

Our Kids

2007 • Vol. 4

News For Southern
Region Families

TV broadcast finds homes for Southern IL youth

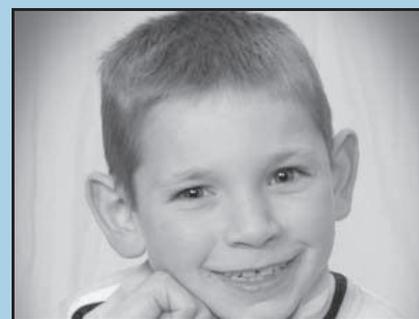
A Place to Call Home, the adoption recruitment segment on the television news broadcast from KSD-TV Newschannel 5 in St. Louis, will also feature Illinois youth. The 90-second segment features an adoptable child taking part in an activity with a newscaster, highlighting their need to find a "forever family." The NBC affiliate for the greater St. Louis area airs A Place to Call Home three times per week during prime viewing times on Tuesdays at 6 p.m., Thursdays at 5:30 a.m. and Saturdays at 9 a.m.

The recruitment vehicle allows children to have a little fun while they hope for a family. Youth have been featured creating toys at Build-A-Bear Workshop, visiting the zoo, and trying out golf lessons for the first time. As the youth enjoy these activities, the cameras present a side of them that goes beyond reading a case file. Viewers who find their interest piqued can contact the Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition (FACC) for more information. The FACC in St. Louis is a partner in the Foster and Adoptive Care Alliance of the Metro East area, and is comprised of many Illinois agencies. Other members of the group are DCFS, Children's Home + Aid, Catholic Social Services, Catholic Charities,

Lutheran Family Services, Holyton Family Services, and Illinois Mentor.

Since beginning the series, more than 200 children from Missouri have been profiled and more than 100 have been placed in adoptive homes. Valda Haywood, DCFS Assistant Regional Administrator, would like that success to spill over state lines for Illinois children. Initially, this project will include children from Madison, St. Clair, Monroe, Randolph, Washington, and Clinton counties. In the future, it is hoped the offer will be extended to include children in the Marion area of the Southern Region.

Featured children are legally free for adoption and do not have an identified adoptive resource. Caseworkers can refer the youth to participate in the program with the approval of Vendetta Dennis, East St. Louis-area placement manager. Aside from the child's first name, no additional identifying information is provided to the public. Caregivers of children will be provided with information to help them support the youth. To learn more about A Place to Call Home or to view the segments of children who have been featured, go to www.ksdk.com.



Adventurous, and creative, Joseph, is 8 years old with sandy blonde hair and big brown eyes. This bright young man is active and loves people. He is a Boy Scout and enjoys attending church youth group and services. His forever family needs to have a lot of patience and the ability to follow through with consequences. Joseph would like to reside in a rural area and live with a family that has animals.

This sweet little boy will require a strong, positive role model in a father and a strong, patient, loving mother. Joseph must have consistency on a daily basis. There should be no more than two other siblings already in the home. Joseph needs to know he is loved and that that a family will not give up on him. Joseph would like to continue to have some type of contact with his biological siblings, possibly through letters, phone calls and in person.

A special thank you to the St. Louis Science Center and Build-A-Bear Workshop: Build-A-Dino for encouraging this budding paleontologist.

Education Support Program helps Metro-East families

Three years ago, DCFS encouraged agencies around the state to begin an educational initiative focusing on children experiencing school-related problems. In the Metro-East area, Children's Home + Aid has been providing these services out of various area offices.

The aptly-named Education Support Program works with children who have problems with truancy, suspension or expulsion. Students in the foster care system are also eligible for this program and can be referred by either the foster parent or caseworker. "We have the same expectations for foster parents as we do for biological parents," said Linda White, the program director. Much of the program's success comes from teaching parents to better advocate for their children.

Families of troubled students can receive assistance from one of three case managers, Leslie Gurley, April Riley, and Ginger Hickman. They provide services to Madison, Bond, Clinton, Washington, and St. Clair counties, with the exception of the immediate East St. Louis area. Each manager carries a maximum of 12 cases, generally working with the child and his/her family for an average of six months.

Education Support case managers function as a link between the student, the parents, and the school. They can also make referrals to other community services such as mental health



Linda White, program director; April Riley; Ginger Hickman; Leslie Gurley

providers and substance abuse programs when necessary. "We will refer kids to access tutoring, mentoring, and counseling programs," said White. For older students, case managers have arranged field trips to colleges and vocational schools to give them a clearer vision for their future.

Students can be referred to the program at any time of year, including summer vacation, as long as they meet the basic eligibility criteria. However, there may be a waitlist if the program is at capacity.

Although success in program like this can be hard to measure, all the staff members feel they have a positive impact on the majority of families. Case manager Ginger Hickman noted, "If a family and child are committed to addressing the problems, we generally see a good success rate. That's the key – family involvement and interest."

More school help available

Educational initiative services are available to all children in the Southern Region, including foster, adoptive and guardianship families. They are coordinated in Local Area Networks (LANs). Child and Adolescent LANs are a group of agencies, organizations, community members and individuals within a set geographic area that respond to the express needs of citizens within the community.

Various agencies in many LANs have contracts to stabilize children in their current educational settings. These programs are available to all families where parents are concerned about students at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion. If a foster parent feels their child qualifies, they should first discuss a referral with the child's caseworker. Adoptive and guardianship parents of children facing problems of truancy, suspension or expulsion can also receive referrals. The LAN liaisons for the Southern Region have a list of programs and the geographical areas they cover. Contact Kay Teel in Mt. Vernon at 618-244-8439 or Duane Phillips in East St. Louis at 618-583-2105.

Foster Parent Council helps region improve implementation plan score

The DCFS Southern Region received a score of 103.156 out of 104 points on its 2007 Foster Parent Law implementation plan. This nearly perfect score is an increase over the score from last year. The regional Foster Parent Advisory Council plays a pivotal role in developing the plan.

Plans from all child welfare agencies with foster care contracts are evaluated yearly under the authority of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council. The Statewide Council was especially impressed with the region's approach to training foster parents on the Foster Parent Law. Another standout was the way the region uses local meeting sites to encourage foster parent participation with the region's Foster Parent Advisory Council.

The Advisory Council holds four quarterly meetings. Two are usually convened in Mt. Vernon and two connect various sites throughout the region by phone conference. Plans for the meetings include having a guest presenter available, which allows foster

parents to earn training credits. Caregivers can receive updates on pending Department initiatives and have opportunity to express their concerns for consideration by the statewide advisory council.

This year, even more sites will be able to take part in the next quarterly meeting. Caregivers can go to the field office that is most convenient and then all of the offices will link via phone conference. The next meeting is Tuesday, August 7, at 10:30 a.m. at these field offices: Wood River, East St. Louis, Olney, Anna, Marion and Salem.

The council will begin preparing for the next Foster Parent Law implementation plan. At least one additional meeting will be held, probably in September, to make revisions to the plan for 2008.

If you would like more information on the Council and its activities, or have suggestions on topics you would like to see discussed, please contact Michael Bollman, Co-Chair, in the Fairview Heights Field Office at 618-394-2137.

Books available for youth

Foster Parent Support Specialist Willie Miller had a busy spring. His Community Outreach program, which sponsors a food pantry in the Salem area, was the recipient of over 10,000 pounds of children's books from Operation Now. Miller delivered the books to the Olney, Mt. Vernon, Salem, Harrisburg, and Marion field offices in late April. The books will be available for foster children, birth families, and as gifts for youth. Contact Willie Miller at 618-678-2837.

Education Advisors help on school issues

Caregivers and caseworkers can usually successfully advocate with schools for the children in their care. However, when families need additional expertise to work through school issues, contact the Education Advisor. They can support DCFS-supervised foster families and families who adopted or took guardianship of children who were in DCFS care. Families with licenses supervised through private agencies can receive similar help from their agency's education liaison.

DCFS Education Advisors are part of the Northern Illinois University Educational Access Project. They work with families where children may have learning, discipline or behavioral concerns at school. They can take part in meetings for special education, and they will help caregivers and caseworkers determine the best strategies to help youth make successful transitions through school. The Southern Region Education Advisors are Bessie Peabody in East St. Louis at 618-583-2125 and Kendra Homoya in Marion at 618-993-7134.



Bessie Peabody



Kendra Homoya

