

Flynns find their stride caring for youth with medical needs

Lisa and Pat Flynn are modest when assessing their importance in the child welfare system and self-effacing when presented with the evidence of their successes.

This Belleville family has done foster care for six years with Catholic Social Services, caring for 15 children so far. When they made their decision to foster they had three children by birth, including one with Asperger's Disorder and another with cerebral palsy and scoliosis. Despite their own intense parenting responsibilities, both Lisa and Pat felt that foster care was a calling.

"We felt we had been blessed with children who needed special care and we wanted to continue to provide that kind of care to others," said Pat. "We knew we could do something positive to help other kids," Lisa added.

Though they preferred to care for children under the age of three, they became licensed for youth up to age 18. They often found themselves caring for older children while juggling their responsibilities. They have been a home for older youth with behavior issues and for a parenting teen, as well as several younger children with serious medical needs.

"I just can't say no," said Lisa. "When a worker calls at 5:00 on Friday saying they need a placement, there's no way I can refuse."

Most of the children they have cared for have achieved permanency, a goal both Flynns strongly support. Some returned home and one child moved to an adoptive placement. Others moved to become independent.

Given their level of commitment to children, it's understandable that both Lisa and Pat feel that letting go of children is the most challenging aspect of foster care that they've encountered. In one instance, after developing a special bond with a child who was returned home, the Flynns took a six-month "sabbatical" without having any other children placed with them.

Although their initial decision to foster did not include the goal of adoption, the Flynns now find themselves just months removed from finalizing. They are looking forward to being a permanent family for a three-year-old boy who has become very special to them. He too has some pressing needs and requires a lot of time and attention. Currently Lisa and Pat are making arrangements to continue all of the needed early

"We felt we had been blessed with children who needed special care and we wanted to continue to provide that kind of care to others"

-- Lisa Flynn

childhood services, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioral therapy. It will be a complicated, lifelong commitment "but that's why we're here," Lisa said.

After his adoption is done, the plan is to take a break from foster care until their children get older. They would like to wait until the youngest is ten. However, they don't see this last adoption as the end of their foster care road. They see a future working again with teens.

"There are kids out there that need us, and we can't let them down," said Pat.

Education Advisors help caregivers work through issues at school

Caregivers can count on professional help with education issues for Southern Region youth. Through a partnership with Northern Illinois University, the DCFS/NIU Education Advisors advocate for youth in care and also work with adoptive and guardianship families.

Education Advisor Bessie Peabody works from the Collinsville office. Robin Vann is in the Murphysboro office and handles the Marion-area. They and all of the advisors across the state have a background of working in or with schools before joining DCFS, so they know how to navigate the system. They understand school issues including special education, attendance policies and discipline.

The Education Advisors can assist with assessments and Individualized Education Plans (IEP) for special education. When there are behavioral issues, they can work out an intervention with the school. They can answer caregivers' questions and attend school meetings with them. They will help caregivers and caseworkers obtain appropriate educational services for the children. They also will help caregivers plan for education after high school.

The advisors are effective advocates because they recognize and empathize with the frustrations and needs of both the education and child welfare systems. Since every school can have a slightly different way

of doing things, it helps to have an Education Advisor sitting beside the caregiver, united as advocates for the student.



Bessie Peabody

Contact the DCFS Education Advisors:

- Bessie Peabody in Collinsville at 618-583-2125 or by email at bessie.peabody@illinois.gov
- Robin Vann in Murphysboro at 618-687-1733 or by email at robin.vann@illinois.gov



Robin Vann

Response to Intervention sets a plan so struggling students succeed

The DCFS Education Advisors want caregivers know about Response to Intervention (RtI). This new program has been implemented in schools to assist students who struggle academically and/or behaviorally. Schools using the RtI process will screen all students for learning or behavioral problems multiple times each year. Struggling students should then receive extra instruction in the identified academic or behavioral skill. This extra support is to be closely monitored and modified to meet the student's needs.

For more information about how the RtI process will affect students, discuss the questions listed below with your local school personnel and call on the Education Advisors for additional support.

10 Questions caregivers can ask school personnel about RtI:

1. Is the school district currently using an RtI process to provide additional support to struggling students? If not, do you plan to use a plan in the future?
2. What screening procedures are used to identify students in need of intervention?

3. What are the interventions and instructional programs being used at this school? What research supports the interventions' effectiveness?
4. What process is used to determine which intervention will be provided?
5. How long will the intervention last before determining if my student is making adequate progress?
6. Is my child's teacher(s) trained to provide the recommended intervention?
7. Will I receive a written intervention plan describing the RtI process/interventions?
8. How will staff monitor my student's progress?
9. How will I receive updates on my child's progress?
10. When are students who are suspected of having a learning disability referred for a formal case study evaluation?

The school's responses to these questions can make a difference in how a student performs this year. Caregivers should expect a clear plan to address their child's identified needs. If that is not forthcoming, the DCFS Education Advisors can assist.



Secret Santa is ready for Mt. Vernon due to Catholic Social Services

For the past decade, Catholic Social Services of Southern Illinois (CSS) has sponsored a Secret Santa program in the DCFS Mt. Vernon regional office. This event helps provide gifts to area children in foster care.

This year, the CSS Mt. Vernon region will help make Christmas a little merrier for more than 140 children. Each generous individual who decides to give donations, time and effort to the Secret Santa program makes this opportunity possible.

Months in advance, each child in the program was able to create a wish list of items he or she would like to

receive from Santa. CSS took the lists and gave them to individual, corporate and church sponsors. Some businesses and churches decided to sponsor a large group of children, while many individuals sponsored one or two children. CSS asked sponsors to purchase new clothing, toys and books for the program. They also accepted cash donations.

Sponsors then delivered the unwrapped gifts to Catholic Social Services. The gifts were organized for each child. Cash donations were used to purchase additional gifts in an effort to ensure that all wish lists are fulfilled. Monetary donations were also used to purchase gifts



for children who entered the foster care program after wish lists were distributed.

This labor of love was appreciated again this year. It is sure to bring a load of holiday cheer to Mt. Vernon families.

Holiday Message from Southern Region

It is with great pleasure that this greeting is being sent to you for a Happy and Safe Holiday Season. We have successfully provided services to the Southern Region Community for another year. Diligently, we have continued to make efforts to ensure the educational, physical, emotional, behavioral and health care needs of our children were met. It is a daily endeavor to keep the focus on protecting children by strengthening and supporting families. There are no small roles. Everyone's contribution is valued and appreciated. We believe without you and your hard work our region would not have the successes it does.

As you enjoy this holiday season with family and friends please remember the greatest blessing you give a child is to provide a loving home and support at a time when they feel there is no blue sky. We pray that the season will be filled with laughter, joy and lots of surprise for you and yours. May you be blessed in 2011.



Thanks to all of you, for another year where what you did was well done.

*Valda Haywood and
Nora Harms-Pavelski
Assistant Southern
Regional Administrators*

Our Kids

Sponsor
DCFS Southern
Region Administration

Regional Reporter
Michael Bollman
10251 Lincoln Trail
Fairview Hts., IL 62208
Phone: 618-394-2100
Fax: 618-394-2123



Michael.Bollman@illinois.gov

Anyone can call the regional reporter with story suggestions about:

- news and schedules from foster parent associations
- local training notices
- features on foster families and community members working for children
- photos
- ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.



Southern 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