

Caregivers to 300 kids learn reunification lesson

Even after 41 years of providing foster care to more than 325 children, Billie Thornton still finds new things to learn. Two years ago, 12-year-old Kay and her parents broadened Billie's perception of reunification. Kay's family was one of the first in Billie's experience who visited regularly and built a positive relationship with Billie as the foster caregiver.

"They really seemed to appreciate what I was doing," she said.

Billie found that talking with Kay's mother after the visits and on the phone seemed to have a positive affect on Kay's behavior in her home. "She has been easier to manage since I started talking regularly with her mother," Billie said.

Billie soon became comfortable enough with their relationship that she invited Kay's parents to her church to watch her perform in the choir. They soon began to regularly exchange ideas about caring for Kay. This meshed well with one of Billie's core beliefs about fostering.

"I always want parents to know that these are their children, but I

will treat them like my own when they are in my home," she said.

With plans now in place for Kay to be returned to her parents before the beginning of the school year, Billie now sees the benefits of working more closely with parents to achieve permanency through reunification.

For more than four decades, being that temporary, "safe port in a storm" through foster care has been a priority for Billie, despite opportunities to adopt children.

"I never adopted because I wouldn't have been able to foster. I felt I could help more children that way," she said.

Many of the youth who have spent time in her home, some of whom with families of their own now, continue to maintain contact with her.

"They know who to call if they need something," she said.

Billie will likely be getting more calls this fall as she embarks on another first. Tina, who has lived with Billie for nine years, heads off to college this year. She will



Billie Thornton

be the first child in Billie's care to go to a college program. Tina's success reinforces Billie's belief in supporting and advocating for her children's education.

"I believe that all children can do well in school," she said. "Education will be important for the rest of their lives."

Backing up her beliefs in education and the importance of staying connected with children, Billie has taken on the additional responsibility of transporting Tina to campus. When college is not in session Tina will return to Billie's home, because... "they all know who to call when..."

Kids Hope United offers education resources for at-risk students

Family Centered Services are available to families (including foster and adoptive families) throughout the Southern Region. In general, Local Area Network (LAN) providers target services to children who are experiencing school difficulties, specifically those who are at risk of suspension or expulsion, or have documented issues with truancy.

Kids Hope United offers their Education Works program to families in Effingham, Fayette, Richland, Crawford, Lawrence, Edwards and Wabash counties. The agency works from offices in Centralia, Effingham, and Olney. In the past year Vicky Strange, a community worker with Education Works, has helped many youth facing difficulties in school.

One of her success stories involves Howard, a 12-year-old whose traumatic experiences led him to relative foster care in the home of his grandmother. Howard had serious educational deficits and was doing class work at approximately the second grade level. In addition, due to his past neglectful home environment, his social and emotional skills were seriously underdeveloped.

Strange first worked with the local school to get Howard placed in special education classes. Next, she stepped in to provide tutoring for him. His grandmother also became involved, and gradually assumed most of this responsibility. Still, Strange called each night to quiz him on multiplication tables and spelling words. Howard made rapid progress in his classes, and in a relatively short period was able to move from special education to regular classes. Along with his academic successes came improved self-esteem. With encouragement from Strange and advocacy by his grandmother, he joined the school band and began developing positive and lasting social relationships. More recently, Vicky referred the family for a "wrap around" service plan, which helped provide additional tutoring and support.

Although Vicky's efforts on Howard's behalf were a "typical" example of Kids Hope United's services, his grandmother's commitment was probably the

most instrumental in turning his life around.

"We made a lot of suggestions for services," said Strange. "His grandmother followed through on every one of them. That's what made the difference."

Families of children facing school difficulties in Effingham, Fayette, Richland, Crawford, Lawrence, Edwards and Wabash counties can get information on the Education Works Program by calling Kids Hope United at 618-395-8656.

In recent years, the contracts between DCFS and the Child and Adolescent Local Area Networks (LAN) service providers focused on creating programs to stabilize children in the current educational settings.

These programs are available to all families, including foster, adoptive and guardianship families, concerned about students at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion. These programs are available to families in LANs across the Southern Region. For more information about education programs in other LANs, contact Greg Hixon, DCFS LAN Liaison at 217-779-2522 or e-mail at greg.hixon@illinois.gov.

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.

Southern Region prepares for accreditation review

DCFS Southern Region is already planning for next February's start of the re-accreditation process with the Council on Accreditation (COA). DCFS was first accredited in 2000 and re-reviews occur every four years.

Foster caregivers are important members of the professional team caring for children. Caregivers in Southern Region's DCFS-supervised homes will be included in the next round of COA reviews. It is expected that COA will be paying particular attention to the use of behavior and medication logs in foster homes, both of which are required by DCFS rule.

The behavior log is used to track any "unusual or extreme" behaviors or incidents in the foster home. Caseworkers distribute the log to

foster caregivers and review it each month. They will collect the old log and replace it during the home visit if there was an incident or behavior to report.

The medication log is used on a daily basis to track ALL prescription and over-the-counter medications that a child takes. As with the behavior log, caseworkers should review the log with the foster parent monthly and discuss any issues that might arise.

COA will review case records, interview staff, and may also interview foster parents to determine if the Region is meeting the standards. Foster parents may be chosen at random to participate in COA's survey process to answer various questions.

Education Advisors help with school

Caregivers and caseworkers working together can usually successfully advocate with schools for the children in their care. However, when families need additional expertise to work through school issues, contact the Education Advisor. They can support DCFS-supervised foster families and families who adopted or took guardianship of children who were in DCFS care. Families with licenses supervised through private agencies can receive similar help from

their agency's education liaison.

DCFS Education Advisors work with families where children may have learning, discipline or behavioral concerns at school. They can take part in meetings for special education. The advisors will help caregivers and caseworkers determine the best strategies to help youth make successful transitions through school. Contact Bessie Peabody in East St. Louis at 618-583-2125.

DuQuoin State Fair

Continuing a favorite summer tradition, DCFS in partnership the B.P.O. Elks Lodge # 800 of Marion will again invite Southern Region caregivers to be their guests at the DuQuoin State Fair on August 23. Please save the date and plan to attend.

Caregivers will receive their registration materials by mail from their licensing agency. Foster and Adoptive Families must RSVP in order to attend. Caregivers should contact their licensing agency if they have questions about registration

The Foster and Adoptive Family Day Picnic, each year, is a guaranteed good time. Caregiver families will enjoy refreshments, entertainment and games. Many local businesses contribute to the effort and DCFS and Private Agency staff volunteer to ensure caregivers have a wonderful time at the fair. Free arm bands for Foster and Adoptive children for carnival rides will be distributed from 10 a.m. - Noon. Reduced rate armbands will be available for adults and other guests at this same time.

The picnic takes place at the VIP tent on the fairgrounds, starting at 10:30 a.m. and ending at 12:15 p.m.

Please watch your mail for your registration form and additional details.

Recruitment Effort

The Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition in collaboration with the Metro East Foster Care Alliance has developed a resource family recruitment project in the Metro East area. The program employs three currently licensed foster parents who are available to speak to church groups, PTOs, and other groups whose members might be potential foster families.

Recruiters select potential speaking opportunities, initiate contact on their own, and speak for a short period on their own fostering experiences. Interested individuals and families are instructed to contact the Coalition for more information and referral to a specific licensing agency.

The project began in November 2007. The recruiters are always interested in learning about potential speaking engagements. Current foster families are invited to contact the recruiters if they are aware of any organization that might be receptive to a short presentation. Contacts are:

- Tina Devor, 618-344-1280 (Madison County)
- Carolyn Neely 618-233-5785 (Belleville, Smithton, Freeburg, New Athens, Red Bud)
- Billie Thornton 618-960-9139 (East St Louis, Belleville, Madison)

For speaking opportunities outside of these areas please contact Michael Bollman, Resource Specialist at 618-394-2137

Southern Region Training Calendar

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Training. Advance registration is required. Training dates, times and locations are subject to change. Detailed address information will be provided with registration.

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 will cover 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.

Carbondale	Civic Center
September 2, 9 & 16 (Tue)	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.

Belleville	Catholic Social Services
August 16 (Sat)	9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Carbondale	Adolescent Health Center
August 2 (Sat)	9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Fairview Heights	DCFS
August 16 (Sat)	9 a.m.-1 p.m.

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.

Belleville	Catholic Social Services
September 20 (Sat)	9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Carbondale	Adolescent Health Center
Sept. 25 & Oct. 2 (Thu)	6-9 p.m.

Effingham	DCFS Office
September 20 (Sat)	9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Marion	LSSI
September 9 (Sat)	9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Mt. Vernon	DCFS
Sept. 22 & 29 (Mon)	6-9 p.m.

Olney	DCFS
Sept. 25 & Oct. 2 (Thu)	6-9 p.m.

Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.

Call the DCFS Office of Training

877-800-3393 toll free