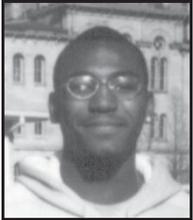


## Future shines bright for two after foster care



*Michael  
Simelton*

Michael Simelton is a 21 year old who knows where he's going. He grew up in relative foster care. Now, with the support of his grandmother, Bernice Wyatt, his caseworker Elida Phifer, and a variety of other team members he has made remarkable strides. Michael

graduated from Cairo High School three years ago where he was named class valedictorian. He entered Shawnee Community College and graduated with an Associate of Applied Science degree. Currently, he is studying at Southeast Missouri State University, where he is majoring in Industrial Technology.

In addition to being a student, Michael is active in the student government. He was recently elected as a Student Government representative for off-campus students and serves as a Student Ambassador for the university.

Michael's ambition and perseverance seem to have no limits. When asked what has motivated him to excel, Michael replied, "Nobody's going to give me anything. You have to work for it." He added that his grandmother raised him in the church and that his church roots always influenced his life.

"Michael is so personable. Everyone who knows him can see his potential," said his caseworker. He recently became a member of the Youth Advisory Board and will be a real asset," she said .

Upon college graduation, Michael plans to pursue a career as a supervisor at an industrial plant. He then plans to return to school for his MBA and become a plant manager.



*Erin Korte*

Eighteen-year-old Erin Korte is a determined young woman. In high school she worked at the local pool and saved her money to purchase a car. She was extremely proud of that first car and felt it was a real accomplishment.

Currently Erin is in her second semester at Southwestern Illinois College, just a few miles from her home. Erin said she selected the college for several reasons. She had lived in several foster homes and moving away to college just wasn't for her. She feels very bonded and a part of the Sinkey family with whom she has lived for the last year and a half. Second, she wanted a small school, where she would feel comfortable.

In addition to attending college, Erin enjoys her part-time work as a cashier at a local grocery store. Her goal is to be prepared for the future and to always be able to take care of herself. She is still appreciative of the help and support the Sinkey family continues to give to her.

Erin said for teen placements to succeed it is very important for foster parents to "give them time and space to think and not try to remake them."

"Erin has proven to herself and others that she is capable of getting done what she needs to get done," said Mrs. Sinkey. The fostering experience with Erin was positive, and as they fostered, the family became aware of the urgent need for teen homes. Although the Sinkeys initially became licensed for Erin, they have now opened their door to foster other teens.

## Youth Advisory Board sets priorities and sees results

The Board has identified four major goals for fiscal year '04 to include: 1) *Outreach*; 2) *Recruitment*; 3) *Graduation Celebrations*; and 4) *Education*. We realize that unless we seek and receive the support of our caregivers, we will have a difficult time achieving our objectives in any of these areas. Remember, all youth in care, youth in guardianship, adopted youth, and emancipated youth age 14 to 21 years old are eligible for membership. Except for December, we meet the first Tuesday of the month from 5:30 to 7:30 pm.

### Outreach

In October the Board conducted its first *Outreach* meeting in Marion, Illinois. It was a lot of work and a long way to go to attend a meeting, but we were pleased to have six youth from the Marion Sub-region attend. We want to thank DCFS caseworker Elida Phifer for all her help in coordinating the meeting. As a Regional Advisory Board, it is important that we reach out to youth placed in other sites in the region and give them the opportunity to participate and have a voice. Many of the youth that attended the meeting followed up and participated via teleconference in the Board's regularly scheduled meeting in November. We hope to have similar success at our upcoming Outreach meeting in Effingham, Illinois scheduled for February 17, 2004.

### Recruitment

The Board has struggled with *Recruitment* and poor attendance for the last several years. However, if the past few months are any indication, we think that we have turned a corner. So far this fiscal year, we have been averaging nine youth per meeting, and we had 18 attend our November meeting. Members enjoy voting privileges and receive a modest bounty for attending Board meetings, but we have a 15-member limit and slots are going fast, so interested youth are urged to begin attending meetings and seek membership.

### Graduation Celebration

This past August the Board sponsored two *Graduation Celebrations*, one in Fairview Heights and one in Marion. It is important that every year the Board recognize the youth that earn their GED or graduate from high school or college. The celebrations were both very successful and we have already begun planning the '04 celebrations. Depending upon the level of interest, the Board may attempt to hold a third celebration for youth in the Effingham area. More will be coming out about the Graduation Celebrations.

### Education

At literally every meeting, youth bring up issues pertinent to

*Education*. We are fortunate to have Kendra Homoya and Bessie Peabody, the regional Education Advisors, helping us. "The more we know the more effective we will be at self-advocacy." Toward that end, at our November 4, 2003 meeting our guests included: Dr. Cullen Cullen, Assistant Regional Superintendent of Schools, Madison County; Dr. Rosella Wamser, Regional Superintendent of Schools and Dr. Brad Harriman, Assistant Regional Superintendent of Schools, St. Clair County. The youth asked many questions and spoke of the debilitating effects of being in the same classroom with students that are several years younger and several grades behind them. The Board plans to continue to focus on the education concerns of youth, especially as they relate to residential schools and the process for developing an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

*If you or a youth in your care would like to receive more information about the Board please contact Chuck Murphy, DCFS, at 217-553-0370. The Board has designed a Recruitment Packet specifically designed to answer most of your questions.*

Sincerely,

Mario Chairs, President

## Privacy and protection is a careful balancing act for parents

Parents generally, and foster parents particularly, often receive conflicting advice on how to handle the “police function” aspect of parenting an adolescent. When suspecting drug use, sexual activity, or other potentially harmful forms of rebellion, parents are advised in some cases to always respect a child’s privacy, so we can model a healthy respect for boundaries. On the other hand, parents are often expected to be aggressive in finding out whether their children are engaging in drug use or sexual activity.

Generally, it is best to perform the monitoring function by asking questions, listening to and being observant of each youngster. Many people suggest spending some time alone with adolescents in an automobile, where they sometimes are more apt to talk. One challenge is to be ready to listen when the teen is ready to talk, which ironically will almost always come at an inconvenient time for the parent.

Sometimes a situation arises in which a youngster needs to know that you care enough to take action. In such a case, look carefully at the child as an individual. Is he or she usually honest? If you have no basis to trust the child, you can clearly communicate that you cannot just take his or her word. At the same time, you will need to give clear directives regarding what you would need to see to increase your trust and be able to back off on your vigilance.

### OUR KIDS

#### Regional Reporter

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Call with foster parent association news and schedules; local training; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and news articles and support all foster families can use.

If you have to violate privacy boundaries, be transparent and explain the need to protect the youngster from suspected danger. Due to the fact that most foster and adoptive children have damaged trust, you will need to express a benevolent and loving intention clearly and repeatedly in order that they don’t just see your anger or disappointment. It helps to be clear that you feel afraid of harm coming to them. If you take action that is clearly motivated by a desire to protect, most youngsters come to understand it as it is meant (in time).

*Submitted by Rachel V. Tompkins, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist, Edwardsville, IL.*

## Local programs prepare youth for adult life

The Pathways Teen Parenting Program is for teens who are pregnant and/or parenting. In the program, teens learn appropriate prenatal care, parenting skills, and life skills related to parenting. The workers are closely involved with the foster parent and caseworker of the teen. The teen is assisted in transportation to the doctor’s office, WIC appointments, and other needs related to the care of the child and teen. There are also fun activities to allow the teens to interact with others in the program. This program is open to teen mothers and fathers ages 13-21 and the youth can receive an incentive up to \$150 after completing the program.

The Transitional Life Skills program teaches youth basic and advanced independent living skills such as communication and interpersonal skills, budgeting and money management, and health needs. The classes include field trips and activities related to topics discussed. The training lasts 12-weeks, and the youth can receive an incentive up to \$150 for completion. This program is open to youth in substitute care aged 14-21.

For more information about either program offered by Chestnut Health System, please contact Mary Gillison or Becky Downing at 618-877-4420.

## Southern Region Training

### FosterPRIDE In-Service Training

All licensed foster parents and adoptive parents are welcome to attend any or all of the PRIDE In-Service Trainings to enhance their skills and meet yearly training requirements.

**Module 1** - *The Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children* (Four 3-hour sessions = 12 training hours)

**Module 2** - *Using Discipline to Protect and Nurture* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

**Module 3** - *Child Development* - New module being written

**Module 4** - *Child Sexual Development and Sexual Abuse* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

**Module 5** - *Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

**Module 6** - *Working as a Professional Team Member* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

**Module 7** - *Promoting Children's Personal & Cultural Identity* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

**Module 8** - *Promoting Permanency Outcomes* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

**Module 9** - *Managing the Fostering Experience* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

**Module 10** - *Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children & Families* (Five 3-hour sessions = 15 training hours)

### East St. Louis

#### 618-650-3213

#### Module

**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS - Ramada Inn**  
March 11, 18 & 25 (Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 5

April 10, 17 & 24 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. 6

**Pre-registration is required for all classes!**  
**Call the number listed for your area.**

## Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

### Marion

#### 618-536-7751

**MT. VERNON Hampton Inn**  
March 17 & 24 (Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

**SALEM Salem Township Hospital**  
April 7 & 14 (Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

### East St. Louis

#### 618-650-3213

**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS DCFS Office**  
March 11 & 18 (Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.  
March 13 & 20 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

April 7 & 14 (Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

## Congratulations!

Congratulations to the staff at the DCFS field offices in Sparta, Belleville, and Mt. Vernon. These locations recently received notice that they had achieved re-accreditation by the Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services (COA).

Countless hours of effort went into preparing for the COA review. Southern Region's administration wishes to thank all staff and families who participated in the re-accreditation process for the quality results evidenced through hard work and dedication.

## Correction

The Post-Adoption/Guardianship Subsidy worker for Southern Region's East St. Louis office is Pearlina Pollion. She can be reached at 618-583-2187.

The DCFS subsidy worker is the primary source for answers to adoption/guardianship subsidy related questions.