

# Our Kids

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News for Southern Region Families

## DCFS Education advisors stand ready to help students succeed

With the start of a new school year on the horizon, Southern Region caregivers should know they have a powerful resource ready to help with education issues. Through a partnership with Northern Illinois University, the DCFS/NIU education advisors advocate for youth in care and also work with adoptive and guardianship families.

The Education Advisors can assist with the assessments and Individualized Education Plans (IEP) for special education. When there are behavioral issues, they can work out an intervention with the school. They can answer caregivers' questions and attend school meetings

with them. They will help caregivers and caseworkers obtain appropriate educational services for the children. They also will help caregivers plan for education after high school.

Having backgrounds of working in or with schools before joining DCFS, Education Advisors know how to navigate the school system. They understand school issues including special education, attendance policies, discipline and a host of other concerns. Working with an Education Advisor can be very positive and gratifying. They identify with and highly value caregivers and the children in their

homes. They recognize and empathize with the frustrations and needs of both the education and child welfare systems, making them invaluable advocates. They advocate effectively because they know what children have the right to expect from schools. The advisors are each well-versed in the federal and state education laws and DCFS Rule 314 concerning education services that must be provided to children in DCFS care.

Since every school can have a slightly different way of doing things, it helps to have an Education Advisor sitting beside the caregiver as you both advocate for the student.

### DCFS/NIU Education Advisors



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## *SAVE the DATE: August 27 for family fun at DuQuoin state fair*

On Saturday, August 27, the DuQuoin State Fair will be the place to be for foster families in the Southern Region. The DCFS Office of Caregiver and Parent Support will be mailing invitations in July. Once again DCFS and a broad range of community partners will present a picnic for foster families.

The picnic is open to all families whose licenses are supervised

by DCFS or by private agency foster care programs, as well as unlicensed relative caregivers.

In keeping with tradition, the picnic will begin at 10:30 a.m. and last until 12:30 p.m. Foster families will enjoy free lunch and other treats. There will be games for the children and rides on a miniature train. DCFS will also provide free carnival ride tickets for children in foster

care or who have been adopted. Other household members will receive discounted ride tickets. The adults will enjoy a morning relaxing with their children and networking with other families.

DCFS management and staff from the Southern Region and their community partners will be working hard on all the details that make this event memorable for families.

## Graduates enjoy celebration with DCFS and agencies

DCFS Southern Region celebrated the graduations of youth in DCFS care who earned a high school diploma or GED or graduated from college. The fun took place in Collinsville at Splash City on June 16. The graduation celebration was sponsored by the Southern Region administration. The Youth Advisory Board and the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services spearheaded planning the event.

Students could each invite a guest to share in the celebration. At the end of the afternoon they did

not leave empty-handed. All of the graduates received goody bags that included gifts cards to local retailers. They could use the funds to purchase items for their next phase of school, for living expenses or just for enjoyment.

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United Methodist Children's Home in Mt. Vernon, celebrated many of the program's youth for their academic accomplishments. The Family Supported Adolescent Foster Care Program recently saw seven students graduate

from high school. In addition to their hard work at school, these students had the benefit of a stable foster home, a long-term relationship with their caseworkers and ongoing support and encouragement from their caregivers.

For many the journey was not easy, but they succeeded and earned their diplomas. On June 9, UMCH held a picnic to celebrate both the graduating seniors and their families.

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Sponsor: DCFS Southern Region Administration

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with story suggestions about:

- news and schedules from foster parent organizations
- local training notices
- features on foster families and community members working for children
- ideas for articles or services that would be helpful to caregivers

## *Southern Region staff thank families for another year of giving*

With May designated as Foster Parent Appreciation Month in Illinois, many foster care programs in Southern Region took extra measures to make caregivers feel appreciated.

**Mt. Vernon/Salem** held an annual Foster Care appreciation dinner on May 3 at the Grace Church of the Nazarene in Salem. Children were kept entertained during the program. Then families and staff enjoyed a hearty meal. DCFS staff donated flower baskets for all the caregivers in attendance and each family received a prize.

**Effingham** sponsored a foster parent recognition picnic on May 19, at the Evergreen Park in Effingham. Food included hotdogs and sloppy joes with all the trimmings and desserts. Caregivers received gift baskets with certificates from local businesses for discounted ice cream, beverages and passes for swimming. Caregivers, staff and children had a fun night together.

**Olney** hosted a foster care recognition party on May 24. Breakfast was provided for the foster caregivers and included egg casseroles, sausage, bacon, doughnuts, fruit, juice and coffee. Staff handed out gift baskets and delivered them to those families who did not attend.

**Marion/Harrisburg** foster parents were invited to the Marion Miners ball game on May 31. The Miners have provided 20 free game day tickets and advertisement at the game to recognize foster parents during the game. The children had access to the bullpen play area during the game, which is usually a big hit for the younger children.

**Metropolis/Cairo/Anna/Murphysboro** This appreciation event was originally scheduled for May 7, but was cancelled due to the flood. Caregivers will be invited to a rescheduled barbecue in July. Plans are underway for children's activities and games. Gift baskets will be made up for the foster parents and each will receive a certificate of appreciation.

## Summit connects older youth to adult resources



*In between the educational workshops at the Youth Summit, participants enjoyed musical entertainment.*

Southern Region hosted its annual Youth Summit on June 4, at Kaskaskia College in Centralia. The theme this year was "Never Back Down, Never Give Up!" The Summit was a huge success, with

more than 100 youth in attendance.

The youth enjoyed workshops on education, employment, health and sexuality, domestic violence and money

management. DCFS Director McEwen and Daniel Fitzgerald, the Deputy Director for Service Intervention, were there to inspire and congratulate the young people on the bright futures ahead of them.

"This event is so important because it brings together ideas and resources that will help our youth succeed as adults," said Fitzgerald.

As they learned, they also had time for some fun. The youth were especially excited about the raffle and give-aways that included a DVD player, flash drives, MP3 players and prepaid cell phones.

## *Thanks, con't.*

**East St. Louis, Belleville, Sparta and Carlyle** offices joined to celebrated caregivers at the annual The Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner on May 25. Activities and entertainment consisted of Senior Steppers dancing and a singer. There was also a candle-lighting ceremony. The candles represented the light that each foster parent brings to the children who are in their home. Despite the bad weather, there was a strong turnout from caregivers and staff across all functions. Families went home with gifts and many won prizes.

**Madison County** Placement Team once again sponsored a Foster Parent Appreciation Event on June 2. Staff arranged a family fun night at the Gateway Grizzly Baseball Center in

Sauget. Caregivers received free tickets for their family members and "Grizzly Bucks" to purchase food or souvenirs. More than 90 individuals attended the popular event.



*Dancing was part of the celebration at the appreciation event for families served by the East St. Louis/Belleville/Sparta and Carlyle offices.*

### **Attend the Southern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council Meeting**

Caregivers can learn about new policies, discuss foster care practices and meet other caregivers and DCFS support staff. The meetings will begin with a pre-meeting in each site at 6 p.m. to allow those present to get familiar with local issues. The remaining meetings this year are on August 16 and November 8. Caregivers can go to any of the following locations and the groups will be linked by teleconference starting at 6:30 p.m.

Belleville Field Office  
1220 Centreville Ave.  
Suite 101

Wood River Field Office  
1403 Vaughn Road

Effingham Field Office  
401 E. Industrial Blvd.  
Suite B

Mt Vernon Field Office  
321A Withers Drive

Marion Field Office  
107 Airway Drive  
Cairo Field Office  
1315 Washington

# Southern Region Caregiver Training

DCFS Office of Training has scheduled sessions of in-service training modules and other courses in locations across the Southern Region. The listing below can help caregivers plan for their training needs. To get specific dates and locations, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center (VTC) anytime at [www.DCFStraining.org](http://www.DCFStraining.org) or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during regular business hours. In addition to classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of videos, books and online training.

## East St. Louis Area

### August

Adoption Certification      Belleville  
(Worker referral required)

### September

Educational Advocacy      Belleville

## Marion Area

### August

Module 9      Mt. Vernon  
Adoption Certification      Marion  
(worker referral required)

### September

Child Trauma      Marion  
Reunification Training      O'Fallon

## In-service Training modules (scheduled periodically in classroom sessions or available on DVD)

**Module 1 - Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk (12 hours)** The focus of this module is how to build self-esteem in children; how kids act when they need recognition, power, freedom, enjoyment and to belong; and 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 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; how to catch kids being "good" and what to do to encourage positive behavior.

**Module 4 - The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (9 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 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 before 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 hours)** Foster parents learn everyone's role on the team, 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 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 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 hours)** In this training caregivers learn how fostering children can affect family relationships, how to minimize stresses that can result and how to find available supports.

**Module 10 – Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children and Families (15 hours)** Foster parents will study the risk factors for chemical use, abuse, and dependency. They will understand relapse and recovery and be able to acquire skills necessary to be an active member of the team to support parents' recovery.

**Module 12 - Understanding & Promoting Pre-Teen and Teen Development (6 hours)**

This 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 module will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use as fostering teenagers in the day-to-day life of the foster family.