

# Illinois Families Now and Forever

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship®

## College opportunities knock for youth in DCFS care

### *DCFS Scholarship applications due 3/31*

DCFS annually provides 48 college scholarships to youth who are currently under the guardianship of the Department or who left DCFS guardianship through adoption or private guardianship arrangements. Scholarship recipients receive up to four consecutive years of tuition and academic fee waivers to be used at participating Illinois state colleges or universities, a \$471 monthly stipend and a medical card up to age 23.

Applicants must have a high school diploma or GED by the end of this school year. Scholarship Program Student Applications (CFS 438) are available now. Students should carefully select three individuals (non-family members) to write helpful letters of recommendation. They will need to gather their high school transcript from the school and an ACT/SAT test score report. They will also write a compelling personal statement with the reasons why they are the best candidate for the scholarship. Everything must be submitted by March 31.

A review committee will evaluate the applications and make selections based on academic accomplishments, community service and the personal statement.

Contact the youth's caseworker or call DCFS at 312-814-5959 for more information.

Students planning to attend college will likely apply for financial aid. The first step to qualify for financial aid is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid form (FAFSA). All assistance based on financial need requires filling out the FAFSA. After completing and returning the application, the student will receive the Student Aid Report (SAR) that lists the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The EFC is what the family is expected to pay, based on their family income, on top of any financial aid that is awarded.

For students who have been in the child welfare system, the major factor for financial aid is the student's status as "dependent" or "independent." As an independent student, the parent's (parent by birth or foster caregiver) income will not be included in the financial need formula. That typically results in eligibility for more financial aid. The FAFSA student section asks the question "At any time since you turned age 13, were

both your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?" A youth in foster care or subsidized guardianship can answer yes and would automatically qualify as an independent student. Similarly, youth who left DCFS care through adoption after age 13, can also answer yes and the adoptive parents' income would not factor in the aid decision. Students should talk to their guidance counselors and college financial aid advisors for more specific details.

It is important that each youth complete and mail or e-mail their applications early in the calendar year, in order to secure the maximum benefits. Students can get forms starting in January from their school counselor or via the Internet at the website [www.fafsa.edu.gov](http://www.fafsa.edu.gov). The DCFS Education Advisors can also help families make plans for college. The advisors are assigned to each region. For more information contact DCFS at 312-814-5959.

These sites are a good jumping off point for students and families to research the college application process and funding sources.

**College Board**  
[collegeboard.com](http://collegeboard.com)

The same organization that runs the SAT exam helps students prepare for and pay for college.

**Fastweb scholarship search**  
[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

**FAFSA Commission**  
[www.fafsa.edu.gov](http://www.fafsa.edu.gov)

**Illinois Student Assistance Commission:** [www.collegezone.org](http://www.collegezone.org)

**Minority Scholarships**  
[www.free-4u.com/minority.htm](http://www.free-4u.com/minority.htm)

**Orphan Foundation of America**  
[www.orphan.org](http://www.orphan.org)

**United Negro College Fund**  
[www.uncf.org](http://www.uncf.org)

## From the DCFS Director

**Richard H. Calica**



Dear Friends,

Thank you again for your extraordinary dedication to the children of our state. Despite some challenges, 2012 was a year of many successes for child welfare in Illinois, and I am confident that with your continued help, 2013 will be even better.

To keep us all moving forward, lawmakers must restore \$25 million in cuts to the DCFS staff budget. Those funds are critical to a reorganization plan which includes: expanding our child abuse investigation teams; reducing shelter stays through new specialists to recruit foster parents; and shortening time in foster care through new permanency staff dedicated to achieving reunification or adoption.

DCFS is also asking lawmakers to restore \$13 million in cuts to adoption subsidies for families who adopted through DCFS and counseling, drug treatment and other supportive services for families in our Intact Families Program. These two programs are critical to our efforts to ensure that every child has the safe, nurturing and permanent family they deserve.

I hope you will remind your family, friends, neighbors and elected officials of the importance of the work that you, the department and our nonprofit partners are doing together and urge them to support it.

## MOVIN' ON UP: *Youth moving to adulthood*

Under the DCFS Youth and Family Development Office there are several education and employment programs for older youth who are still in DCFS custody. However, youth who achieved permanency through adoption or guardianship are eligible to apply for the DCFS Scholarship program (see page 1) and the Education and Training Voucher is available to youth adopted after age 16. For further information, DCFS has Transition Coordinators assigned to each DCFS region. These individuals can help youth and their families explore different educational and employment resources. Contact them at the nearest regional office or call 312-814-5959.

### Youth In College/Vocational Training Program

Students may choose to attend an accredited vocational school, four-year college or community college. They receive a monthly grant in the amount of \$471 provided each month for up to four (4) years. Medical cards are provided to Illinois students until the participant reaches the age of 23. Reimbursement is available for books not covered by financial aid. Benefits are available until the earlier of four (4) years, or the semester of the 23rd birthday.

#### Eligibility Requirements:

- Be at least 16 years old, and not yet 21
- Be under court-ordered, legal responsibility of DCFS
- Maintain at least a "C" average each semester
- Maintain full time status and submit a schedule and grades each term

### The Employment Incentive Program (EIP)

The Employment Incentive Program is designed to provide financial and supplemental services to

help adolescent youth gain marketable skills through on-the-job work experience or through job training programs. Participants receive a monthly stipend in the amount of \$150.00 for a maximum of 12 months and a medical card until age 21.) They may also be eligible for start-up funding of work-related items (e.g., tools, work clothing, etc.). Funding is need-based and limited to a one-time disbursement of up to \$200.00.

#### Eligibility Requirements:

- Be 17 years of age, and not yet 21
- Have a high school diploma or GED
- Be under court-ordered responsibility of DCFS
- Complete Casey Life Skills assessment
- Be involved in job training through a certified job skills training program or be employed for at least one month prior to applying for the EIP and working at least 20 hours/week

### Education & Training Vouchers

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program assists youth with post-secondary education related expenses not covered by financial aid grants. Qualifying students can receive payment of up to \$5000 annually for education related expenses such as tuition, fees, books, supplies, uniforms, equipment, and/or transportation not covered by other grants or scholarships. Funding is available until age 21. However, if the student is enrolled in a post-secondary program before age 21 and is making satisfactory progress toward completing the program, funding is available until age 23.

#### Eligibility:

- Youth for whom DCFS is legally responsible or who aged out of care at age 18 or older OR
- Achieved permanency at age 16 or older through either subsidized guardianship or adoption

## From the Editor Vanessa James



*As editor, I typically prefer stay behind the scenes, but at least once a year I figure I should let you see there is a real person, parenting and producing the newsletter.*

*A dozen years ago, I got a call looking for leads to replace the retiring editor. The search was on for a person who could write and who did foster care. With five kids at home and a demanding public relations career, that cold call opened up a new professional path for me. In the 12 years since, my family has grown through birth, adoption and foster care to independence. We have had some bumpy transitions and*

*celebrated returns home. Now the “kids” are all in their 20’s and building lives for themselves. Our oldest daughter by birth is applying to colleges. The baby that was baking when I started this job is almost a teenager.*

*I share these personal milestones to give you some insight into what you will be reading in the year ahead. The articles we present in the newsletter reflect some of my experiences and so much more. My supervisor and teammates at DCFS have logged more than 90 combined years of foster care and adoption. The regional reporters have all done foster care or have supported foster families for years. Before every issue we put our heads together to determine what there is about foster care and adoption that needs clarifying, what isn’t being talked about and what*

*information could make this unique type of parenting a bit easier for families.*

*At a time where everyone is expected to do more with less, this newsletter demonstrates the commitment the DCFS administration makes to all of us. Personally, I find it a privilege to play a small part in providing this resource to you. I am grateful for the support at the highest levels, the contributions from topic experts and the efforts of the design and production teams. Even more, I thank you for reading, for inspiring new content and for all you do for children.*

*Have a fabulous 2013 where many dreams are fulfilled or hope continues to flame until they do.*

---

## DCFS receives grant for trauma treatment to promote permanency

DCFS has been awarded a federal grant to help improve rates of reunification, adoption and subsidized guardianship for youth who are at risk of long term foster care. The grant is known as the Permanency Innovations Initiative in Illinois (PII, pronounced like “Pie.”) PII has the goal to help youth gain control of their trauma-related reactions and form stronger relationships with their caregivers through a trauma-informed therapy, thereby leading to increased rates of timely permanency for youth in care.

The PII project will target youth ages 11-16 in traditional, relative, and specialized foster homes throughout the state of Illinois who, upon reaching the two-year anniversary of entering care, are experiencing mental health symptoms and/or have had at least one placement change. The intervention, Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education and Therapy

(TARGET), is a strength-based approach to education and therapy for youth, foster parents, and when appropriate birth parents who have been affected by trauma or experience a high level of stress related to being in care.

The PII project will be evaluated in partnership with local universities. About 650 youth will participate in the study. To test the effectiveness of the intervention, half of the youth enrolled in the study will receive the TARGET intervention in addition to services as usual; the other half will only receive services as usual. For those receiving TARGET, researchers will explore whether there are improvements in how youth manage their emotions and behaviors, and whether foster parents improve their skills in understanding and helping youth with emotional and behavioral difficulties. Also, the study will identify if the TARGET intervention results in increased

contact between a youth and their parents. One hoped for long-term outcome for this study is to increase the timeliness of permanency for youth.

The PII project will run for the next two years. Foster caregivers with a child who is eligible for the study will be contacted by their caseworker and research staff. Caregiver cooperation and participation is critical. If TARGET proves to be effective, more therapists will be trained to do TARGET in Illinois, and greater numbers of youth in care will be eligible for TARGET treatment in the future.

Caregivers who have questions or would like additional information about the PII project, can contact the PII Project Coordinator, Jennifer O’Brien, by e-mail at [j-obrien2@northwestern.edu](mailto:j-obrien2@northwestern.edu) or by phone at 630-301-8108.

## Earned Income Tax Credit and other tax benefits ready for caregivers

The decision to support children through foster care and adoption can bring benefits to you at tax time. Caregivers may qualify for valuable tax benefits, if the child in foster care meets these requirements:

- is under age 19 or age 24 for students (A child with disabilities qualifies at any age.)
- lived with you for more than half of the tax year.
- related to you – If placed by an authorized agency or by judgment or decree, that child meets the relationship requirement. Relationship also includes grandchildren, as well as siblings, nieces, and nephews.
- child cannot have provided over half of his own support (State board payments are not considered support provided by the child.)

### Earned Income Tax Credit

The federal credit for low-income, working families can be as much as \$5,891 - \$442 for the state of Illinois. To qualify:

- the household income must be under \$36,000 - \$50,000, depending on family size.
- you must have earned income—usually wages or self-employment. In some cases taxable disability benefits qualify as earned income.

### Dependency Exemption

This lowers your income tax, as well as leading to other benefits:

- *child tax credit* – up to \$1,000 per child under age 17

- *child care credit* – for working parents
- *education credits* – based on out-of-pocket college expenses
- *head of household filing status* – for unmarried parents

### Charitable Deductions

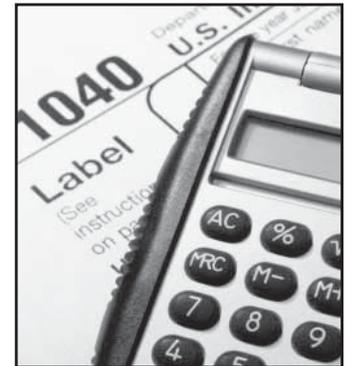
If you itemize deductions – and most homeowners do – you may be able to deduct unreimbursed out-of-pocket expenses to care for your foster child.

### Adoption Tax Credit

New legislation made the Adoption Tax Credit permanent. An adoptive family can claim adoption expenses up to the maximum amount allowed under the credit \$12,650. Families with incomes under \$189,710 are eligible for the full credit which then diminishes gradually at higher incomes. However, beginning with the 2012 tax year, it is no longer refundable and can only be used to offset tax liability. In some cases, an unused credit can be carried to future tax years.

Be sure to explore these areas yourself or with your tax preparer. Additionally, the Center for Economic Progress provides free tax preparation services for families with income under \$50,000.

To find a location, go to: [www.economicprogress.org](http://www.economicprogress.org).



## Online course updated to include new adoption tax credit rules



Adoption Learning Partners offers a broad catalog of online courses for current and prospective adoptive families. The organization in January updated the Adoption Tax

Credit Course to reflect changes for tax year 2012.

The adoption tax credit is one way the federal government promotes and supports adoption. Though the adoption tax credit provides a very valuable benefit to adoptive families, it is also among one of the most complicated tax law provisions.

The Adoption Tax Credit Course will help adoptive

families:

- Determine their eligibility for the adoption tax credit
- See how the adoption tax credit works with different types of adoptions and financial situations
- Create a system for tracking and documenting expenses
- Prepare for year-end tax planning and work with a tax professional

This course is available for free. Caregivers can register at [www.adoptionlearningpartners.org](http://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org).

# Free respite programs ease adoption pressures at home



The decision to care for a child comes with many emotional costs that adoptive and guardianship parents willingly pay. However, the cumulative toll of meeting high-end, special needs can mount over time. At some point, parents may feel they need a break, or a period of respite, without the constant responsibility of day-to-day parenting.

Research done by the Center For Adoption Studies at Illinois State University showed that a segment of adoptive families was on the brink and that periods of respite could bring them back from the edge. Some families reported

feeling like “prisoners in my own home” because children’s behaviors were so difficult to manage for normal activities. The study found that three to six hours of respite once or twice a month went a long way in improving family stability. It recommended that the respite providers be trained and experienced in working with children with special needs. The care also needed to be consistent and predictable.

DCFS funds respite programs through the Adoption/Guardianship Preservation Programs. Several community agencies also provide some form of respite. The forms and delivery of respite vary by program. For example, Healthy Families

Chicago does in-home respite and group activities for both children and parents. In central Illinois, The Baby Fold sponsors Camp Take-a-Break, a weekend camp for children staffed by teachers from a local therapeutic day school. In southern Illinois, Matthews and Associates will arrange to take children out on field trips, so they can have “normal kid” social experiences.

Families who feel they could benefit from a brief stint of respite service should contact a provider from the list below. The agency will do an assessment and determine eligibility and availability.

## Cook County

*Catholic Charities*  
312-655-8430

*Healthy Families*  
773-257-0111 ext 132

*Metropolitan Family Services*  
708-974-5815

## Northern Region

*CHASI Rockford*  
815-962-1043  
Boone, Carroll, DeKalb, Jo Daviess, Lee, Ogle, Stephenson, Winnebago and Whiteside counties

*McHenry County Mental Health Board*  
815-788-4371  
McHenry County

*Metropolitan Family Services*  
630-784-4861  
DuPage Grundy, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will counties

*Lutheran Social Services*  
815-936-9166  
Kankakee County

## Central Region

*The Baby Fold*  
309-454-1770  
Champaign, Christian, Clark, Cumberland, Coles, DeWitt, Douglas, Edgar, Ford, Livingston, Macon, northern Macoupin, McLean, Menard, Montgomery, Moultrie, Piatt, Sangamon and Shelby counties

*Catholic Charities*  
815-223-4007  
LaSalle, Bureau, Putnam, Marshall and Stark counties

*Cornerstone*  
217-222-8254  
Adams, Brown, Calhoun, Cass, Green, Hancock, Morgan, Pike, Schyler and Scott counties

*Family Core*  
309-682-4621  
Peoria, Tazewell and Woodford counties

*One Hope United*  
217-345-6554  
Coles, Cumberland, Clark, Douglas, Edgar, Shelby and Moultrie counties

*Lutheran Social Services of IL*  
309-671-0300  
Bureau, Fulton, Henderson, Henry, Knox, LaSalle, Logan, Marshall, Mason, McDonough, Mercer, Peoria, Putnam, Rock Island, Stark, Tazewell, Warren and Woodford counties

*Project Success of Vermilion County*  
217-446-3200  
Vermilion County

## Southern Region

*Matthews and Associates*  
618-988-1330  
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 counties

*CHASI-Granite City*  
618-452-8900  
Bond, Clinton, Madison, Macoupin, Monroe, Randolph, St. Clair and Washington counties

# Illinois Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Bulletin



The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council recently completed scoring the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans. In addition to judging the plans on paper, each year the council, working with the DCFS Agency Performance Teams, actually visits one third of the agencies for on-site reviews. The Council also requires telephone surveys with a set number of randomly selected foster caregivers to give another perspective on how the implementation plan translates into the agency's interaction with caregivers.

This year the council members will conduct reviews at the following private agency and DCFS foster care programs:

- Arden Shore Child & Family Services
- Aunt Martha's Youth Service

- Center for Youth and Family Solutions
- Chaddock Child and Family Child Link
- Children's Home Association of Illinois
- Christian Social Services of Illinois
- DCFS Central Region
- DCFS Cook County Region
- Easter Seals Joliet Region, Inc.
- Family Core
- Generations of Hope
- Envision Unlimited
- Hephzibah Children's Association
- Hoyleton Youth & Family Services
- Jewish Children and Family Services
- Lawrence Hall Youth Services
- Lutheran Social Services of Illinois
- Shelter, Inc.
- U-CAN
- Unity Parenting Services

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 February 15 in Bloomington at 9 a.m.**

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

## Be Strong Families strengthens foster homes

Foster caregivers can keep their families fabulously strong while they provide care for children in their home. Be Strong Families/ Strengthening Families Illinois is working with DCFS regions, private agencies and foster caregivers throughout the state to support families. Families grow stronger when they focus on the six protective factors:

1. Be Strong & Flexible
2. Parents Need Friends
3. Being a Great Parent Is Part Natural & Part Learned
4. We All Need Help Sometimes
5. Parents Need to Help Their Children Communicate

### 6. Give Your Children the Love & Respect They Need

Foster caregivers can take part in Foster Parent Cafés and other innovative, transformational and fun trainings. Through these opportunities, caregivers can meet new friends, learn positive foster-parenting techniques, and reinforce their confidence. Find useful information and join the conversation virtually at [www.bestrong-fosterparents.com](http://www.bestrong-fosterparents.com) and on the Be Strong Foster Parents page on Facebook. Contact Robyn Harvey at 815-793-5847 or e-mail [Robyn@bestrongfamilies.net](mailto:Robyn@bestrongfamilies.net).

### Get digital delivery

Many caregivers have decided to skip the paper and request electronic versions of the newsletter, *Illinois Families Now and Forever*.

When you move to the online version, you still receive all the same valuable information with more benefits. It comes faster, is easier to file, saves money and protects the environment.

To make the switch, send an email to [vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov) (there is a dot before "james") Be sure to include your name and mailing address. We will stop the hard copies and send you an e-mail each time a new issue is ready to read online.

## New family lays firm foster care foundation

Tyler and Candice Zippel of Collinsville have been licensed for foster care for just two years. In that time they have had five children be part of their family. They said that they were originally motivated to do foster care when they learned that they were not able to have children of their own. They also believed it was something that God had called them to do.

Before becoming licensed, Tyler and Candice had many discussions with their parents on both sides. They felt it would be important for everyone to be on board and in agreement with their decision to foster. Their thoughtful approach to foster care and their broad network of support has helped make their fostering experiences fulfilling for them and the children. Right now two children are at home with them, and they are making good progress. The Zippels would like to apply what they have learned through foster care to eventually adopt.

The Zippels know first-hand that foster care can be strenuous emotionally and physically. Therefore, caregivers should know their limitations and understand that a support system should be well in place. Church members, family

and friends, co-workers, and even respite care are some of the sources that foster parents can turn to for support.

The Zippels have come to understand the challenges of foster care and realize that fostering may not be for everyone initially. According to them, fostering takes a loving heart, patience, caring, and responsibility when dealing with children. It also requires being flexible and understanding, even when the child's behavior does not meet the foster parents' expectations.

The Zippels have also come to terms with the challenges of reunification. When the child leaves the home, there can be an emptiness and concerns about if the child is safe and loved. Regardless, they know that the foster parent must remain compassionate at all times. That is just one example of when the support system can be especially important.

When the stakes are high, there can be big payoffs. For Tyler and Candice, the reward of foster care is the opportunity to love children who perhaps would not have the comfort of belonging to a family that would provide them with the love and nurturing they deserve.

---

**The reward of foster care is the opportunity to love children who perhaps would not have the comfort of belonging to a family that would provide them with the love and nurturing they deserve.**

---

## *New structure for Southern Region*

Last August, Derek Hobson took the reins as the Regional Administrator. Since then, he and the administrative team have designed a new organizational structure to serve the families spread among 34 counties in the lower third of the state.

The Regional Administrator will oversee the Department's interventions, spanning from the investigation, through foster care or other placement, including services to parents and on to subsequent adoption/ guardianship. Five Area Administrators will supervise those functions in the offices that are part of their respective geographic territory.

### **Southern Region Area Administrators**

**Don Rose**

Effingham, Mt. Vernon and Olney

**Bob Cain**

Anna, Cairo, Carlyle, Harrisburg, Metropolis and Sparta

**Vendetta Dennis**

Belleville, East St. Louis

**Debbie Palmer-Thomas**

Marion and Murphysboro

**Valda Haywood**

Alton, Granite City and Wood River

The first point of contact for DCFS-supervised homes is the child's caseworker. After that, the chain of command goes through the caseworker's supervisor and up to the Area Administrator.

## Holiday festivities spread fun to families across Southern Region

*There was plenty of holiday fun happening across the Southern Region as staff from many DCFS offices celebrated with the families they support. What follows is a sampling of the spirit of giving.*

*The administration would like to thank all of the staff volunteers who donated their time and effort to plan each of the holiday events. The numerous donations of gifts and food from the community is very appreciated as well.*

Children's Home and Aid held a holiday skating party for the fourth successive year at the YMCA in Edwardsville, which donated the use of their facility. As always, Santa was on hand to distribute gifts and board games to all the children. Approximately 125 people attended the event.



The "Help for the Holidays" program matched 85 foster and adoptive families to donors to grant children's wish and needs.

\*\*\*

Christian Social Services of Illinois in Belleville sponsored a skating party for foster families and children. Along with free skating, participants had pizza, soda and dessert. Santa also distributed gifts. This was the eighth year for a skating event, along with the regularly held holiday parties for caregivers. The East Alton office sponsored a holiday dinner for foster families.

CSSI also sponsored a Secret Santa as they have for nearly 20 years. A child in foster care was anonymously linked to a local family who agreed to purchase gifts from that child's wish list. This year the group met the wishes of 500 children.

\*\*\*

Christian Social Services of Illinois in Mt. Vernon held a bowling party in Salem. Foster families and children bowled for free and received complimentary drinks.

Each child received a "goodie" bag to take home. Approximately 120 people attended this event.

\*\*\*

The Emmanuel Free Methodist Church graciously sponsored the Madison County foster parent Christmas Party. Dinner was provided by the church, with Santa's arrival following. All children received gifts from Santa. Family activities, games, and crafts were also available.

\*\*\*

Families served by the Mt. Vernon office shared the holidays with "Santa Cop." The Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge 241 invited DCFS families and children to a holiday party with festive decorations, pizza and cookies. This collaboration with families and local law enforcement led to a very relaxed time, where caseworkers, caregivers and children could enjoy the holiday season together.

### **Donations fund gifts for more than 100 DCFS families**

The Poshard Foundation and the Pat's Kids program provided \$50 Visa gifts cards to make the holidays brighter for DCFS families. Caseworkers in field offices for Murphysboro, Marion, Harrisburg, Anna, Cairo, Metropolis, Olney, Effingham and Mt. Vernon were able to grant children's wishes.

Pat Benton, radio personality on WUEZ-FM in Cartersville, annually raises funds for disadvantaged children in Southern Illinois. The Poshard Foundation has been a partner in giving and distributing the funds. The goal is to guarantee that children have presents to open on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Gifts totaling more than \$5,000 made the holidays brighter.

## DCFS Transition Coordinator prepares older youth for adulthood

Johnny Williams, one of four DCFS Transition Coordinators, is responsible for providing information to Southern Region youth as they transition out of care onto the path to adulthood. He also shares information with workers, foster caregivers and others, regarding the various programs available through the DCFS Youth and Family Development Office.

Several important youth programs have recently been enhanced. The Life Skills Program was revamped to ensure that older youth have practical information to prepare for adulthood. Youth at age 14 should begin the process by taking the Casey Life Skills Assessment. Next, life skills courses are provided by the social service agency SICCM. Youth with open DCFS foster care cases will learn financial planning, health and personal care, educational success and career planning in preparation for their life after DCFS care.

In addition to these programs Williams can help youth (in foster care or post-adoption) with school matters, the DCFS scholarship program and employment opportunities. To reach him by phone, call 217-557-5710 or send an e-mail to him at [Johnny.K.Williams2@illinois.gov](mailto:Johnny.K.Williams2@illinois.gov).

For additional growth and leadership development, all youth between 14 and 21 can participate in a Youth Advisory Board. The Southern Region Youth Advisory Board, which hosts monthly meetings, promotes youth empowerment, self-advocacy and information exchange. Anyone interested in learning more should contact LeShonda Rogers of Primed for Life at 217-789-2980.

Much more information on transition resources for older youth is at the DCFS-sponsored Web site [www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov).

---

### *Join the Advisory Council in-person or by phone*

The Southern Region Foster Care Advisory Council meets regularly to discuss DCFS policy and practices that affect caregivers who do foster care and those who have moved to adoption or guardianship. The advisory council is structured to accommodate the vast area that comprises Southern Region. Caregivers can participate in-person at one of several DCFS offices or by phone for each quarterly meeting.

The meetings begin with a pre-meeting in each site at 6 p.m. to discuss issues related to the Foster Parent Law.

#### **2013 Meeting Dates:**

January 22  
April 23  
August 20  
November 19

Caregivers can meet at the DCFS offices in Belleville, Cairo, Effingham, Marion, Mt. Vernon and

Wood River. The various offices and individual callers will be linked by teleconference.

At the last meeting before the holiday break, caregivers discussed new licensing requirements for infant cribs and changes to the credit hours for training.

The advisory council is an important platform for caregivers to stay informed and to have a say in new policies and procedures that impact the foster care program. If an issue has the potential to affect foster care homes across the state, the regional representatives can elevate it to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council. The region's administration encourages caregivers to take an active role in these meetings each quarter.

### Be included in the 2013 directory for associations and support groups

If you lead a support group or association for foster or adoptive families, you can be included in the directory of support groups, published in May in the Foster Parent Appreciation Month issue.

Please send the following information by March 30:

- Name of group
- Meeting schedule (e.g. 2nd Tuesday monthly at 10 a.m.)
- Meeting location
- Contact name with phone number/ e-mail
- Any other notes (e.g. potluck dinner, child care provided, RSVP required, etc.)

New listings and updates should be sent in writing by e-mail or post to:

[Vanessa.James@illinois.gov](mailto:Vanessa.James@illinois.gov)  
Vanessa James, DCFS  
100 W. Randolph, 6th fl.  
Chicago, IL 60601

## Southern Region Training

The DCFS Office of Training has scheduled sessions of in-service training modules and other courses in locations across the region. To get specific dates and locations, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center (VTC) anytime at [www.DCFstraining.org](http://www.DCFstraining.org). Click on any of the links under Training Schedule to access course descriptions, in-service training and Educational Advocacy Training or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during business hours.

The Virtual Training Center (VTC) is your tool to:

- See training news and general information
- Check available trainings
- View/Print your training transcript
- Register and take on-line courses
- Download course materials to use in class or to access after training

### DIGITAL TRAINING MATERIALS NOW AVAILABLE

As we move into the digital age and aim to use fewer printed resources, DCFS Training has made many PRIDE materials easily available on the home page of the Virtual Training Center at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org).

Anyone may print the materials or download them onto almost any electronic device and bring their device to training class. Trainees who have no digital access should speak with their trainers when they arrive in class, so we can accommodate everyone.

---

## Who do you call when....?

### **...A child in your home is having a psychiatric crisis that may require hospitalization?**

Call the CARES line at 800-345-9049. However, if a child is a danger to himself or others, call 911 first. The CARES line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### **...You want information on becoming a foster parent or on adoption?**

The Adoption Information Center of Illinois (AICI) can answer your questions and connect you with a licensing agency. The toll-free number is 800-572-2390. AICI also maintains information about the children who are featured in the newsletter.

### **...You have questions about your board check?**

Call the DCFS Central Payment Unit at 800-525-0499 if your check comes from DCFS. If your check comes from a private agency, contact the agency.

### **...You need to report a child missing or have information about a youth who has run away?**

To report information on missing youth call 866-503-0184. The toll-free number is available 24 hours a day every day of the week. If you feel the child is in danger, call 911 first.

### **...Your adoption or guardianship is final but you have questions about the subsidy?**

Call the subsidy worker assigned to the case or the Adoption Support Line at 888-96-ADOPT so you can be connected to the right individual for help.

### **...You feel you aren't being treated fairly by DCFS or a private agency?**

If you've already tried to resolve the issue by going up the chain of command with the caseworker and supervisors, then call the Advocacy Office at 800-232-3798.

### **...You have questions about your child's medical card?**

Call 800-228-6533.

### **...You need to find a phone number for a caseworker?**

Call the main switchboard in Chicago at 312-814-6800 or the State of Illinois Operator at 312-793-3500.

### **...You are having family problems with your adopted child?**

Contact the Adoption/Subsidized Guardianship Preservation Program that serves your area. Call the Adoption Support Line at 888-96-ADOPT.

### **...You are having a hard time getting services for your child at school?**

Most private agencies have an Education Liaison, and each DCFS region has Education Advisors who can help. Call your agency or nearest DCFS office to be connected to the right educational resource for your area.

### **...You have questions about programs for youth approaching adulthood?**

Contact the Transition Coordinator that serves your area, by calling the nearest DCFS regional office. The Transition Coordinator can advise on programs such as life skills training, preparation for higher education and employment assistance. Details on these programs can also be found at the Get Goal'd website [www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov).

### **...You have an idea for an article in the newsletter?**

Each region has reporters to help gather local news. The names and contact information are listed on the back page of each edition. You can contact the Editor, Vanessa James, at 312-814-6800 or send an e-mail message to [vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov).

## A family for me: Call 1-800-572-2390 for more information



Nazon (7664)

**Nazon [7664]** Nazon, 13, is a bright young man who does extremely well in school. He is gifted at math and has an excellent memory for dates and times. When he's not doing schoolwork or playing video games, Nazon enjoys learning about automobiles. He knows the name of almost every car on the road and wants to become a mechanic someday. In the meantime, he is content to play with his collection of toy cars and trucks.

Nazon's worker says he is an upbeat, engaging young man. She adds that he has a positive attitude and is curious about the world around him.

To be the forever family for Nazon, you can be caring and patient with him. You can establish clear, consistent boundaries for him. You can also provide him with plenty of positive attention, making sure to praise him whenever he does a good job or meets your expectations. Nazon would like to join a family that includes "a mom and dad who live in a house," preferably in an urban area. He should be the oldest child in his adoptive home.



Alias (7949)

**Alias [7949]** Alias, age 11, is an active young man who enjoys riding his bike, playing sports, and spending time with other active family members. He can be very loving, as long as he is surrounded by people who care about him. He needs a family that will love him unconditionally, and that will remain patient with him as he adjusts to his new home.

Alias' teacher says he is a joy to have in class. His worker says he thrives when he is surrounded by loving, caring people.

Potential parents will be able to provide a loving, stable home environment for Alias. You can establish clear boundaries, but also display patience with him as he tests those boundaries. Alias would like to join a family that does things together, such as bike riding and other outdoor activities. Other children in the home should be older than Alias.

**James [8015]** This young man brings new meaning to the phrase "multi-tasking!" Ten-year-old James likes to keep himself busy at all times by playing, laughing, talking, and interacting with others. He becomes distracted easily, but usually responds well to redirection. James prefers to play inside, and is especially partial to toys, including Transformers and LEGO pieces. He has been diagnosed with autism, and can become overwhelmed when confronted with loud noises or other excessive stimulation.

James' worker says he is an outgoing child who is both friendly and well-mannered. He has a wonderful imagination, and can entertain himself for hours on end.

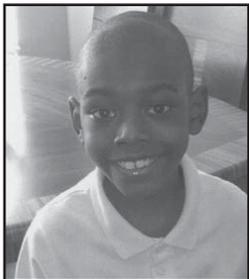
To be the right family for James you can provide a loving, caring home environment. You can monitor his behavior and provide

redirection to help him stay on task. You can also learn about autism, so you can become an effective advocate for him, both educationally and emotionally. The ideal family would include children who are roughly the same age as James, and would also help him maintain relationships with his siblings, including regular visits.

**Darius [7975]** Darius, age 13, can be shy and reserved at first, but he is still able to form attachments with others. He is a fan of sports, and enjoys watching football and playing basketball with his friends. He also enjoys playing video games and listening to music. Darius has trouble concentrating at times, and also needs to be reminded to clean up after himself, but he is generally cooperative, both at home and in school.

The staff members at Darius' school say he is well-behaved. His worker says he is usually quiet and well-mannered.

The forever family for Darius is one that can provide a loving home, and assure him that he is a permanent part of your family. You can be patient with him as he adjusts to your home. You can also work with professionals who can help him understand his emotions and develop appropriate coping techniques. Darius says he wants to live in a stable home. Other children in the home should be older than Darius.



James (8015)



Darius (7975)



Please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390, or see the AICI Web site – [www.adoptinfo-il.org](http://www.adoptinfo-il.org) if you are interested in adopting one of these children or learning about other children waiting to be adopted.



## Illinois Families Now and Forever

Pat Quinn, Governor  
Richard H. Calica, DCFS Director  
Published by: DCFS Office of  
Caregiver and Parent Support

Editor: Vanessa James  
Phone: 312-814-1307  
Fax: 312-814-4131  
E-mail: [vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov)

Sponsor: DCFS Southern Region  
Administration

### Regional Reporters

Bernice McWilliams  
618-214-1885

Assistant Regional Administrator:  
Valda Haywood  
618-583-2117

Graphics: Jenny Florent  
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.

Material may not be reprinted in whole, in part or in any form whatsoever without permission from the Editor or DCFS. Opinions expressed by experts writing articles are no substitute for professional answers or opinions about a family's or child's specific situation. Consult a competent professional for answers to your specific questions.

Department of Children and Family Services©

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

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

### Inside this issue:

- Page 1 College opportunities for DCFS youth
- Pages 2 Movin' On Up: News for older youth
- Page 3 DCFS gains grant to promote permanency
- Page 4 Earned Income Tax Credit and tax benefits
- Page 5 Free respite supports for adoptive families
- Page 7 Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council update
- Pages 7-10 *OUR KIDS*: Regional News
- Page 11 Family for Me profiles of waiting children

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