

Leanne Montgomery finds purpose in foster care advocacy

When you see an opportunity to make a difference, you should get involved. Leanne Montgomery, a 17-year foster care veteran, decided she wanted to become part of the solution where she saw challenges in the child welfare system.

Since starting in foster care, she took an interest in knowing how the system worked and who the people were behind the system. She felt a call to act as an advocate for foster caregivers and children in care. At Bridgeway, her licensing agency, she was a Parent Support Specialist assisting parents in locating mental health services for their children. Montgomery also began training caregivers in Foster/Adopt PRIDE.

For nearly six years, Montgomery has served on the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council, representing the Central Region. She is proud of the fact that she helped to get information about the advisory council put in the Foster/Adopt Pride training so that new caregivers will know they can have a voice and can sometimes change practices. Montgomery remembers one piece of policy that was brought to the advisory council regarding the practice of “bed holds.” Caregivers from Cook South council raised the issue that foster home reimbursement was being stopped once a

child was hospitalized for medical or psychological reasons. However, the council members pointed out that just because a child is hospitalized caregivers don’t stop providing care – they visit, consult with the doctor, are involved with the treatment plan and more.

All these activities take place while they “hold the bed,” anticipating the child’s return. This was an issue that foster parents felt needed to be changed. Due to the council’s efforts, now foster homes continue to get the reimbursement when a child is away from the home for medical care and intends to return.

That type of advocacy with a clear-cut result is almost as gratifying as the results that come at home. Leanne and Ted had been married for many years without children. They decided to try foster care. Three children came at once. They finalized the adoption three years to the day on July 7, 1997. Leanne and Ted parented more than 30 children over the years. Then there was a necessary break after Ted’s passing following a heart attack. After two



Leanne Montgomery (r) demonstrates the importance of advocacy at the Statewide Advisory Council meeting.

years, Leanne felt that it was time to return to fostering. Currently, she shares her home with two sons and a daughter through foster care and her son by adoption.

“It’s a very special type of person who opens their heart and their home. They need to have a sense of humor, be compassionate, understanding, and love it. Plus... about a thousand other things,” said Montgomery.

She obviously has the personal traits. Montgomery is also working hard to ensure that caregivers have all they need to be successful with their children. As a Central Region representative to the statewide council, she invites others to contact her by email at momathome7@yahoo.com.

SAM parents honor foster caregivers

The Booth family of Pittsfield is this year's recipient of the SAM Award. They were selected by judicial staff of the Adams County Circuit Court. The award is for foster caregivers who provide a home for neglected, abused, or dependent children with complex medical or emotional needs. The annual award is given in memory of Samantha Jane Otte whose parents work in the court system. Samantha died of complications of cystic fibrosis and liver transplant surgery in 2000.

The Booth family is raising a four-year-old boy with cerebral palsy and epilepsy. They are also caregivers to a five year-old girl and a 15-year-old girl. Their adult daughter's cerebral palsy condition gave them experience in handling medical complications. Denise's work with special education students opened the couple up to the idea to do foster care.



Charles and Denise Booth are the 2010 recipients of the SAM Award to caregivers of children with medical needs.

Local agencies help students with truancy, suspension or expulsion

The state breaks Illinois into geographic units called Local Area Networks (LANs) to provide community-based services to families. In the case of school-related concerns, there is a full slate of Family Centered Services (FCS) programs that families across Central Region can turn to for help. DCFS provides financial support for FCS services that specifically assist students who are at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion.

The agencies with these contracts have the flexibility to design their programs to the needs of the community they serve. However, they typically all include case management, consultation between families and school personnel, connections to other services and provisions for school-related items or materials. Parents and caregivers who believe their students need intervention can contact their caseworker, school or the local agency for a referral. Students at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion are served by programs in the following communities:

Adams, Hancock, and Pike counties
Ellen Rigor of Cornerstone at 217-222-8254

Knox, Warren, Henderson, and Henry counties
Ronadene Bogener at 309-344-4222

Fulton and McDonough counties
Carrie DePoy or Erika Parks at 309-833-1791

Peoria, Tazewell, and Woodford counties
Heidi Charron at 309-687-7923

Peoria County

Ron Tyler of Support Our Students at 309-682-4621

Tazewell and Woodford counties

Kathryn Halleen of Community-Based Family Services at 309-637-2600

Bureau, LaSalle, Marshall, Putnam and Stark counties

Hasime Jashari at 815-433-3953

Bureau, LaSalle, Marshall, Putnam, and Stark counties

Cindy Robinson of Front End Intervention Services at 815-433-3953

Ottawa Public Schools

Cindy Robinson of Truancy Prevention Services at 815-433-3953

Streator

Kim Mercer or Jennifer Clark of Northlawn Junior High School-Streator/Counseling Program at 815-223-4007

Rock Island County

Clay Huffstutler of Bethany/Therapeutic Recreation Program at 309-736-6622 or Nicole Sodawasser of Community-Based Family Services at 309-786-0770

Mercer County

Marla Reynolds of Family Crisis Center at 309-582-7233

For more information about the Local Area Networks listed here, caregivers can contact DCFS LAN Liaison Greg Hixon at 217-779-2522 or by E-mail at greg.hixon@illinois.gov



Advisory Council reaches caregivers needs in person and by phone

The Central Region Advisory Council serves caregivers by providing vital information about DCFS policies and a platform for caregivers to have a voice. Because the Central Region covers such a broad geographical area, the council holds meetings at varying locations and also conducts some meetings by teleconference.

Schedule for 2011

February 16	10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	via teleconference
March 16	6 p.m. - 8 p.m.	Springfield in person
April 20	10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	via teleconference
May 12	6 p.m. - 8 p.m.	Peoria in person
June 29	10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	via teleconference

Regional teleconferences:

To participate in any or all of the teleconference calls, caregivers can call the Central Region Foster Care Help Line at 1-866-368-5204. They will be given a toll-free call in number and pass code. Agendas for these calls will be available shortly before each call. The goal of the calls is to give foster and adoptive caregivers an

opportunity to hear about DCFS programs, upcoming events and changes in policies and procedures.

In-person evening meetings:

In-person evening meetings will be held around the 50 counties that make up the Central Region. The region's administration will send postcards to both families supervised by the DCFS foster care program and by private agencies in advance. The focus of these meetings will be to:

- have discussion with local caregivers;
- identify strengths of the foster care system and
- make suggestions on how to overcome the weaknesses.

These meetings are designed to discuss issues within the system as a whole, not to deal with individual case-specific issues. Registration information will be available on the postcards.

Questions about the Central Region Foster Care Advisory Council can be directed to the Central Region Foster Care Help Line at 866-368-5204.

Youth Services Network offers free training

Caregivers can take advantage of a series of free "Turning Choices into Change" workshops offered by the Youth Services Network. The workshops are open to all foster, adoptive or guardianship caregivers in the Peoria area. Credit for DCFS training hours will be offered as applicable.

January 13	Bullying
February 10	Reactive Attachment Disorder
March 10	Court Appointed Special Advocate
April 4	Keeping Kids Busy This Summer

The free workshops will be held Thursdays from 6:30 p.m. until 8 p.m. at Calvin Coolidge Middle School, located at 2708 W Rohmann Avenue, West Peoria.

To register, call Elizabeth Richmond in the Family-to-Family office at 217-671-7919.

Central Connections

Sponsor

Robert Blackwell,
DCFS Central Regional Administrator



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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.



Central Region Caregiver Training

For the most up-to-date and complete 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. In addition to the slate of classroom courses, caregivers can take advantage of these other options.

Learning and credit hour earning options outside the classroom

Classroom training is the preferred method for training caregivers. Interacting with instructors and other caregivers brings a unique richness to the training experience. Still, there are other methods of learning that can take advantage of technology and flexible scheduling. DCFS can offer caregivers the additional options of computer-based training and the DCFS Lending Library of books and tapes.

The in-service PRIDE training modules are now available as an interactive CD-ROM format in addition to the traditional classroom format. The digital format provides anytime, anywhere use, allowing caregivers to receive training, while working around the other responsibilities that compete for their time.

The nine in-service modules in PRIDE Digital Curriculum use the same combination of cotrainers that are featured in all the PRIDE classroom training programs. A child welfare professional and a foster parent professional guide at home learners through each module. Using video and an easy-to-use computer format, the computerized course presents the information and recorded discussions from other caregivers, adopted individuals and agency staff with knowledge of Illinois' child welfare system. The digital system takes learners

through exercises to test their understanding of the material. It saves exercises so caregivers can document their work.

To order a CD set for one of the PRIDE in-service modules, call 312-328-2828.

The DCFS Lending Library can also be used as a convenient alternative for obtaining approved training credit for license renewal. Licensed foster and adoptive parents can borrow materials for a two-week period at no charge. The Lending Library catalogue highlights a multitude of books, audio cassettes and videos for self-directed training in parenting and family life, spanning 17 categories.

To borrow these or one of the myriad titles in the Lending Library, simply fill out the order form at the back of the catalogue. Send it to the DCFS Office of Training, Station 122, 406 E. Monroe, Springfield IL 62701.

To request a catalogue, call 877-800-3393. The catalogue is also available on the DCFS Web site: <http://www.state.il.us/DCFS/docs/lendinglibrary.pdf>.

Lending Library Categories

- Child Sexual Abuse
- Children with Sexually Aggressive Behaviors
- Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Children with Behavioral Disorders and/or Emotional Disturbances
- Disciplinary Strategies for Difficult Children
- Separation and Visitation
- Drug-Affected Infants and Children
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effects (FAS/FAE)
- The Medically Complex Child
- The Child With HIV/AIDS
- Promoting Educational Success Through Improved Learning Skills
- Building A Healthy Self Esteem in Kids
- From Foster Care to Adoption
- Child Development and Parenting
- Parenting Adolescents
- Families and Diversity—Parenting with Greater Understanding
- Children With Mental Health, Language and Physical Challenges