

Caregivers can contribute much at Cook Juvenile Court

The Cook County Juvenile Court is an imposing building with stark white walls against a sparse urban backdrop. While it is not an especially welcoming environment, it is important that a caregiver be prepared for “their day in court.” If, when and how often you may go to court will depend mostly on status or progress of the parent’s case concerning the children placed in your home. Still all caregivers should be aware of the unique characteristics of juvenile court and of the caregiver’s special role in supporting children whose cases come before the court.

Cook County’s juvenile court was the first such court in the nation. It was established in 1899, as a separate court for children, originally established on the belief that:

- The State has the right and the duty to stand as the legal guardian of its children when their parent/s cannot, or will not, provide for them.
- Children who commit crimes should not be treated like adult criminals.

Now there are juvenile court proceedings in all Illinois counties. In Cook County, specific judges

are assigned to hear juvenile court cases.

The Cook County Juvenile Court is split in two parts. The Juvenile Justice Division handles cases where the child is accused of committing a crime. The Child Protection Division decides cases on behalf of children that involve abuse, neglect or dependency (a child without a caretaker to adequately parent him or her.) While doing foster care, court hearings that the caregiver would attend will normally be on the Child Protection side.

In Cook County, caregivers generally are notified of court dates in two ways:

- 1) The caseworker and agency work with caregivers to notify them of upcoming court dates verbally or in writing, and
- 2) The Guardian ad litem (GAL) who serves as an attorney representing the child usually mails a letter to caregivers after each court hearing. The GAL’s letter lists the next court date



and invites the caregivers to call if they cannot attend the next hearing.

Foster caregivers can take on the role of supporter when the child needs to appear in court. They also may advocate for the child’s best interests in court by providing important information about the child’s history, need for services and/or temporary or permanent family placement.

Whether you voluntarily go to court to provide information, are requested by the worker or GAL to appear, or are officially summoned by the court, being prepared is essential. It is important to get to the court early. Parking can be hard to find and lines for the metal detectors can be long. Cameras,

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Action For Children links pre-schoolers to Cook early education slots

According to a study reported in the Chicago Tribune last month, in Illinois nearly 35 percent of Latino 4-year-olds attended preschool, compared to 66 percent of white children and 54 percent of African-American children enrolled.

DCFS for several years has emphasized the importance of early childhood education. Pre-Kindergarten programs lay the social and emotional foundation children need in order to learn the reading, writing and math skills taught in Kindergarten. Under the DCFS School Readiness Initiative, all children at age three or older should be enrolled in a Head Start program, state pre-Kindergarten program or an accredited child care center. All children in DCFS care are automatically eligible for Head Start and state pre-K programs, regardless of household income.

Action for Children is the local organization that provides referrals to connect Cook County families with child care providers. DCFS

and Action for Children have set up an enhanced referral process so children in care receive special service.

As a child approaches his or her third birthday, the caseworker should begin the process for enrollment in pre-Kindergarten. Caseworkers will contact Action for Children on the designated enhanced referral phone line. The agency will confirm the child's information and then call the caregiver to discuss the type of program the child needs. Action for Children will find programs that match the family's criteria and confirm openings. Next, they provide the foster caregivers with a profile sheet of applicable programs. The caregiver can then contact the providers, make a decision and enroll the child. Caregivers to children who are three years old and not enrolled in a Head Start or Pre-Kindergarten program should



contact their caseworker right away.

Quality preschool gives children academic readiness and also helps them learn to play, make friends, and receive positive attention from adults. Youth in foster care especially need the stability of an early educational program that can help them "catch up" from any educational and developmental setbacks due to problems in their family life. Then, when they reach kindergarten, they will understand how school works and will be ready to perform well.

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recording devices and knives are among the list of prohibited items. Each courtroom has a waiting area where you can meet the GAL beforehand and go over the expectations for the hearing.

Caregivers have a right to be at court. They don't need anyone's permission to ask the judge to be heard. However, the judge may or may not grant your request to

be heard, based on the relevance of your testimony to the hearing. If you do testify, state only what you remember. Be as descriptive as possible when testifying about the events or reactions of the child, so that the judge has a clear picture of what occurred. If you can't remember details, you may be allowed to review your notes. If you don't know, say so. You can ask to have the question repeated.

Don't allow yourself to be rushed or intimidated.

Living with a child during the trauma of separation from family gives you a unique and important perspective. The judge needs information and details to understand each case. You can contribute to the outcome and help ensure that the children at the heart of the matter are well-served by all the adults on his side.



Action Teams tackle child welfare concerns



Cook North has been working with three Permanency Enhancement Action Teams. The action teams are the result of several community forums held last year with caregivers, community leaders, social service professionals, members of the justice system and other individuals who have an interest in outcomes for youth in care. These teams came together to address the issue of disproportionality of African-Americans being represented in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and criminal justice systems at higher rates than their percentage of the general population.

The Cook North and North Suburban action teams cover Chicago's north and northwest Chicago communities and the townships of Niles and Evanston. These Action Teams attempt to create greater sensitivity and awareness about the problems in these communities. African-Americans make up 16 percent of the population of the area. Data, however, shows that 57 percent of all indicated reports are for African-American families, and 76 percent of children in substitute care are African-American.

The third action team covers the DCFS Cook North Region's part of Chicago's South and near South Side communities, including Douglas, Fuller Park, Kenwood, Hyde Park, Armour Square, Oakland, Grand Boulevard, Washington Park, and Woodlawn. Of the children in these communities, 85 percent are

African-American, but make up 99 percent of children in care in that area.

Also of concern is the fact that African-American youngsters leave the child welfare system at lower rates than do children of other races and ethnicities. The action teams look for ways to keep more children safely at home, to return children home to a safer environment sooner, and to move children to permanency through guardianship or adoption so that they do not grow up in foster care.

The Cook-North Action Team covering the North and Northwest sides of Chicago meets on the third Thursday of the month at 1 p.m. at 1911 S. Indiana.

The North Suburban Action Team meets every fourth Tuesday of the month at 1:30 p.m. at 8140 N. McCormick in Skokie.

The team covering the South Side and near South Side meets on the third Friday of the month at 10 a.m. usually at 1911 S. Indiana.

Everyone interested in the issues addressed by the action teams is welcome to attend. Contact your Foster Parent Support Specialist, or the DCFS LAN Liaison Joann Niemuth at 847-745-3048 for more information.



Advisory Council Update

The Cook North Regional Advisory Council had a busy fall responding to requests for specific training and preparing the region's Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan.

In September, Pam Mills of the DCFS Post Adoption and Guardianship Unit did a presentation on the subsidy agreement. Many caregivers had specific questions about the end date for the subsidies and how to prepare for that end as youth approach age 18. Mills explained each of the notifications and documents that caregivers will receive and how they should respond.

The council also selected topics for upcoming training to include the effects of drugs and alcohol and teen dating violence. The council will mail notices about the training dates.

The other important task was to draft the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan that was due November 30. Caregivers were invited to two focus groups so they could have input to the plan, which describes how the foster care program meets the rights and responsibilities in the Law.

All caregivers can join the council's monthly meetings on the second Tuesday at 10 a.m. at 1911 S. Indiana or via conference call. For more details, contact Iris Cuevas at 312-808-5000.



Caregivers find strength in others to deal with FAS effects in youth



The Foster Parent Support Group recently discussed Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). This condition is very prevalent among children in care. The seriousness of the symptoms and the lingering impact can bring specific parenting challenges. If it isn't addressed, caregivers can feel "pushed to the brink." Cook South responded to the call and arranged a special training on a topic that touches many in the region.

Ajeet Charate, FASD Program Director of Trinity Services, Inc. spoke about alcohol and its effect on the developing fetus. FAS is not always easy to detect and diagnose. It leads to a whole range of disabilities that includes varying degrees of behavioral and learning difficulties. The outward signs can be very visible or not at all or they may disappear over time.

FAS has the ability to mask itself as another disorder. Even with these complications, early diagnosis and treatment can improve the outcomes.

Donna, a foster parent who came with the presenter, spoke about her experiences doing foster care and adoption for several youth with FAS. She described children with FAS as similar to a light switch. Some days it is on and some days it is off. So this makes the job of receiving and storing information complicated. It is very hard for them to recall information when necessary or use it appropriately in a given situation. Their primary disabilities are lower IQ, impaired reading, poor spelling, limitations on their mathematical ability, and verbal comprehension. They also can be confrontational and explosive. The youth are prone to misinterpretation, and may require you to fill in the blanks. Or they

may pretend they understand. Sometimes the story they tell at that moment is true for them. A piece of practical advice was to listen to the youth and then say, "that is a very interesting story...now tell me more or describe what really happened."

Working through these obstacles to comprehension and communication requires almost endless patience. To lessen the tension Charate suggests making the home environment structured and consistent. Donna stressed getting in a FAS support group to help you cope with the variety of behaviors a child may have. There are groups in Chicago, New Lenox and Naperville. Visit the website for the local affiliate of the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome at www.nofasillinois.org.

For more details on this and upcoming topics call the Foster Parent Info Line at 773-371-6119.

Cook South Support Groups

Foster Parents, Our Greatest Resource Support Group

Contact:

Elisse Worrell at 773-371-6114

Info line at 773-371-6113

Meets 2nd Tuesday from 10 a.m. to Noon
DCFS Office, 6201 S. Emerald, Chicago

For DCFS and private agency families. Training credits offered.

Cook South DCFS Regional Foster Care Advisory Council

Contacts:

Angela Barber at 773-578-0079

Gloria Orange-Long of DCFS at 773-371-6115

Meets 3rd Wednesday at 10 a.m.
DCFS Office, 6201 S. Emerald, Chicago

DCFS Cook South Suburban Support Group

Contact:

Adrienne Taylor at 708-210-3578, Sandra Montgomery at 708-210-3594 or Foster Parent Info line at 773-371-6113

Meets 4th Thursday (January, March, May, July, September and November) 9 a.m. to Noon

DCFS Office, 15115 Dixie Highway, Harvey

Cook Central completes Law implementation plan with caregivers



Cook Central Regional Management worked with caregivers and other stakeholders to develop the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan, which all foster care programs must submit to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council. The plan details how the programs will protect foster parent rights and assist families with the responsibilities outlined in the Law.

Caregivers had their opportunity to weigh in on the plan at several occasions, including the monthly advisory council meetings for the fall. The regional administration and staff encouraged open communication and partnership in crafting the Cook Central Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan, which was due on November 30. The 2010 Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan is available for all caregivers to review.

The Cook Central Regional Advisory Council meets each month on the fourth Tuesday. The meetings begin at 9:30 a.m. at the regional office, located at 3518 W. Division in Chicago. The meetings are open to all foster, adoptive and guardianship families that live in the DCFS Cook Central Region. The region covers the West Side of Chicago and the surrounding western suburbs. Families supervised by DCFS and those licensed with private agencies participate in the advisory council.

Each council meeting allows caregivers to learn about policy, programs or resources and to offer their thoughts. Because many key staff members attend the meetings, caregivers find the answers they seek. Often training credit hours are provided for the information shared at the monthly meetings. For more information, contact the Foster Parent Support Specialist phone line at 773-292-7879.

Melrose Park and neighboring families find hope at Esperanza Center



The Community Center, known as Esperanza, is home to seven non-profit agencies that offer free services to help strengthen families. Esperanza is located at 1115 23rd Ave. in Melrose Park and offers bi-lingual services to the surrounding communities. No community is excluded from receiving services. Their goal is to help people become independent and to lead prosperous lives.

- The Resurrection Project offers help in housing and financial counseling.
- The Welcoming Center has a language bank that offers services in 46 different languages. The Welcoming Center just opened a second location in Riverside at 22nd and Harlem.
- Put Illinois to Work is a federal

program that works with companies to hire and employ people from the community. The workers can be placed in jobs all over the area.

- HAS, Health Care Alternate System, offers substance abuse counseling for teens and adults.
- IDES, Illinois Department of Employment Security, helps people apply for unemployment benefits, helps write resumes and has an employment data base.
- PASO (*Proyecto de Accion de los Suburbios del Oeste* or West Suburban Action Project) offers citizenship workshops and community organizing.
- The Catholic Knights offer financial assistance.

Many other free services are provided at Esperanza including

domestic violence services, ESL classes, computer workshops, guitar lessons, a Parent Book Club and a Child Book Club. There is a Senior Program that offers free meals Monday through Friday from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. Another program helps Italian immigrants access their pensions from their employment in Italy. The one service that is restricted only to Melrose Park residents is The Food Pantry. It is open every Wednesday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Juan Villalobos, Program Director stated that all are welcome and that they never say no to a client that enters their door. The Community Center is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Saturday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Call 708-345-3632 for more details.

Stay warm, get smart and save money on museum winter free days



Many of Chicago's museums offer a weekly free day. However, in the winter months, those discounts often come more frequently. Take advantage of the learning and fun, while you save money. This winter, act like a tourist and enjoy all the fun that is so close to home.

Chicago Children's Museum on Navy Pier

700 E. Grand Avenue
312-527-1000
www.chicagochildrensmuseum.org
Free: Thursdays 5 p.m to 8 p.m.
1st Monday Each Month for ages 15 and under

Chicago Field Museum

1400 S. Lake Shore Drive
312-922-9410
www.fieldmuseum.org
Free: 2nd Mondays 9a.m. to 5 p.m.

Chicago History Museum

1601 N. Clark Street
312.642.4600
www.chicagohistory.org
Free: Mondays

DuSable Museum of African American History

740 E. 56th Place
773-947-0600
www.dusablemuseum.org
Free: Sundays

Museum of Contemporary Art

220 E. Chicago Avenue
312-280-2660
www.mcachicago.org
Free: Tuesdays

Museum of Science and Industry

57th Street and Lake Shore Drive
773-684-1414
www.msi-chicago.org
January: Free general admission on weekdays
February: Free general admission on 2/1, 2/8, 2/14, 2/15 and 2/22
Omnimax films, the optional U-505 onboard tour, and certain temporary exhibits are not included in general admission, and they require separate admission.

Notebaert Nature Museum

2430 N. Cannon Drive
773-755-5100
www.chias.org
Free: Thursdays

Oriental Museum

1155 East 58th Street
773-702-9514
Admission is Free. Suggested Donation \$7.00 for adults, \$4.00 for children under 12

Shedd Aquarium

1200 S. Lake Shore Drive
312-939-2438
www.sheddaquarium.org
On Community Discount Days, admission to the aquarium's original galleries is free. Dates for 2011 were not available at press time.

The Art Institute of Chicago

111 S. Michigan Avenue
312-443-3600
www.artic.edu/aic
Free: Thursdays 5 p.m to 8 p.m.



Outdoor family fun is even more fun when it is free (or almost free)

The 2011 Chicago Snow Days Festival will take place January 28-30. More than a dozen professional ice-sculpting teams will create elaborate ice sculptures. Teams from Chicago public high schools also participate in the challenge.

Returning to entertain the crowds this year will be the Green Valley Dog Drivers sled team, as well as the Snowboard Rail Jam with participants from the Raging Buffalo Snowboard/Ski Park.

Navy Pier at Gateway Park
600 E. Grand
11a.m. - 8p.m.
Admission is free

Lace up your skates at 11 Chicago rinks

Chicago has ice rinks downtown and in many of the neighborhood parks. Except for the rink at Wrigley Field and the McFetridge indoor rink, you can bring your own blades and skate for free.

Daley Bicentennial Park
337 E. Randolph St. - Chicago
312-742-7650
Skate rental \$6

McFetridge Sports Center
3843 N. California Ave.
773-478-2609
Skate rental \$3; admission is \$4 for children 12 and younger, \$5 for ages 13 and older, and \$2 for seniors 60 and older.



McKinley Park Ice Skating
2210 W. Pershing Road
312-747-5992
Skate rental \$5

Midway Plaisance Park
East 59th Street at Woodlawn
312-745-2470
Skate rental \$5

Millennium Park Ice Rink
100 N. Michigan Ave
312-742-5222
Skate rental \$10

Mt. Greenwood Park
3721 W. 111 St.
312-747-3690
Skate rental \$5

Riis Park Ice Skating
6100 W. Fullerton Ave.
312-746-5735
Skate rental \$5

Rowan Park Ice Skating
11546 S. Avenue L
773-646-1967
Skate rental \$5

Warren Park Ice Skating
6601 N. Western Ave.
773-761-8663
Skate rental \$5

West Lawn Park Ice Skating
4233 W. 65th St. - Chicago
773-284-6078
Skate rental \$5

Wrigley Field Ice Skating Rink
phone 311 for hours
Adults \$10; Children \$6; Season Pass \$50; Skate rental \$10

Cook County Advocate Regional Reporters

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Cook South ~ Rod Mulford
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Anyone can call the regional reporter with story suggestions about:

- Foster parent association news and schedules
- Local training notices
- Features on foster families and community members working for children
- Ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

Cook 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