

Dukes advocate for children and caregivers

With six children ranging in age from two to 10 years old, the household of Bob and Tonya Duke is a bustling place. Both parents juggle work schedules and parenting responsibilities with other activities directly related to advocating for and supporting foster parents. "Life in our home is never predictable," noted Tonya.

Tonya, who is a full time teacher of the deaf in the East St. Louis school district, has been a member of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council for the past three years. Bob is a certified FosterPRIDE trainer who teaches several PRIDE classes per year. Tonya has also assisted with training foster parents on the Foster Parent Law and regularly attends meetings of her local foster parent advisory council.

Reflecting back on their eight years of providing foster care actively, both Bob and Tonya retain their enthusiasm for their "second" professions. In addition to their two children by birth, they are doing foster care for another child and raising three children who they adopted out of foster care. The Dukes' initial interest was in traditional foster care, but Tonya attributed some of their success

of the transition to adoption to being open when dealing with birth parents.

"We never felt uncomfortable with biological parents," she said. In some instances, their positive relationship with the parents helped encourage them to support the adoption.

Both Tonya and Bob would be willing to accept more children, but are currently at capacity. In the meantime, they encourage others to join them in caring for children.

"We're often approached by people who ask us if we are a foster family," said Bob. Encounters of this kind have provided them with the opportunity to encourage others to become foster parents. "We've recruited four families so far," said Tonya proudly. "There are thousands of kids who need help."

In addition to the basic safety and shelter needs, the Dukes take their advocacy role seriously. They make a point to attend all of the court hearings for each of the kids in their home.

"I think we've only missed two

hearings the entire time we've fostered," said Tonya. "Even if you can't get into the actual hearing you can advocate for the child by talking to the G.A.L. and others."

They both feel that they receive excellent support from their caseworkers, but acknowledge that oftentimes foster parents need to be self-sufficient. Working with an agency may be frustrating at times, and there are occasions when there may be some disagreement over how best to meet children's needs.

Bob's involvement with PRIDE training has increased his interest in advocating for foster parents. He says that he would even be interested in becoming a Foster Parent Support Specialist if the opportunity were available. Tonya has found her work with the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council to be very rewarding. "It's been an educational experience," she said. "It's interesting to see and hear what other agencies around the state do with their foster parents."

Holiday message from your RA



The holidays are upon us and with them celebrations of family traditions and faith. The holidays were special in my family. I am the eighth of 14 children. It seemed that we turned our focus from all of our busy lives and hanging out with friends to being with family. It was a time of gathering together to play cards, string popcorn for the Christmas tree and tell stories.

In such a large family there were many changes and challenges. When I was seven years old my oldest sister joined the convent; two years later my other sister joined her. When I was 12, my brother Len was in the military. I recall one year he was not able to come home for the holidays. I remember someone asking if Santa would bring Lenny his presents. My mother would assure us that Santa would. Although their reasons were honorable, I still felt sad when my siblings could not join us. I did take solace in that we visited our sisters, and my brother would telephone.

You may be faced with similar questions and emotions from the children in your care. During these holidays I am sure our children will find peace in your home. I offer you my thanks and best wishes.

*Happy Holidays
Michael J. Ruzicka*

DCFS nurse program supports families

The DCFS nursing consultation program was initiated in 1993 and continues to be an important resource for caseworkers, foster parents, and biological families. In the Southern Region Lillian Bogan, Kathy Disher, and Gwen Howard are available to provide this service.

The nurses provide clinical and professional consultation in a wide variety of circumstances including monitoring medications, attending hospital discharge staffings, facilitating appointments with medical specialists, and providing specialized input on medically related issues.

Virtually any child involved with DCFS or a private foster care agency is potentially eligible for service through this program. This includes foster children and children with open DCFS cases while at home with their parents. Referrals must be made by the caseworker – no direct referrals can be made by foster caregivers.

Referrals are generally assigned by geographical location, with Lillian handling the far southern counties of the region, and Gwen and Kathy handling the remainder.

Gwen was one of the first nurses in the program when it began and currently works out of the Belleville Field Office. Her special interests include maternal health and mental health issues. She enjoys professional challenges, and felt that working in child



Gwen Howard



Kathy Disher

welfare would be anything but a routine job. "Every new case is a challenge," she said. "Each one has different issues and tasks and I enjoy the variety."

Kathy works out of the Wood River office and came to DCFS in 1999 after working in forensic mental health settings. Her professional interests include a specialization in surgery, as well as labor and delivery. "I have always enjoyed working with children," she said. "Medical information can be overwhelming, so I hope I can help people understand it."

Lillian has been in her position for 15 years. She had previous experience with a local health department as well as a hospital. Her belief in the importance of family is key to her continued commitment to providing nursing services to Southern Illinois families.

Although the nurses program is open to any child or family involved with DCFS, referrals regarding foster children are given highest priority. Foster parents who feel that nurse involvement would be beneficial should discuss this with the caseworker, who will then make the referral.

Mental health services for youth affected by parental substance abuse

Moving Families Forward (MFF) is a new program offering medical, psychological, and developmental evaluations, as well as therapy services for any child impacted by parental substance use. For example, they serve children who have been exposed to narcotics or methamphetamine before birth or in their living environment. The program is focusing on families in the Belleville area, but has clients from Monroe, Madison and St. Clair counties. The organization is currently accepting referrals for evaluations and individual/family therapy, as well as for the following groups:

- Social skills group
- Parenting skills group
- Trauma group

There is also a parent support group that meets the first Tuesday of the month in Belleville. All psychological services provided by MFF are free of charge. To make a referral, please speak with your caseworker and ask them to contact Bev Vokes at 618-398-9850 for an intake packet.

* * *

MFF is also looking for families with DCFS foster children to participate as control subjects in a research project. Foster parents with eligible children would have to fill-out a set of questionnaires, which takes about an hour. Six months after the original appointment, foster parents would fill-out these questionnaires again and complete a brief phone interview. Families will be reimbursed for their participation with a \$20 Wal-Mart gift card at the first visit and a \$20 Wal-Mart gift card at the six month follow-up. In order to participate, families must contact their caseworker, who will put them in touch with MFF. If you have any questions about the research project or would like to learn more information, please contact Bryan Dematteis of Moving Families Forward at (618) 394-9703.

Advisory Council Update

The Southern Region's Foster Parent Advisory Council concluded their activities for 2008 on November 6, when they met to sign-off on the 2009 Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan. The Region continued to utilize its "site" approach to meeting and convened at seven locations around the region to approve the 2009 plan. This year the Council initiated a new approach to the sign-off process by allowing foster parents to "drop in" at any Department field office during a one week period to sign off on the plan. Although all foster parents are notified when the plan has been completed and may request a copy, the Council also provided a copy of the Plan at each one of the offices as well as a sign-off sheet.

The Advisory Council also provided training to caregivers on the Foster Parent Law during the autumn months. The training uses a "vignette" approach in which foster parents are presented with a case scenario and asked to identify and discuss the ways in which the Foster Parent Law applies. This demonstrates the connection between the Law and direct service practice.

The Advisory Council encourages caregivers to participate in the Council's activities by attending one or more of the quarterly meetings. A schedule will be mailed after the first of the year. For more information, contact Michael Bollman, Co-Chair at 618-394-2137.

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 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 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.

Belleville *Trinity United Church*
January 8, 15 & 22 (Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Marion *Heartland Medical Ctr.*
May 2 and 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
May 9 (Sat) 9 a.m.-Noon

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.

O'Fallon *Illinois Mentor*
June 15, 22 & 29 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 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.

Rend Lake *Rend Lake College*
April 25 (Sat) 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Module 12 - Understanding & Promoting Preteen and Teen Development (6 training hours)

This new course will assist 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 to understand the teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.

Belleville *Trinity United Church*
May 14 & 21 (Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Effingham *DCFS*
June 1 & 8 (Mon) 6-9 p.m.

The Teen in Family Foster Care: Supporting Attachment (6 training hours)

This training will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand how early attachment experiences have impacted the teen's development.

Belleville *Catholic Social Services*
January 17 (Sat) 9 a.m.-4 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*
February 19 & 26 (Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Belleville *Children's Home and Aid*
March 5 & 9 (Thu/Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Carbondale *Adolescent Hlth Center*
April 9 & 16 (Thu) 6-9 p.m.

Effingham *DCFS*
January 12 & 19 (Mon) 6-9 p.m.

Fairview Heights *DCFS*
March 17 & 24 (Tue) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Granite City *Gateway Reg. Medical*
April 4 (Sat) 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Marion *Heartland Medical Center*
February 28 (Sat) 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Olney *DCFS*
April 9 & 16 (Thu) 6-9 p.m.

Ullin *Shawnee Community College*
March 7 (Sat) 9 a.m.-4 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.

Ullin *Shawnee Community College*
January 24 (Sat) 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.

Call the DCFS Office of Training

877-800-3393 toll free