, prizes, games, photos, entertainment
Contact: Joanne Woods at
618-394-7200

Effingham Office Appreciation Picnic

Friday, May 16, 5 p.m. to 7 pm.
Hendlemeyer Park, Effingham
Contact: Janet Redeker at
217-347-5561

Belleville/Carlyle/Sparta Appreciation Event

Thursday May 22
4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Caseyville Township Building
10001 Bunkum Rd., Fairview Heights
Light snacks, beverages, and social hour from 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Speakers and presentations from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Contact: James Toolles at
618-394-2150

Metropolis/Cairo/Anna Appreciation Luncheon

Saturday, May 31, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Shawnee Community College/River Room, Ullin
Guest speaker Regional Administrator Mike Ruzicka, lunch, prizes
Contact: Gloria Pounds at
618-734-0858 or 525-2428
For foster caregivers in Alexander, Pulaski, Union, Johnson, Massac, Hardin, Pope, Jackson, Perry counties

Southern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council stays connected

The DCFS Southern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council continued to utilize teleconferencing to connect various offices when it held its first meeting of 2008 on February 7th. Issues discussed included tax preparation help for foster/adoptive families and Foster Parent Appreciation Month events.

Members decided to continue teleconferencing. The next quarterly meetings will be:

- Tuesday, August 5
6:30 p.m.
- Thursday, November 6
10 a.m.

The August meetings will connect the following field offices: Cairo, Anna, Marion, Mt. Vernon, Salem, Effingham, Fairview Heights, and Wood River. The November 6 meeting to sign-off on the Region's Foster Parent Law Implementation plan will be an in-person event held at the Mt. Vernon and Fairview Heights Offices ONLY. Foster parents are strongly encouraged to attend the meeting that is most convenient for them. Every foster parent in the Southern Region should have already received a schedule of local meetings via post. For more information on Council



The Advisory Council shared information at the DCFS Caregivers Conference on March 7 held in Fairview Heights.

activities please contact Michael Bollman, Co-Chair, in the Fairview Heights office at 618-394-2100.

Monroe and Randolph counties get help at home and school

Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois provides a variety of programs in the Local Area Network 5 (LAN) covering Monroe and Randolph counties. One of the most effective is the Family Support Program, which provides intensive in-home parenting, counseling, and education related interventions.

This program's primary focus is families that are stressed and sometimes overwhelmed by the demands of parenting. It provides skill-building services that help families address their needs before formal intervention by the child welfare system. Referrals can be made by other agencies, schools, churches and family members.

A home-based specialist provides concrete interventions, working

directly with the family on an intensive basis for up to six weeks, depending on the issues. A mentor can stay involved with the family for an additional six to nine months.

The Family Support Program also provides services to families whose children are experiencing difficulties in the school environment. This would include children who are at risk of suspension, expulsion, or are chronically truant. Foster children can be candidates for this program if they meet admission criteria. Specialists work directly with parents, children, and various school personnel to address the issues that are causing complications in schools. The program can provide mentors and make connections with other community programs as needed.

Foster caregivers can refer a child directly or discuss such referral with the assigned case manager.

Further information is available by contacting Becky Springsteen, Program Coordinator, at Lutheran Child and Family Services located at 1505 N. Market Suite 6A in Sparta or by phone at 618-443-2228.

Additional information on this program or other LAN based services in the Southern Region is available by contacting either of the two DCFS LAN Liasons: Duane Phillips at 618-583-2105 (East St Louis sub-region) or Kay Teel at 618-244-8439 (Marion sub-region).

Youth Summit

The Division of Service Intervention is sponsoring a Youth Summit for youth in Southern Region. Teens and young adults who participate in the Youth Summits will obtain the educational and survival skills needed to successfully achieve self-sufficiency and independence. The Youth Summit will offer workshops covering financial planning, life skills, employment training, academics, nutrition and health. There will also be food, prizes and fun events.

Wednesday, June 18
 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
 Kaskaskia College
 27210 College Road, Centralia
 Contact: Gail Simpson at 217-524-2425

OUR KIDS

Sponsor

Michael Ruzicka, DCFS Southern Regional Administrator

Regional Reporter

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 DCFS Reporter/Editor
 10251 Lincoln Trail
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 Michael.Bollman@illinois.gov



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 Training Calendar

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.

Alton August 5 & 12 (Tue)	DCFS Office 6:30-9:30 p.m.	Fairview Heights June 24 & 26 (Tue/Thu)	Ramada Inn 6:30-9:30 p.m.
Belleville June 7 & 14 (Sat)	Catholic Social Services 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Mt. Vernon July 3 & 10 (Thu)	DCFS Office 6-9 p.m.
Effingham August 4 & 11 (Mon)	DCFS Office 6-9 p.m.	Ullin August 2 (Sat)	Shawnee Comm. College 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
Fairview Heights June 5 & 12 (Thu)	DCFS Office 6-9 p.m.		

Child Trauma 4 training hrs.

This four-hour course helps caregivers recognize the signs of trauma and understand how to work with children who have experienced trauma.

Granite City June 28 (Sat)	Catholic Charities 9 a.m.-1 p.m.
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Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.

Call the DCFS Office of Training

**877-800-3393
 toll free**