

Illinois Families Now and Forever

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship®

State celebrates Foster Parent Appreciation Month

From the DCFS Director



May, Foster Parent Appreciation Month in Illinois, comes near the half-year point in my tenure as Director. When I look back on what has taken place so far and what we face, my respect and gratitude for our foster caregivers goes even deeper. I hope all of our families will take some time this month to reflect on the many good things that come from the hard job you perform.

Governor Quinn's proclamation for Foster Parent Appreciation Month stated that, "foster parent caregivers tirelessly tend to children's physical, emotional, material and educational needs, providing them the opportunity to move from the child welfare system to safe and successful lives."

Official acknowledgements are important, but they only go so far. Perhaps the most valuable reward would be the sentiments from someone who can sincerely speak to foster care in a very unique, personal way. This letter from Carissa gets to the heart of Foster Parent Appreciation Month. I pledge to take her experiences into account as we move DCFS forward.

— Richard H. Calica

Carissa Wesley, age 22, described in a letter how she felt when she and her sister were taken into DCFS care. The excerpts that follow speak to the girls' traumatic entry into the system, their placement in foster care with Jeff and Robin Simpson and Carissa's gratitude for a positive foster care experience.

Initial shock

"My name is Carissa Wesley. On December 16, 2005 my world was flipped upside down. Sitting in Spanish class, my teacher gets a call from the office, letting her know to let me know to grab my things... Well, I get to the office and there sits my principal and a police officer... They go on to say that my biological mother was taken into custody... Anyway, they told me that if family couldn't take me, then we would be placed in foster care. The sad thing was that I had a place to go, but they couldn't separate siblings. So after a failed attempt, they had me ride in the police car to the junior high where my younger sister went to school.

Welcoming family

When we left the office [the caseworker] took us to the family's home. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know where Odin was, and it was dark, plus we were out in the country. As we pulled in the driveway there was [sic] cars and lights and a lot of movement. Walking up to the front door, we were greeted by a house full of people. But, from the moment we walked through that door the Simpsons did nothing but make us feel like part of the family.

Lifelong impact

Yes, I may be out on my own and no longer in care, but they are more of a family than my own has been. I keep in contact with the Simpsons. In fact, Jeff said that when the day comes for me to get married that he would give me away.

My point to all of this is that a good, loving, caring foster home can impact a child's life. Had they not cared the way they did for us then, I'm not sure I would be here writing this letter to you. I've had so many more chances in life, met new people, learned new things, advocated for other youth.

Had I not been placed in a good home the first time, I would have been in a group home waiting for the day I could age out.

You may not see things from our point of view, but I have seen good foster parents lose kids because the real parents "cleaned up," but that rips not only the kids up but the foster parents too. They get attached and it's as if they were losing their own kids. I guess what I'm asking is that you truly see what is going on and see what is best for not only the kids, but the foster parents as well."



MOVIN' ON UP: SAVE THE DATES

News for youth as they transition to adulthood

Older youth are about to embark on a busy season with DCFS. The end of spring brings several special events designed to educate and encourage teens and young adults who are involved with DCFS.

The Division of Service Intervention is celebrating academic accomplishments with a graduation celebration in each DCFS region. Those youth in care or

those formerly under DCFS care who earned a high school diploma or GED or completed a vocational program are invited to attend.

There will also be four Youth Summits that will provide teens skills to help them successfully achieve self-sufficiency.

Save the date for the events listed below. More information will be

sent directly to families with youth ages 14 to 21 who are still in care. Youth who are adopted or in guardianship can also take part in the events by calling one of the support staff below.

Cook/Northern regions
Tony Lawlor, 312-401-5462

Central/Southern regions
Leshonda Rogers, 217-789-2908

Central Region

Graduation Celebration
June 8, 10a.m. - 3p.m.
Executive Mansion
Springfield

Youth Summit
June 28, 8a.m. to 4p.m.
Miller Park Pavilion
Bloomington

Cook Regions

Graduation Celebration
June 29, 12 to 4p.m.
Location TBA

Youth Summit
June 14, 8a.m. to 4p.m.
IL Institute of Technology
Chicago

Southern Region

Graduation Celebration
June 22 (time TBA)
Splash City
Collinsville

Youth Summit
June 21, 8a.m. to 4p.m.
Kaskaskia College
Centralia

Northern Region

Graduation Celebration
June 18, 1 to 4p.m.
Brunswick Zone
Aurora

Youth Summit
June 15, 8a.m. to 4p.m.
Kishwaukee College
Malta

Caregiver families invited to State Fair August 10-19 in Springfield

DCFS continues the annual tradition of offering caregivers a special invitation to attend the Illinois State Fair.

Complete and return this page by June 22 and in July you will receive by mail:

- A pass that includes parking and admission for all passengers in the car for one \$3 fee.
- 1 refreshment ticket for each family member, worth \$3 in food or drink.
- One ride ticket for each family member that provides unlimited rides for \$15 (during designated hours ONLY on August 13-17)

MAIL OR FAX NO LATER THAN JUNE 22, 2012

DCFS Office of Communications
406 East Monroe Street, Station 65
Springfield, IL 62701-1498
Fax: 217-524-0014

Tickets may not be requested by telephone. Nothing will be sent to you unless you return this coupon. This is the only invitation to the state fair. Please act NOW if you wish to attend.

There will be _____ family members in our party.

Number of vehicles _____ (limit 2)

(If requesting more than 8 tickets, please print the name and phone number of your licensing or subsidy worker.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Foster Home supervised by: DCFS private agency

Post Adoption/Guardianship: yes no

Name of Agency/DCFS Region: _____

Worker's Name: _____

Phone: _____

We are a licensed foster family, relative caregiver, a guardianship family or have adopted a child through DCFS, and we would like to attend the 2012 Illinois State Fair. We understand that only our foster, adopted and guardianship children and family members who live in our home consistent with DCFS licensing regulations are eligible for these special offers.

Signature: _____



Illinois Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Bulletin

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council traveled to Effingham for the March meeting.

Foster Parent Law: The council concluded the evaluation process for the 2012 Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans. Several plans were nominated for special honors. Representatives from three foster care programs will join the June meeting to receive awards. Meanwhile, council members continued the on-site reviews at agencies to gauge the plans' impact on caregivers and staff.

Television campaign: The council had an opportunity to weigh in on the next installment of the public service commercials for the "Foster Kids Are Our

Kids" television campaign. Anne Klassman of Voices for Illinois Children said that the organization would consider recommendations the council made as it prepares for public roll out.

Priority issues: At the start of the year, Director Calica asked the council to look into ways to enhance the relationship between caregivers and the staff that support their efforts. The council formed a committee to address that need and will also develop a set of other critical issues.

Elections: Council members set the ballots for chair and vice chair. Results from the vote will be announced in June 8 meeting so terms can start in July.

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council was founded in conjunction with the Illinois Foster Parent Law. Membership consists of caregivers, agency representatives and other experts in child welfare, who are appointed by the DCFS Director. The mandated positions for caregivers are spread among the DCFS regions.

The council holds open meetings at least six times a year, and more as needed, in locations around the state.

The next meeting of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council will be on June 8 at 9 a.m. in Downers Grove.

Call the Office of Caregiver and Parent Support at 217-524-2422 for details.



New phone line for post-adoption info calls

Caregivers who have moved to permanency through adoption or guardianship can find answers to questions and information about services by calling a new phone line that serves the entire state.

The new phone line to the Call Center is 1(888) 96 ADOPT. This is the number to use with questions about the subsidy, to get approval for additional services and to provide updates to contact information or other changes.

The centralized system was first piloted in Cook County and many

**Post-Adoption & Guardianship
toll-free phone line
1-888-96-ADOPT
(1-888-962-3678)**

benefits came to light early in the process. Calls can be directed to the right subsidy worker who can respond. Calls are also tracked to improve response time and to ensure that the matter is resolved.

"We are very pleased with the level of service and responsiveness that the new system provides our caregivers," said June Dorn, DCFS Statewide Adoption Administrator.

The direct line phone numbers for the subsidy workers are still in place. However, the new central number will come in handy if you do not know the exact individual who may be of help or if you have a general question about services after the adoption or guardianship.



The DCFS Office of Caregiver and Parent Support and the DCFS Office of training presented the 2012 Caregiver Institutes. The theme was "I've Been Through Some Things," and focused on helping caregivers support children affected by trauma.

The six-hour sessions included panel discussion with youth, interactive presentations and time for networking. The four institutes served hundreds of families throughout the state.

Foster Parent Law defines caregivers' rights and responsibilities

Before 1995, the rights and responsibilities for the individuals providing foster care were not clearly defined. Without a clear job description, caregivers, agencies and DCFS had struggled in placing caregivers' rights and responsibilities within child welfare policy. It took a lengthy, coordinated effort from individual caregivers, foster care advocacy organizations, legislators, and child welfare personnel to bring about the Foster Parent Bill of Rights. That document provided the foundation for the Foster Parent Law, signed on June 3, 1995.

The Foster Parent Law clearly defines 15 rights and 17 responsibilities for all Illinois families who provide foster care to children in DCFS care. The statement of rights helps foster caregivers, agencies and DCFS regions know what role caregivers will play on the child welfare team and the consideration they should receive. The statement of responsibilities helps caregivers know what will be expected of them and gives a clear understanding of the general expectations they should have of the foster care agency or DCFS regional foster care program.

The Foster Parent Law also established the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council to advise DCFS about foster care issues. The council also has the responsibility to oversee the implementation of the Foster Parent Law.

Details and the full text of Foster Parent Law are included in the Foster Family Handbook. Caregivers can also request their foster care program's annual Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan to see how it upholds the Law. The DCFS Office of Caregiver and Parent Support at 217-524-2422 can provide further information.

Caregivers have the right to:

1. Be treated with dignity, respect and consideration
2. Be provided pre-service and appropriate ongoing training to improve skills
3. Be informed on how to receive supportive services from the agency
4. Receive timely financial reimbursement commensurate with child's service plan
5. Be provided a clear, written understanding of the plan concerning the child's placement and how it will support his family relationship and cultural identity
6. Fair, timely and impartial investigations of licensing complaints
7. Receive additional information to assist in the care of a child while in placement
8. Receive specific information from DCFS and private agencies listed in Children and Family Services Act and the Child Care Act of 1969
9. Be notified of scheduled meetings and staffings in order to participate in case planning and decision-making
10. Be provided, before placement, with any information a caseworker has that is pertinent to the child's care and the permanency plan
11. Receive written notice of any change in a child's case plan or of plans to terminate the child's placement, along with the reasons for the change or termination
12. Timely notification of court hearings and right to intervene or request mandamus
13. Be considered as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the foster parents re-enters DCFS care
14. Access the existing appeals process with the assertion that the appeal will be free from acts of harassment and retaliation.
15. Be informed of the Foster Parent Hotline and the rights for foster parents when reporting misconduct by child welfare personnel

Caregivers have the responsibility to:

1. Communicate and share information with the child welfare team
2. Respect the confidentiality of information about the child and his family
3. Advocate for children in the care of the foster parent
4. Treat the child and his or her family with dignity, respect and consideration
5. Recognize their individual and family strengths and limitations and to utilize appropriate supports as appropriate
6. Be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent associations
7. Assess their ongoing training needs and take action to meet those needs
8. Strategize with agency representatives to avoid placement disruptions and support the child if disruption occurs
9. Recognize the impact of foster care on relationships and take steps to minimize stress as much as possible
10. Positively promote the benefits of foster parenting
11. Know the role, rights and responsibilities of foster parents, other professionals in the child welfare system, the child, and the child's own family
12. Know and fulfill their role as a mandated reporter and know policies regarding allegations that foster parents have committed abuse or neglect
13. Know the purpose of and to participate in Administrative Case Reviews, client service plans and court proceedings
14. Know the child welfare agency's appeal process
15. Maintain accurate records
16. Share information about the placement with subsequent caregivers/parents
17. Provide care that respects the child's cultural needs supports the relationship between the child and his or her own family

Our Kids

News for Southern
Region Families

Family finds a way to give intense medical care but not lose focus

Tom and Teresa Miller, foster caregivers since 2005, love what they do, but acknowledge that you will burn out if you don't take care of yourself.

"Fostering takes a lot of emotional energy. You need to recognize when you need to take a break," the couple stressed. Teresa added, "Build your support system, take care of your marriage and use respite."

Before starting foster care they raised five children. Tom's brother was licensed for foster care, and that sparked the idea for Tom and Teresa to try that as well. However, months went by with no phone calls about children. Then the "Seth" call came. He was 13 and had specialized medical needs. It was only supposed to be a weekend and that was just about how long it took to fall in love.

Seth is 17 now, but with Down's Syndrome, his developmental age is that of a young child. He has a heart ailment that requires a pace maker and he is on oxygen twenty-

four hours a day. Although he is unable to speak, he does communicate very well. The Millers have learned his body language.

Before Tom and Teresa, Seth had never been to school and had been medically neglected. Taking care of Seth became a full time job. Teresa was not working at the time, which helped. Tom has an auto repair operation at their home and he drives a school bus. The flexibility was important because meeting Seth's medical needs means traveling often to St. Louis Children's Hospital.

Now, after four years, Seth's adoption is final. His physical condition is stabilizing and he is able to attend school. Teresa is now working outside of the home as a project director for a child advocacy center in Robinson. She has flexible hours and Tom's shared workplace/home makes things easier. Even with that, they agree it is vital to have a good support system in place. As one example, their younger daughter attends college, but lives at home and is a big help.

Help is welcome because beyond Seth, the Millers have provided foster care for nine children, mostly teenagers. They also do respite care for other families. They said they have had some children who were difficult to manage. A few years back, they had to acknowledge that one young man needed more care than they could provide. Realizing that he would have to leave was not an easy decision, but



Tom and Teresa Miller

it was best. He transitioned to a group home, yet they still remained connected. He calls for advice and comes to visit. Now he is in college and is showing much progress.

"You may never see positive results while some kids are with you, but you will make a difference," Tom said.

The Millers' advice to other caregivers is to "have patience, patience, patience." One should also be willing to live outside of your comfort zone, be compassionate even during troubled times and listen to what the kids say and read between the lines.

"be willing to live outside of your comfort zone, be compassionate even during troubled times and listen to what the kids say and read between the lines..."

—Tom and Teresa Miller

Message from the DCFS Southern Region

**Valda Haywood,
Acting Regional Administrator**



Each year during the month of May we take the time to celebrate, congratulate and honor foster parents. On behalf of Southern Region management and staff, we give kudos to the best foster parents in the State of Illinois. Foster parents have partnered with licensing workers, child protection investigators, child welfare intact and placement workers, supervisors, managers, school staff and other community providers to give the children of Illinois, and specifically those of the Southern Region, an opportunity to reside in a safe and loving family.

You continue to release your homes without reservation or judgment to children whose tears flowed and hearts ached over the loss of parents, siblings, other relatives, schools, churches and extra curriculum activities which they had as their support. You consoled them and

allowed them to show their own creative ways to help to progress through this very difficult grieving process. Each child in his or her own way has become a special and unique family member.

Because of the special bonds developed, you are no longer the stranger in their lives, but you have become the individual these children depend on for guidance. You direct them as they journey from grade school to graduate high school and college and to start careers and families. You have cheered at the football and basketball games, helped prepare for class presentations and walked them down the aisle to marriage. Even when they return home, you maintained a healthy relationship supporting their natural parent and giving them that same love they have grown to know.

This year, again we stop specifically to honor you and to say **THANK YOU**. “Thank you” are very small words, but we give them to you with love and appreciation for all you do everyday.

On behalf of the entire Southern Region, we applaud all of you and say, “Job Well Done.”

Family Support Program serves Randolph and Madison counties

Parents are often stressed and sometimes feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities and parenting. The Family Support Program is an intensive, in home, education, skill training, and counseling program. Participation in the program is voluntary, free and open to residents of Randolph and Monroe counties. This includes foster and adoptive parents and their children.

The Family Support Program helps family members learn the skills necessary to meet the needs of children. The Family Support Program teaches in the natural environment—the home of the family.

Families may be referred by other agencies or schools, or they may refer themselves because they recognize the need. A supervisor from the program will start with an interview before admission to the

program, to determine eligibility and the needs of the family. From there, the family and the Home-based Specialist will set goals directed towards the areas that need to be addressed. The Specialist will work with family members for one to two hours a week for up to six weeks depending on the needs of the family. Areas of focus include developing appropriate parenting skills and stress management. Families will then receive continued support through mentoring for six to nine months.

In addition to helping with parenting, the program has an education component for youth having struggles at school. The Family Support Program also provides support and services to children who because of their behavior are at-risk of being suspended or expelled from school or are truant. Students and families will set goals to focus on

increasing school attendance and forging a positive relationship between school and home to get the child back on track.

For further information on the Family Support Program, contact Becky Springston of Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois at 618-443-2228.

There are similar support programs for families living in the other Local Area Networks (LANs) in Southern Region.

These services are open to all families, including foster, adoptive and guardianship families.

*For more information on local resources contact DCFS LAN Liaison:
Dwayne Phillips
618-257-7500 office
dwayne.phillips@illinois.gov.*

Families can find support in numbers with caregiver groups

DCFS, private agencies and community organizations sponsor many support groups and associations to assist foster and adoptive parents. The following list can help identify a group that may suit your family.

All-Dopt

Contact: Ginny Burkhart at 618-622-3522
Meets quarterly. Call for schedule.
Includes all types of adoptions.
Serves Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair counties.

Community Kids

Contact: Margie Fink at 618-534-4969
margie_fink@hotmail.com
Meets second Friday at 6 p.m.
Christ Community Church
473 W. Harrison Rd., Murphysboro
Potluck dinner served and child care is available with RSVP.

DCFS Southern Region Foster Care Advisory Council

Contact: Gloria Pounds at 618-524-2428
Meetings held quarterly in various DCFS offices and connected via teleconference. Call for a schedule. Open to all DCFS-supervised foster and adoptive families.

Mentoring Matters Support Group

Contact Lisa Harrell at 618-997-9470 or lisa.harrell@thementornetwork.com
Meets second Wednesday of each month
Coffee hour: 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.
Potluck dinner: 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Illinois Mentor, 4505 West DeYoung Street, Suite 203 C, Marion
Child Care Provided with three day advanced notice.

Southern Region Adoption and Subsidized Guardianship Preservation Program Support Group

Contact: Julie Fritzler at 618-988-1330, x. 103
Open to all adoptive parents and immediate family members.
Call for schedule details.

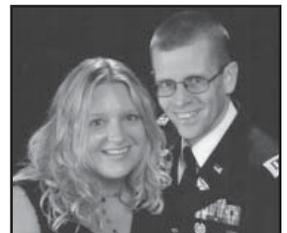
In honor of Foster Parent Appreciation Month, we asked Northern Region caregivers: What aspect of foster care makes you feel appreciated for what you do?

"The kids and the biological parents make you feel appreciated. Over a ten year period of doing foster care, we have made friends with many of the parents. Most of them in the end realize that you have done something good for them."
Andrew and Rae Delao



"Our most rewarding experience is working with caseworkers in the assistance of the foster children – whether it is doctor appointments, counseling, getting evaluations, or working with the schools. We have a lot of support with DCFS workers and we love it."
Tammy and Gary Teel

"Our caseworkers Jeannie Abell and Nikki Greathouse have been very helpful and encouraging, which makes us feel appreciated as foster parents. They have been very good about making sure we had what was needed for the children and have returned our calls very quickly. Ruth Zwilling, our support specialist, has been so great and always makes us feel appreciated. Anytime we have questions or just need some encouragement we call her. Overall, everyone has been great, and we are very proud to be foster parents and to belong to the Olney office."
Timothy and Jackie Tanner



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. 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 business hours. In addition to classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of videos, books and online training.

MAY/JUNE

Child Trauma (4 Hours)	Effingham
Transcultural Parenting (9 hours)	Mt. Vernon



Illinois Families Now and Forever

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Caregiver and Parent Support

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Produced by: DCFS Print Shop

Purpose: To help busy families more effectively parent children currently or formerly in DCFS care. To bring them the best information from the most knowledgeable sources. To promote statewide teamwork in finding permanency for children.

Address Changes: Families must notify their licensing representative, who will notify DCFS. Agencies should change office addresses or request staff copies through the Editor.

Illinois Families Now and Forever is published six times a year, bi-monthly, and mailed to licensed foster parents, unlicensed relative caregivers, adoptive and guardianship families receiving subsidies. An electronic version is sent to all DCFS staff, and private agency staff.

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Department of Children and Family Services©

Illinois Families Now and Forever
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Department of Children & Family Services
100 West Randolph - 6th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60601

PRESRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE
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SPRINGFIELD, IL
PERMIT NO. 763

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Current and back issues of *Illinois Families Now and Forever* are available online in English and Spanish at www.state.il.us/dcfs