

Bourlands' care for kids also extends to disabled adults

Twenty years ago, when Mike and Marilyn Bourland became foster parents, they started building a reputation for reliable, responsible care that has benefited more than 50 children, and extends to other foster families and child welfare staff.

“They have been like your franchise quarterback – the backbone of your



Mike and Marilyn Bourland

foster care team. You could count on them to take a difficult child on a moment's notice,” said Sam Saladino, a former DCFS PRIDE Trainer and regional reporter for this publication.

When Saladino taught PRIDE, the last class would include a panel of foster parents whose wonderful fostering

experiences and thought-provoking tales could send chills down the spine. The Bourlands were known to be both positive and frankly honest about their role as foster caregivers.

They began foster care when the children of a family member needed a temporary placement. After becoming licensed, they started caring for non-related children. Marilyn, who comes from a family of 14, believes in the foundation that family can create.

“Children need to grow without people around them doing drugs, abusing alcohol or smacking them around. They need parents who will guide and assure them that things will be okay,” she said. “You need to be a strong advocate for your children, have a big heart and have patience.”

Mike's work as a self-employed truck driver helped make foster care to so many possible, by providing a schedule that could flex to the children's needs. In two decades, they have had a lasting impact. The family has adopted two children and provided a home for 56, in addition to raising their three children by birth. They look back fondly on experiences that at the time seemed maddening. There's the eight-year-old boy who required everyday pick-ups from school because of his behavior. By his eighth

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grade year, this boy received an award for community work and was the most improved student of the year. About half of all the children that have been in their home still keep in touch. Mike and Marilyn are grandma and grandpa to the grown children's children.

Now with just one child at home, they have found a new way to channel their interest in serving. A family member suggested they consider helping developmentally-disabled adults who could do well in a family-setting. In the past three years, theirs has been home to four adults. The Bourlands keep their license and use the lessons of two decades of foster care to continue the cycle of giving.

Local support for families in LANs

In 1992 Local Area Networks were formed throughout Illinois with the goal of reducing out of home, school and community placements for at-risk youth. The LANs are inclusive networks in specific geographic areas that promote collaboration between agencies, parents, schools, and community groups. Agencies work together to ensure that children with mental, emotional and behavioral problems have access to the services and supports they need to succeed.

The local area networks that cover Central Region can each develop programs that address the specific needs of the community. However, the School Initiative programs and Wrap-around Plans are two basic constants. Since 2004, DCFS has asked that the LAN providers focus on services that address children in the school setting who are at-risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion. Under the School Initiative Program, providers have responded with many unique approaches to stabilize students at school. Additionally, each LAN receives a small amount of “flex funds” from DCFS and the Illinois State Board of Education. The flex funds are used to provide services that a child and family team determines to be needed but are not available through state, federal, or community programs. These funds are granted through a process called wrap-around services.

Any family can go to the LAN serving their community. Caregivers can take part in the regularly scheduled meetings to have input on the services delivered in their LAN. They can also request services on behalf of children in their home, whether they are in foster care or have moved to adoption or guardianship.

Working with a LAN can benefit families in many ways that might not be readily apparent, but could be helpful:

- The LAN provides a means to identify resources that may be unknown to an individual worker or foster parent
- The LAN can assist a worker or foster parent in accessing needed services
- The LAN looks for donated items that may be needed by individual youth and families
- The LAN pays for tutors and mentors for youth who are at risk of truancy, suspensions, and expulsion
- The LAN demonstrates to youth the community’s commitment and support
- The LAN promotes “creative out of the box” ideas to address youth needs
- The LAN uses the child and family team model, where a group of advocates work on behalf of youth and increase collaboration among service providers, schools, and parents.

Foster families are welcome and encouraged to become members of their Local Area Networks. In each LAN a local agency serves as a co-convenor and a DCFS LAN Liaison helps bridge the community needs with the Department resources. To find more information on Local Area Networks go to the website www.systemof-careillinois.com for program descriptions, referral applications and a search function to find individual LANs by zip code. To ask questions about LANs by phone, contact the DCFS Regional Office and ask for the LAN Liaison.

Families can find new strengths

The Strengthening Families Illinois project is spreading through McLean County. Strengthening Families Illinois is a child abuse prevention program that brings together parents, early childhood center staff, child welfare agencies, and others to strengthen families with young children.

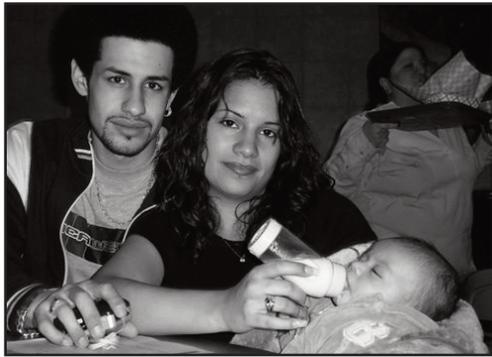
At a recent Parent Leadership Training in Normal, 15 parents devoted three Saturdays to Strengthening Families. They were led on a journey of personal discovery that would help them focus on the goals they have for themselves, their families, and their communities. The discussion hit on recurring parental themes that included pride, anxiety over the future, excitement about possibilities and the need for a vacation. The parents talked with family members and created family goals, then broke them down into manageable steps. They stayed in touch between sessions for support to stay focused on their goals.

On the last day, the group brainstormed about ways to offer parent support in the Central Region, including starting “Parent Café” discussion groups, which are part of the Strengthening Families model. Caregivers with young children who would like to be involved in the Strengthening Families program can contact Keri Hartwig of Crittenton Centers at (309) 674-0105 or visit the website:

www.strengtheningfamilies.org.

DCFS offers programs for teen parents

For a teenager, making the transition to adulthood while in DCFS care can be complicated. Making a transition to being a parent at the same time, adds another degree of difficulty. Fortunately, DCFS has some resources to help teens who are pregnant and/or parenting. The DCFS Division of Service Intervention currently contracts with five agencies to provide services in 35 counties in the central and southern areas of the state. These



services are available to youth who are still under DCFS custody in foster and relative care, or independent living situations. The providers accept referrals from caseworkers for both male and female youth.

When a pregnancy occurs, the caseworker for the mother or for the youth who is the father files an Unusual Incident Report. The first UIR alerts the downstate Pregnant and Parenting Youth coordinator of the new pregnancy. If DCFS has a contract with a service provider in the youth's placement county, the coordinator will initiate a service referral. The service provider is to work in tandem with the caseworker and the foster parents to provide education and support to the youth.

The service providers work directly with the youth to develop skills that will make them better parents. To

achieve this, the service providers work one-on-one with youth in their home and community and can provide support to the foster parents to help stabilize placements. The providers also work to introduce youth to community-based services such as Women and Infant Children (WIC) and Department of Human Services programs. Over time the youth should learn about child development, health care services, family planning and other topics that will prepare them for parenting independently.

When a young person becomes pregnant while living in a foster home, the caregiver role shifts in important and sometimes complicated ways. Along with parenting the younger new parent, caregivers help the youth learn to be a parent as well. In cases where the youth has custody of his or her baby, caregivers should remember that DCFS has no jurisdiction over the child. DCFS will attach a payment of \$107 to the caregiver's board check and the caregiver is required to give the \$107 to the parent to buy items for their child. DCFS also starts a medical card for the baby as soon as DCFS Central Office is notified of the delivery.

With supportive caregivers and service providers, the young person can get on track to successful parenting. Questions about the pregnant and parenting teen services can be directed to the youth's caseworker or Marilyn Peebles, the DCFS downstate Pregnant and Parenting Teen Coordinator at 217-557-2689.

Join the Youth Advisory Board

The Central Region Youth Advisory Board meets on the third Wednesday of the month at Cunningham Childrens Home in Urbana from 6 to 8 p.m.

This board is an excellent opportunity for older youth to have input into the policies and procedures that directly affect them. For example, the regional youth boards across the state have recently been asked to review and offer revisions to the Department's life skills program.

The advisory board provides positive peer involvement and exposes youth to valuable leadership skills. The YAB conducts business according to Robert's Rule of Order. Youth can be elected to offices and may also participate in the Statewide Youth Advisory Board activities.

The Central Region Youth Advisory board is open to youth ages 14 to 21 who are or were involved in the child welfare system. This includes youth who have moved to guardianship or have been adopted, along with youth in residential programs. Caregivers are encouraged to have youth in their homes become part of the YAB. Transportation is available to youth who are interested in attending the meeting, regardless of their location in the Central Region.

For more information, call the coordinating office for youth boards at 312-401-5462.

**Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.
Call the DCFS Office of Training 877-800-3393 • toll free**

Central Region Training Calendar

All caregivers can attend PRIDE In-Service Training. Advance registration is REQUIRED. Detailed address information will be provided with registration. Information included here is accurate at the time of publication. Training dates, times and locations may change based on enrollment and other circumstances. For the most up-to-date schedule information, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center anytime at www.DCFstraining.org or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during regular business hours.

Foster PRIDE In-Service Module

Module 7 – Promoting Children’s Personal and Cultural Identity (6 training hours)

Culture includes traditions, values, customs and history. What “culture” means to a child’s self-esteem, how to manage cultural diversity in a foster home, how to discuss sensitive issues with children and how to help a child record his or her history are topics covered in this module.

Peoria Proctor Hospital
March 14 (Sat) 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Attachment and the Teen in Family Foster Care (6 training hours)
This training will help foster/adopt

caregivers to understand how early attachment experiences have impacted the teen’s development.

Rock Island Catholic Charities
March 2, 9 (Mon) 6 - 9 p.m.

Child Trauma (4 training hours)
This four-hour course helps caregivers recognize the signs of trauma and understand how to work with children who have experienced trauma.

Champaign Restoration Urban Ministries
March 28 (Sat) 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Educational Advocacy

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.

Quincy Chaddock
March 12, 19 (Thu) 6 – 9 p.m.

Danville New Direction
March 14, 21 (Sat) 9 a.m. – 12 noon

Peoria Lutheran Social Services
March 16, 23 (Mon) 6 – 9 p.m.

Springfield Faith Evangelical
March 16, 23 (Mon) 6:30–9:30 p.m.

Springfield DCFS Office
March 19, 24 (Thu, Tue) 6 – 9 p.m.

Decatur Webster Cantrell
April 4 (Sat) 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Bloomington St. Patrick’s Church
April 6, 13 (Mon) 6 – 9 p.m.

Normal The Baby Fold
April 7, 9 (Tue, Thu) 6 – 9 p.m.

Urbana Webber St. Church
April 7, 14 (Tue) 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Central Connections

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.