

Illinois Families Now and Forever

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship®

Prepare now for high holiday emotions

Parenting challenges can become even greater than usual during the holidays. All children have the tendency to become overwhelmed by holidays, the prospect of gifts, and the let down when it is all over. Children in (or after) foster care face all of these same stressors, along with their own unique challenges. It is important that foster caregivers and even parents who have moved to adoption or guardianship be prepared for the emotional swings that may be part of the holiday package. Fortunately, there are some ways to manage the holidays to minimize problems and help children feel less isolated and confused.

This season can intensify feelings of longing for children in the foster care system because it emphasizes the separation from their birth families. Often, these children create memories of idealized parents or imagine a life before foster care that was only happy. Although this often does not match their real experiences, this type of imagination is common and serves as a kind of emotional pro-

tection for them. However, when they face the reality of their situation, some children will exhibit sadness and significant emotional distress caused by separation from their families. They may struggle with confusing feelings of wanting to be loyal to their own parents and their traditions and also wanting to be part of the fun in the home where they presently live. A child with attachment issues may sabotage any attempts to participate in enjoyable activities or may simply become withdrawn and sullen, “ruining” the holiday for others. Often, older children are more vulnerable to intense feelings of sadness and anger during the holiday season because they have more memories of the rituals and traditions of their families during the holidays.

It is important to provide a supportive environment for children who may be saddened during the time of year that brings so much joy to others. Failure to acknowledge the feelings



may cause them to be more acute. It is often helpful to create a bridge that connects the family of origin, either literally or figuratively, with the foster/adoptive family to compensate for the feelings of separation that occurs during this time.

The holidays have a way of raising the stakes. So the adults must be prepared for more than gifts and a great meal. Patience will likely become even more important than presents. Try not let the child set the emotional tone in the home. Your feelings of joy and happiness can't be dependent on the child's feelings and behaviors. You may need to schedule a break outside of the house (or a nap!) Taking care of yourself will keep you in shape to enjoy the holidays and enjoy sharing them with everyone in the home.

Urge your state lawmakers to restore funding to DCFS

DCFS needs the help of families across the state to restore \$38,048,200 in cuts to the department's budget, including \$6.6 million for adoption assistance payments to adoptive families. The department's efforts also include adding staff to improve foster parent recruitment, promote permanency, and other wide-ranging efforts to ensure children's safety, well-being and permanency.

A vote is expected in early January, and the fate of the department's funding and the lives of thousands of youth across the state is uncertain. Please call your state senator and state representative before January 1st and urge them to vote YES on restoring \$38 million in cuts to the DCFS budget, and ask your friends, family and neighbors to join you. For more information, you can “like” DCFS at Facebook.com/ProtectIllinoisKids or search for Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

From the DCFS Director

Richard H. Calica



As the holidays approach, we should all take a moment to remember all the aspects of your family that bring gratitude and hope.

The road you chose in committing your life to children is one with many twists, some hills and even the occasional rock. My job is to help the staff at DCFS and our nonprofit partners provide you with the support and road map you need to work around the obstacles that arise.

It has been almost a year since I accepted this role. During that time I have taken steps to restructure the Department into more logical functional lines, eliminating activities that didn't fit or didn't work well enough. I was able to focus on our core mission of keeping children safe.

In my last message to caregivers I spoke of the budgetary twists and turns that the Department had to work through in the new fiscal year. With your help, we will see our request for the funding needed to protect children and strengthen families restored this January. Meanwhile, you, the individuals who open your homes to children and who inspire the work we all do, allow me to pause and consider all that brings me gratitude and hope.

Have a safe and happy holiday season.

Celebrate holiday cultural differences

The Illinois Foster Parent Law states that it is the foster parent's responsibility to "Respect and maintain a child's cultural needs and support relationships with his own family." With the many religious and cultural holidays that abound in December, this can be a time to create special holiday memories while learning about new cultures and share memories with your children in ways you might not have considered.

Following are highlights of some winter religious and cultural holidays that may be significant to children in your home. There may be others, so talk directly with children about what they have experienced or may want to discover.

Kwanzaa bonds family, community and Africa

Kwanzaa is an African-American and Pan-African holiday that celebrates family, community and culture. The Kwanzaa celebration is a way to explore aspects of the African culture and build bonds within the family and the larger community. It is celebrated from December 26 through January 1 by an estimated 26 million people around the world.

The tradition centers around the Kwanzaa symbols and the seven Nguzo Saba (principles) of Kwanzaa, which each get a day of devoted attention.

To celebrate Kwanzaa, the family chooses a central place in the home for the Kwanzaa Set, or the symbols of Kwanzaa. The set includes a table covering of African cloth, the mkeka (mat) and the kinara (candleholder).

The kinara holds seven candles to represent the seven days of Kwanzaa and the seven Kwanzaa principles:

- Umoja (unity)
- Kujichagulia (self-determination)
- Ujamaa (cooperative economics)
- Kuumba (creativity)



- Ujima (collective work and responsibility)
- Nia (purpose)
- Imani (faith)

Each night of Kwanzaa during the evening meal, the family members light one of the seven candles to commemorate the principle of the day. Everyone explains what the principle of that day means to them and how they practiced it during the day. Finally, everyone makes a commitment to practice and promote the particular principle throughout the year. Families can head into the new year, connected, focused and inspired.

For more information on the Kwanzaa holiday, visit www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org

Important holiday advice

Whether your family embraces a “greeting card” traditional Christmas, explores another cultural holiday or focuses on other aspects of the holiday season, give thought to your plans in advance. Start by asking children about the holidays as they experienced them before coming to your home. If you are parenting across cultures, it is especially important to get some background on the holiday traditions that are meaningful to the child and his or her family. Remember though, even children of the same religious faith as their caregivers may have emphasized different aspects of a holiday. Some families might open Christmas presents on Christmas Eve while others wait until the morning. Still others might skip presents all together and give handmade gifts or exchange personal favors.

Straddling between two sets of family traditions can be complicated. The key is to talk about the holidays and work out ways to honor the child’s past and present family rituals while he is in your home. Patience, tolerance and compromise might be the best gifts of all.

Chanukah

In 2012, Chanukah will be observed beginning at sundown on December 8 through December 16. Families of the Jewish faith celebrate Chanukah or Hanukkah to mark the victory over Syrian rulers, who more than 2,300 years ago tried to force the Jewish people to renounce their faith and worship Greek gods. Led by Judah Maccabee and his brothers, the Jewish fighters drove the Syrians out of the land of Judea (now Israel) and reclaimed the temple at Jerusalem after a three-year struggle. On the 25th day of the Hebrew month Kislev, the Maccabees finished cleaning out the temple and rededicated it.

They found only a tiny jug of oil to use to light an eternal flame. The oil in the jar should only have lasted a day, but it burned for eight days. The modern day Festival of Lights or Chanukah lasts for eight days to commemorate the miracle of the oil.



Families celebrate Chanukah at home by lighting the menorah, eating special food and giving gifts.

Los Posadas

In Mexico the posada, which means lodging or shelter in Spanish, is celebrated every evening from December 16 to 24 to commemorate Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem. On each night of the posada, a home in the neighborhood plays host to a party with food, drinks and candy and fruit for the children. At dusk, a young child dressed as an angel leads a procession to the host home. Children dressed in silver and gold robes carry figures of Mary and Joseph. The adults and musicians follow as everyone sings *alguinaldos* (Christmas carols) holding lit candles.

Arriving at the house, the group splits in two, with one half going inside as the other remains outside and begs for shelter. When the doors open, the solemn aspect of the celebration gives way to fun. To end the posada, the children take turns swinging at a star-shaped piñata, hoping to release the treats inside.



Three King’s Day

El Dia de los Tres Reyes

Three King’s Day follows the account of the Three Magi who brought gifts of frankincense, myrrh and gold to the infant Jesus. It begins at dawn on January 6. The night before, Puerto Rican children place cut grass into a shoebox and top it with a wish list. The grass is intended as a treat for the kings’ camels after their journey. The Reyes (kings) will only come if the child has been good all year.

After a night of anticipation, fortunate children wake to find gifts left by the Reyes. They spend the day playing with toys and enjoying a holiday meal with family and friends.



Holidays bring opportunities for sibling visits

The holidays are a good time to plan extended visits with siblings who are in different foster care homes. Visits can often soften the traumatic impact of separation and contribute to siblings' long-term mental health. DCFS recognizes the power of sibling connections and will provide foster caregivers assistance and payment as they do their part to facilitate visits.

Visitation requirements

While children have an open DCFS foster care case, rules require that visits occur at least two times a month for a minimum of two hours each for all siblings in other foster care placements. Exceptions to twice-monthly visits include:

- A court order requiring less frequent or no visitation
- Requests by the child for less frequent or no visitation (requires regular counseling)
- Risk of physical, emotional or mental harm from the visit (requires documentation)

If siblings are in residential care or are placed more than 150 miles apart, visits may be less frequent. However, visitation may not be reduced based on the unavailability of a visit supervisor or as a form of discipline.

These requirements only apply to youth in DCFS care. After adoption, visitation is still an important factor for the adoptive family to consider, but it is not mandated or reimbursed by DCFS. The adoptive parents have to determine what will work best for the children and families involved.

Foster caregivers who help children have visits with their siblings in foster care can be reimbursed

for supervising the visits and for providing transportation. A caregiver who hosts an overnight or weekend visit in their home can be reimbursed \$100 for supervising the visit. Supervising shorter visits is reimbursed at \$25 an hour for up to four hours. Reimbursement for supervising visits is capped at a maximum of \$100 per month. Driving a child to or from a visit is also eligible for reimbursement at the rate of \$55.5 cents per mile (as of July 1). The maximum reimbursement for travel each month is capped at \$50.

The child's caseworker can help foster caregivers complete the form (CFS 315) for reimbursement. Reimbursement for sibling visitation is only available for visits between siblings who are in foster care.

If a foster caregiver is not directly involved in hosting or transportation, their support for the workers and the youth is still important. Caregivers send a powerful and lasting message to the children under their care by how they protect and nurture important relationships. To fulfill that role, talk to the child's caseworker about potential emotional issues that may arise from visits. This could include unusual or escalated behavior before or after a visit, or disappointment upon returning home. Sometimes caregivers will notice a child "acting out" as the time for a visit gets closer. While sometimes difficult, it is important to realize that visits are often like an investment with payoffs that come later after relationships are more stable.

Safety certificate for all cribs by Dec. 28

As previously reported, since June 2011, the federal government prohibits the manufacture and sale of "drop-side" cribs. Cribs of the type where an entire side could be raised and lowered were determined to be hazardous.

In response, DCFS Rule 402.9 was updated to address cribs and includes a deadline of December 28, 2012. By that date, any foster family home with a crib must have a certificate that shows it meets or exceeds the federal safety standards. The manufacturer's certificate has to be available to show a licensing representative.

The website for the Consumer Product Safety Commission (www.cpsc.gov) has details on the recalls and how to determine if current child equipment is safe.

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 (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.



Illinois Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Bulletin

The fall season is especially busy for the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council (SFCAC). In addition to the regular business, the council holds two joint meetings with other advisory councils and must prepare for the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan submissions on November 30.

Joint meeting with the youth

The adults on the foster care council had a very productive meeting with the Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) in September. This annual meeting set a platform for both councils to discuss overlapping topics. It also helped build bridges among the two groups when they moved into the “café” portion of the meeting. Then they could talk in small groups about more personal challenges and triumphs, using discussion prompts with a facilitator. This year’s meeting was agreed to be very successful by the leaders from both councils.



Young people on the Youth Advisory Board got to know their counterparts on the foster care council

Joint meeting with the Adoption Advisory Council

Each November the foster care council joins with the Illinois Adoption Council in honor of Adoption Awareness Month in Illinois. The joint meeting at the Baby Fold in Normal was held on

November 9. Issues on the agenda included updates on changes to Medicaid that could affect children in care, legislation on sibling visitation, and changes to the Advocacy Office.



Mike Ruppe, DCFS Regional Administrator for Central Region, addressed both councils in November

Implementation Plans

The council members completed a training update to get ready for the next cycle of Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan scoring. The plans are due each November 30 from all agency and DCFS foster care programs. The plans must explain how DCFS and the partner agencies will honor the foster parents’ rights and assist them in achieving their responsibilities as outlined in the Foster Parent Law.

All Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council members will devote additional time to review and score their share of plans to ensure that they are acceptable. They can potentially nominate plans that deserve special recognition for Organization/user Friendliness, Dignity and Respect for Caregivers and Foster Parent Involvement. The scoring will be done in early 2013 and award winning plans will be announced in May, during Foster parent Appreciation Month.

New rep for Southern Region

The council welcomed its newest member at the October meeting. Joycestine Jones will be



Joycestine Jones

joining fellow caregiver Michael Simpson in representing the Southern Region. She and her husband Robert have been foster parents for DCFS for 14 years. They have cared for numerous children, including teens and sibling groups and those with special needs, and have adopted four children. Outside of her home life, Joycestine is a youth minister at the Centralia church where her husband is pastor.

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 January 18 in Joliet at 9 a.m.

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



Adoption Advisory Council Update

The Illinois Adoption Advisory Council met in November to tend to a full slate of business and to celebrate Adoption Awareness Month in Illinois. This meeting is planned annually as a joint meeting with the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council.

The adoption council raised many questions about recent changes to the Medicaid program that could impact children after they were adopted. Vince Champagne of the Office of Health Services said that youth assigned a medical card through the child welfare system are largely exempt from the changes but that there can be confusion among medical providers and local pharmacies. The office is tracking the results and working with the Department of Healthcare and Family Services. Caregivers can contact the office at 217-557-2689 with questions or concerns about the Medicaid card.

Kendall Marlowe of the Bureau of Operations attended the meeting to provide a policy update and news on recent changes at the agency. Marlowe also helped the councils present certificates to honor the efforts of key individuals and organizations that contributed to

positive adoption outcomes in the Central Region. Judge Kevin Fitzgerald of the 11th Circuit Court, Camp Take-a-Break and the Baby Fold received special tribute for demonstrating dedication and service to adoptive families. Judge Fitzgerald has established a court culture that is educated in the adoptive process and its importance as a means to bring permanency for children. Camp Take-a-Break is a program that provides short-term respite services for families, promoting stability. The Baby Fold is a child welfare agency in Normal that consistently finds ways to meet the needs of families that open their homes to children. The agency also sponsors a Adoption/Guardianship Preservation program that reaches a wide swath of Central Region families.



Kendall Marlowe of DCFS Operations with the Adoption Month honorees



Adoption Support Line now answers the call statewide

As of October, caregivers who have questions about adoption or guardianship have one spot they can call before, during and after finalizing. **The Adoption Support Line has expanded its capacity to serve callers statewide through one toll-free number 888-96-ADOPT (888-962-3678).**

During the move to adoption, a caregiver may be in close contact with the adoption worker. However, later when there is a question about a subsidy or a new need for services, caregivers may not know who to call. The Adoption Support Line takes care of that. All adoption-related calls can now come to a centralized location. Calls will be answered by staff who are Master's level Adoption Preservation staff who will have the training/knowledge to answer a wide range of questions. All calls will be assessed on an individual basis and documented to forward on to the assigned caseworker or supervisor if needed.

Staff can also handle the types of calls that do not require follow-up. These could be requests for numbers to field offices, replacement Medicaid cards, or making connections to educational advocacy resources.

When a caregiver calls about an intense issue that requires immediate attention or crisis intervention, he or she can immediately get referred to Adoption Preservation providers or connected to an adoption supervisor without delay.

The Adoption Support Line will have extended hours so caregivers can call outside of the regular business day. Operating hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Monday through Thursday) and 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Fridays. Calls requiring a normal response will be routed to the assigned worker and supervisor for follow-up to occur within 24 business hours.

The expanded capacity of the support line holds many benefits for caregivers and also DCFS/agency staff. Caregivers can continue to direct dial their adoption worker. However, when that isn't feasible, they can use the Adoption Support line. The field offices that take "cold calls" will also know to route those adoption-related calls to the support line. From there, the trained adoption staff can answer, direct and track a call to a satisfactory conclusion.



Illinois Celebrates Adoption Month

Each November is designated Adoption Awareness Month in Illinois. To honor the contributions of adoptive parents and those who provide support to children through adoption, Governor Pat Quinn issued a state proclamation. It was presented to the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council and Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council at their joint meeting in November.



WHEREAS, thanks to thousands of adoptive parents across the state, 17,639 children have found permanent loving homes over the last decade, including 1,697 children in the last year alone; and,

WHEREAS, all children need and deserve the love, nurturing, and sense of security that can only come from being a part of a loving, permanent family; and,

WHEREAS, adoption provides a unique joy and a special opportunity for individuals, whether or not they are already parents, married, in a civil union, single or divorced, to open their hearts and their homes for the rest of their lives to children; and,

WHEREAS, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and its nonprofit partners strive to reunify children with their birth families; but when that simply is not possible, they are equally committed to ensuring every child has the safe, loving family they deserve and need to reach their fullest potential; and,

WHEREAS, Illinois has made great strides in recent years in strengthening and improving the child welfare system: reducing the number of children in temporary foster care from 52,000 to 15,000; establishing a Bill of Rights for both birth parents and adoptive parents; and strengthening licensing requirements for adoption agencies to prevent the exploitation of birth parents, adoptive parents and children; and,

WHEREAS, Illinois has recently established an Adoption Support Line to provide professional assistance to adoptive families and enacted legislation to protect and maintain the critical ties between siblings whether destined for adoption or reunification with their birth parents; and,

WHEREAS, all of the progress in recent years would not have been possible without champions like State Representative Sara Feigenholtz, an adoptee herself, and State Representative Naomi Jakobson, an adoptive parent, as well as child advocates including: Child Care Association of Illinois; Illinois Foster and Adoptive Parent Association; Illinois Adoption Advisory Council; Illinois Statewide Youth Advisory Board; Chicago Bar Association; Loyola ChildLaw Clinic of Loyola University; and many child welfare agencies, adoptive parent groups and individuals across the state; and,

WHEREAS, together we are committed to improving the child welfare system even further, including reducing the length of time children remain in temporary foster care, where Illinois ranks 47th in the nation according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; and,

WHEREAS, currently, there are 2,040 children awaiting adoption across the state across all ages, backgrounds and needs; and,

THEREFORE, I, Pat Quinn, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim November 2012 as **ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH** in Illinois, and do hereby encourage all Illinoisans to express their gratitude to the thousands of families across the state that have opened their homes and their hearts to children, and encourage others to consider joining them in making a life-changing difference to children.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Illinois to be affixed.



Essee White
SECRETARY OF STATE

Done at the Capitol, in the City of Springfield,
this SEVENTH day of NOVEMBER, in
the Year of Our Lord two thousand and
TWELFTH, and of the State of Illinois
the one hundred and NINETY-FOURTH

Pat Quinn
GOVERNOR

New DCFS structure leads to better adoption practices

As the Department realigns functions, there are changes in the works that will affect how staff will carry out activities that move children toward permanency through adoption and guardianship.

Previously the adoption casework, the subsidy review and support after adoption would be done by three different workers. Under the new arrangement, one worker will be able to provide all three functions for a family. Adoption staff will carry cases and will be able to support the child and families in the home. They will also be able to see a case through to adoption or guardianship and be able to support families after the case reaches finalization.

Larry Chasey, DCFS Assistant Chief of Staff, was at the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council meeting in September as the plan was described. The new structure is designed to improve the quality of adoptions, enhance customer service and decrease the amount of time it takes to complete the adoption process. Caseworkers will continue to be involved with families, but only adoption staff will perform the adoption related work in the new model.



Larry Chasey (left) describes the proposal for restructuring adoption practices to the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council.

Central Region advisory council offers platform for all caregivers

The Central 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. Given the vast area that comprises Central Region, the schedule must have some flexibility so that more caregivers can participate.

Michael Ruppe, Central Region Administrator, held a teleconference in the beginning of December to update foster parent on the changes in the Department and proposed a new structure for the upcoming Central Region Area Foster Care Councils. With input from caregivers, he and the area administrators will determine how to maximize caregiver participation in the council within their geographic areas.

With the start of the new year, the region's administration will roll out a new system of in-person council meetings that will be hosted at DCFS offices covered by the seven area managers. The goal of each meeting is to give caregivers in a local community an opportunity to hear about DCFS programs, upcoming events and changes in policies and procedures. If an issue has the potential to impact foster care homes across the state, the regional representatives can elevate it to the State-wide Foster Care Advisory Council.

Area council meetings will be open to caregivers with licenses supervised by the DCFS foster care program and those families served by private agencies. To get details on the schedule for the area advisory council meetings call the nearest field office.

Central Region's representatives to the state's foster care advisory council



Regina Parnell is in her first term as a council member. She was brought up among a family of foster parents and looks forward to advocating

for more support to foster parents to insure that placements are more stable.

She brings a broad perspective to the council since in addition to being licensed for foster care, she has been a caseworker involved in both licensing and investigations. Now she is a program director with the Regional Education Office, serving schools in Champaign and Ford counties.

During her 13-year career as a single foster parent, Regina has specialized in caring for teenage girls. She also has a son by birth and is the grandmother to a child she had in her home in foster care.

Lee Coffman and her husband Kent have been foster and adoptive parents since 1994. They have had dozens of children come to be part of

their family, and have adopted seven. They love being parents and feel that being involved with children "keeps them young, fit and on their toes." They enjoy working with the agencies, the workers, and the children's families.

Lee believes the Council is needed to keep everyone informed on policies and laws. She feels that the board helps to hold everyone accountable. Being on the State-wide Advisory Board is a responsibility Lee says, "but it is also very gratifying because you get to see the effort put forth by many people, and the fruits of their hard work." She feels honored to serve on the council, but adds that "when you love what you do, it means even more."



Bill Moorehead of Mount Alburn is on his second term as a member of the statewide foster care advisory council. He has a remodeling and contracting business.



For the past 18 years he has been a foster parent, 15 of which have been as a single foster parent. With four children by birth ranging in age from 18 to 41, plus 18 years of fostering, Bill felt that he could share some of his child-rearing knowledge by being on the council.

Devoted to helping children, Bill believes in hope for the future for them, regardless of their circumstances. As a council member, he is working on the step-down committee and makes recommendations to DCFS about children coming out of residential care going into specialized care.

Be the first to benefit from new course on youth's sexual health

Central Region caregivers have the opportunity to be the first to take a new training on the sexual health of children. So often this important topic is avoided because it can be difficult to find the right words and accurate information. This new training will make sure that caregivers, parents and staff get trained together on the factors that can affect a child's sexual health. They will learn how to talk with children about what is at stake and how to put children on a path toward long-term well being.

This training is possible through a federal grant that the DCFS Office of Training manages. To design the curriculum, young people from the Youth Advisory Board, members of the Statewide Foster Care Council

and staff who work with youth offered ideas about what the course should cover.

This training will be piloted in Bloomington and other parts of the state in the second half of January 2013. It will use the co-trainer model, where the instructors will be a DCFS staff trainer with a foster parent/trainer. The sessions will be open to staff and parents who will learn together.

To register for the course after January 1 log in to your account on the Virtual Training Center (VTC) at www.dcfstraining.org or call the Registration Line at 877-800-3393 during business hours.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentor Sangamon and Christian county kids

Central Region families in Sangamon and Christian counties can turn to the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program when children age five to 14 could benefit from having another positive adult relationship. The Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Central Region has built a reliable foundation for supervised, one-to-one relationships between an adult mentor and a child. The agency focuses on building the child's self esteem and social skills through exposure to a variety of activities and experiences. Its mission is to build friendships that develop confident, competent and caring youth.

The adult volunteer (the "Big") that gets matched with a child ("the Little") will be committed to spending at least 10 to 14 hours each month with a child. A volunteer must be a responsible and stable person who cares about children and understands the needs of young children. The Big and the Little typically see each other two to four times each month. The parent, child, the volunteer and the program case manager will

decide how often the child needs to see his or her Big Brother or Sister.

The Big Brother and Big Sister program may be a resource to consider with the child's case-worker under many circumstances. For example, you may feel he is going through a difficult time, and it's hard for you to communicate with him. Often it helps the child to have another adult he can confide in and trust. Or it could be that you sense that your child is lonely and maybe she needs a boost in their self-esteem. Bigs can give youth the extra attention they need.

There is no charge to have a Big Brother or Big Sister. The program encourages Bigs to plan free or low-cost activities and caregivers to pay your child's admission to activities, such as skating, bowling, or movies. The Big Brothers/Big Sisters agency also hosts activities for Bigs and Littles.

Caregivers and parents who want to apply to the program for children age five to 14 must reside

in Sangamon or Christian County. There is an orientation and interview and home visit required. There is no set time for how long it will take for a child to be paired with a "Big." It depends on each unique situation. The screening process for volunteers is thorough and includes an interview, reference checks, background checks, home assessment and ongoing training and support from the staff. It may take several months before the right volunteer for an individual child enters the program. While waiting for a Big, the organization will host "waiting list" activities to keep him or her involved. Once matches are confirmed, the program expects that the volunteers and children commit to see each other regularly for at least one year.

For more information on the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, contact the intake Coordinator for Sangamon County at 217-753-1216 and in Christian County at 217-824-5531.

Central 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**. 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 and register for available trainings
- Take on-line courses
- Download training materials and resources
- View/Print your training transcript

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. 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.

...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 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 need to find a phone number for a case-worker?

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

Customer Service Line

The number for the DCFS Central Region Foster Parent Customer Service Line is 866/368-5204.

This toll-free line is operational Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., excluding state holidays. The line is equipped with voice mail.

The calls can be about issues or concerns that caregivers have not been able to resolve through normal channels. The goal is to have a response time of 24 to 48 hours for all calls. This is not set up to be an emergency response line. If a caregiver has an urgent request, it is best to call the field office or the after-hours number.

The Customer Service Line is designed for calls from foster families whose licenses are supervised by DCFS Central Region. Agency-supervised homes should work directly with the agency that monitors their license.

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

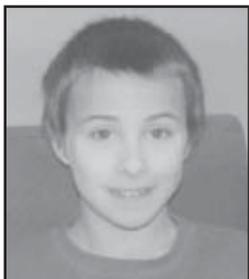


Vasha (7686)

Vasha [7686] Vasha, 13, is a considerate child who likes helping others. She enjoys attending church, participating in bible study, and visiting with her relatives. She also enjoys singing, dancing, and listening to music. She struggles with self-control at times, but usually responds well when supervised by consistent, responsible adults.

should remain patient as he adjusts to his new, permanent family. You can provide the kind of structure and routine that will put him at ease. You can also work with professionals who can help him manage his emotions. Chris would like to live in a rural area, and would like to join a family that has pets. Chris should be the youngest child in his adoptive home.

unteers to cook or do household chores. Latrice's teacher says she is an independent learner who gets along well with other students. Her foster parent says she is a good child who appreciates any opportunity to play basketball with her friends.



Chris (8008)

Vasha's teacher says she is a sweet girl who behaves well in school and tries hard to please others. Vasha's foster parent says she is capable of following rules and behaving appropriately in the home.

Jesse [7820] Jesse, 12, is an active, energetic child who likes to keep himself busy. He enjoys being out and about in the community, whether he is walking the family dog, riding his bike, playing softball, or eating at a restaurant. Jesse sometimes struggles to relate honestly to his peers, but he is trying hard to improve in this area. In general, he is a fun kid who is also smart, cooperative, and easy to talk to. Jesse's worker says he is a sweet child who loves spending time outdoors. He does well in school, and is eager to converse on any number of subjects.

The forever family for Latrice can provide her a loving home. You can also help her develop strong communication skills so she can express her feelings appropriately. Latrice should be encouraged to enjoy her childhood without taking on too many adult responsibilities. She would also benefit from ongoing visits with her siblings.



Jesse (7820)

The right parents for Vasha would be loving and supportive, while also providing clear expectations and regular supervision. Once Vasha is adopted, you can give her plenty of time to adjust to your home. You can also work closely with child welfare professionals to help meet Vasha's medical and emotional needs, and to encourage continued positive behavior. The ideal family would live in the St. Louis area, and would help Vasha maintain relationships with her siblings and other members of her birth family.

Potential parents to Jesse would be able to establish a stable, structured home environment for him. You can monitor his behavior, and redirect him in a calm and patient manner should he act out. The ideal family would live in a rural community, would enjoy spending time outdoors, and would not have children who are younger than Jesse.

Noah [7950] This young man is eager to form strong relationships with his peers. Noah, age 12, wants to be liked and accepted by others, but he sometimes struggles with his behavior. That said, he can also be loving and outgoing. Noah's hobbies include playing basketball and immersing himself in video games. He also enjoys visiting with his grandparents on a regular basis. Noah's worker says he can be likable and affectionate.



Latrice (7840)

Chris [8008] Chris, age 11, is a quiet, polite child who generally cooperates with others. He can be shy at first, but usually warms up to people once he gets to know them. Chris sometimes struggles to manage his emotions, but he has improved significantly in this area. In his spare time, he enjoys watching spots and taking care of animals. Chris' worker says he is a friendly child who is easy to get along with. He does well when interacting with other kids in his community.

Latrice [7840] Latrice, 15, is an outgoing child who enjoys playing sports and spending time with her friends. She also has a creative side, and can often be found writing poetry or practicing the guitar. Latrice has trouble following rules at times, but she is also helpful around the house and often vol-

The right family for Noah would welcome him into your home, and be patient with him as he adjusts to his new, permanent family. You can work with professionals who can help you understand his emotional needs, and who can provide guidance on how to redirect his behavior in an effective, appropriate manner. You can also help Noah maintain a relationship with his grandparents, including regular visits. Noah should be the only child in his adoptive home or, if this is not possible, the youngest child in his adoptive home.



Noah (7950)

The forever family for Chris



Please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390, or see the AICI Web site - 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

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Address Changes: Families must notify their licensing representative, who will notify DCFS. Agencies should change office addresses or request staff copies through the Editor.

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