

After more than 70 youth, Annie Ratliff still will care for more

Annie Ratliff has worked with DCFS as a foster parent and day care provider for 11 years. She has opened her arms and her home to more than 70 children. She has taken children into her home when the hour was late or the child was hungry, crying and cold. “Annie Mom” as she is called, works with older teens and youth that are parenting. Additionally, she advocated for other caregivers as a Foster Parent Support Specialist. She was even asked to speak with a group of parents who have children in care so they can better relate to caregivers.

Ratliff started on the foster care path without knowing there was such a formal system. Initially, she sought out playmates for her daughter, an only child. From then on, she always had children around. In 1999, after being encouraged by a cousin and good friend, she started the journey to becoming a licensed caregiver. She received her first child in 2000. Since then she has cared for 75 children, with more than two-thirds having

special needs. She has been that safe haven during tough transitions. Most of the children stay in her home for an average of four to six months.

Ratliff returned to Illinois from Virginia after retiring and lives with her mother, her greatest supporter. She is active in her church, volunteering in the hospitality and culinary ministries, Missionary Society and as leader of the Mother Ministry. She says God and her mother have kept her focused.

Ratliff gives this advice to caregivers. “Foster parents must be willing to tolerate a lot and have much patience. They must love all children and provide encouragement to them because they are exposed to so much. It takes love and patience to help children make it in the world today,” she said.

She lives by more words of wisdom that she takes from her grandmother and passes down. “Get an education. But the teaching actually begins at home. We cannot wait on the teachers to teach our children. We have



Annie Ratliff, or “Annie Mom,” has been an example of reliable parenting to more than 70 children and other caregivers.

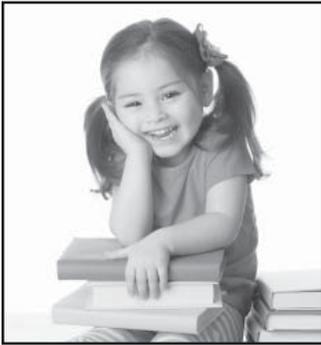
to teach them,” Ratliff stated.

She doesn’t wait on much. For that she has gained the admiration of the DCFS team that supports the children at her home.

“She wants workers to move swiftly to get her children involved in services. She is very direct and does not give up easily on children placed in her home,” said her caseworker Ralpa Perkins.

In the Belleville office she is also known for her cooperation and perseverance. Staff say she often goes above and beyond the call. She will provide transportation even when she does not get reimbursed. Even after an unfortunate hip injury, she remained committed to taking care of children. The licensing staff breathed a sigh of relief when she decided to open her door once more.

Caregivers can jump to front of the line for Head Start enrollment



A solid education foundation is one of the most important ways to help children succeed. For youth involved in child welfare, pre-school is especially important to counter the effects of trauma that brings children into care. DCFS requires that all youth in foster care who

are between the ages of three and five be enrolled in a quality early learning program such as Head Start, Preschool for All (pre-K), accredited day care, licensed day care with early education, or home day care with early education.

DCFS has a working partnership agreement with the Head Start program. Children age 3 to 5 years old in foster care are categorically eligible for services through Head Start and Early Head Start. When enrollment space is available, the Office of Head Start (OHS) encour-

ages Head Start/Early Head Start agencies to prioritize children who are in DCFS care.

Southern Region set a goal to enroll all children who will be three years old for the current school year. Southern Region foster parents and relative caregivers should continue to finalize their children's early educational plan by consulting with their child's caseworker and making sure these items are in place for a smooth transition:

- Placement form (906)
- Medical card to verify up to date medical

records

- Certified copy of the child's birth certificate
- A copy of the most recent Early Intervention Assessment

For more information, contact Dock Conner, the DCFS Southern Region School Readiness Specialist, at 618-583-2096. Families created through adoption or guardianship may experience problems that require intensive services. Sometimes, even years after successfully reaching finalization, old problems flare or new and troubling behaviors appear.

Preservation services help families smooth path of rocky adoptions

The Adoption and Guardianship Preservation Program recognizes that families formed through adoption or guardianship may have characteristics significantly different from those created through birth. This can result in unique challenges for the family.

DCFS created the Adoption and Guardianship Preservation program as a way to help a family gain stability and to reduce the risk of out-of-home placement. The Adoption and Guardianship Preservation Program helps families who often feel they are at the end of their rope, by offering family-centered support and services. The services are home-based and can involve the entire family, as specifically trained adoption professionals help work through some of the toughest situations.

The goals of all preservation programs are to help parents:

- Feel better about their ability to parent
- Understand adoption and guardianship and its impact on children
- Connect current behavior to past history
- Understand the child's past losses
- Gain skills to help their child

In Southern Region, adoptive and guardianship families can find support from the two agencies that offer preservation services.

Children's Home & Aid Society/Granite City **618-452-8900**

Counties: Bond, Clinton, Madison, Monroe, Randolph, St. Clair and Washington

Matthews & Associates/Herrin **618-988-1330**

Counties: Alexander, Clay, Crawford, Edwards, Effingham, Fayette, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson, Johnson, Lawrence, Marion, Massac, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Richland, Saline, Union, Wabash, Wayne, White and Williamson

The testimonials from families who have used preservation services reveal that these services worked, while other traditional, less intensive services they had tried, did not. Any Southern Region adoptive or guardianship family can call for preservation services if the circumstances at home seem like more than they handle.

Southern region students earn DCFS scholarships

This year, four students whose cases were served by programs in Southern Region headed to college with the benefits included in the DCFS Scholarship program. The scholarship includes the waiver of tuition and mandatory fees at one of the nine Illinois state universities or an Illinois community college, a monthly maintenance grant of \$471 and a medical card.

Scholarship recipients were chosen statewide on the basis of scholastic aptitude, a written personal statement and demonstrated community involvement. Next year's scholarship application process begins in January and ends in March. Contact the youth's caseworker or the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services at 312-814-5959 for more information.



Breeanna Arft

Breeanna, from Makanda, graduated from Anna-Jonesboro Community High School where she earned a 3.88 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. While in high school she participated in Future Farmers of America, Spanish Club, Art Club, Beta Club, and she was on the Honor Roll. Breeanna also volunteered as a teacher for Vacation Bible School and helped organize the local Relay for Life. Breeanna now attends Shawnee Community College and plans to pursue a career as a veterinarian.

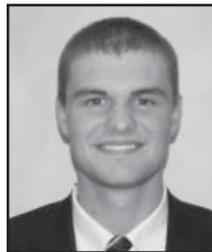


Antonnett Long

Antonnett, from East St. Louis, is a graduate of Althoff Catholic High School where she earned a 3.4 out of 4.0 grade point average. Antonnett was an active member of the pom-pon quad, cheerleading team, French club and Freshmen Mentor Group while in high school. She is an honor student who has volunteer experience at SIUE Headstart Program and her church's Young Adult Ministry. She also participated in the 2010 Miss Saint Louis Pageant Competition. Now Antonnett is studying at Southwestern Community College with plans to transfer to Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.

Sharelle Shelton (photo not available)

Sharelle graduated from Carrier Mills High School, where she earned a 4.8 grade point average. Her past volunteer experiences include after-school tutoring, Future Community Career Leaders of America and the student council. She was acknowledged for her perfect attendance and she was recognized on her high school's wall of fame for outstanding academic accomplishments, including four years on the honor roll. Sharelle is now a student at Southeastern Illinois Community College where she studies nursing.



Robert Smith

Robert, of Buncombe, graduated from Goreville High School, where he earned a 3.9 out of 4.0 grade point average. During high school, Robert was recognized for high honors, Top Flight Achievements, regional honor band and his participation with the Southern Illinois University Symphonic Band. His volunteer experiences included working with Vacation Bible School, assisting with and donating to the Vienna High School and Goreville High School blood drive, tutoring other high school students and serving as a Little Egypt Chrysalis motivational speaker and Goreville High School tutor. Robert is now attending Shawnee Community College, studying nursing.

Our Kids

Sponsor: DCFS Southern Region Administration

Regional Reporter:
Sam Saladino

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

Contact:
Cindy McCleary
Cindy.McCleary@illinois.gov
618-244-8414

Assistant Regional Administrator:
Valda Haywood
618-583-2117

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 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.

October

Educational Advocacy	Alton, Belleville, Marion, Mt. Vernon, Harrisburg
Module 4	Belleville
Module 7	Mt. Vernon
Reunification Training	Ullin
Adoption Certification (referral required)	Mt. Vernon

November

Educational Advocacy	Belleville, Olney
Module 9	Alton, Marion
Adoption Certification (referral required)	Belleville, Effingham, Marion

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.