



# Illinois Families Now and Forever

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship®

## DCFS Guardian appointed to Director's Office

On September 30, Governor Quinn appointed D. Jean Ortega-Piron to serve as acting Director at DCFS, following the resignation of Erwin McEwen.

Ortega-Piron may be a familiar name to caregivers. Since 1996 she has been the named Guardian for all children committed to DCFS care by Illinois' juvenile courts. Her signature is on everything from the consent forms for medical treatment to orders finalizing adoptions.

As the Deputy Director for Guardian and Advocacy, she was the person legally responsible for

children in care. During her tenure as Guardian, she with UIC/Clinical Services in Pharmacology established a system for monitoring psychotropic medications for youth in care that the Chicago Tribune described as the "gold standard" in the country. In a first for a child welfare agency, she was instrumental in establishing a Memorandum of Understanding between DCFS and Mexico to address unique circumstances. She has also served as the DCFS chief administrative law judge and administrator of the Appeals and Hearings Unit.

"I am no stranger to DCFS. As the Acting Director, I will continue to insure that we provide high quality child welfare services to children and their families," said Ortega-Piron.



D. Jean Ortega-Piron

Before joining DCFS as Guardian, Ortega-Piron worked as chief legal counsel for the Illinois Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. Coupled

with her extensive time as a member of the DCFS executive team, she feels ready to continue to protect children and serve families in this new role.

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## Holiday happenings can bring both joy and pain for youth in care

Caregivers often strive to make the season bright for children, but that can backfire when a child is affected by trauma. It is important for everyone involved to keep the communication "open and often" around the holiday season. With realistic expectations, reasonable compromises and emotional support, the holidays can indeed be happy.

When a child is separated from his or her parents during Thanksgiving

or Christmas, that longing or disappointment may come out in negative attitudes, regressive behaviors or bad memories. Most of the time the child is not aware of the emotional changes or the reasons for them. Even if she or he could put a finger on the problem, managing the flare-up may be beyond what they can handle. That is when the adults have to step in to provide an extra layer of support. Caregivers should recognize that even a "picture-perfect" day might

not compete with the ingrained memories and traditions of a child's family home. Even if the past holidays didn't come close to the ideal, they still have a powerful place in a child's personal history and are valid and important.

To tip the scales in favor of joyful holiday memories while in foster care, the grown-ups have to do some advance planning for more than just the gift list. Caregivers can talk

*Continued on Page 2*

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## Holiday, continued



about possible reactions to the holidays with the child's caseworker or counselor. Ideally the parents can offer insight, as well. In the best of scenarios, the foster family and the child's family can find a way to bridge the separate households. Together they can plan the visits, arrange phone calls or handoff presents. There won't be one right way to handle this complicated situation, but there can be a solution that makes sense, given the circumstances. When children see the adults who are important in their lives cooperating and respecting each other's role, there can be less loyalty conflict and anxiety. With less stress, youth have a better chance at expressing their feelings appropriately. Then caregivers can also spend less time de-escalating situations and more time wrapping presents and basting the turkey.

Following are a few ideas to consider that can pave the way for a happy holiday season. Think about and talk about what could make sense for the children in your home.

*Talk about holiday traditions from the child's memory and find ways to incorporate them into your plans*

*Make a plan for a visit or phone call with the parents during the holiday break*

*Help children create and mail holiday cards or letters for their parents or siblings who are not together*

*Understand and support the child's need for loyalty to his family*

*Take a picture of the foster family, including the caregivers and any birth children to display with holiday decorations*

*At a visit, snap a photo of the child and her parent. Display it at your home and frame a print as a gift*

*Host an overnight sibling visit while school is out*

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## New law allows schools to have epi-pens for allergy emergencies

Recent studies suggest that one in 13 children are affected by food allergies. Nearly 40 percent of children with food allergies have a history of severe reaction, and 30 percent are allergic to multiple foods. The most common food allergen is peanuts, followed by milk and shellfish.

Governor Pat Quinn in August signed legislation to increase access to potentially life-saving medicine for children with severe allergies. House Bill 3294, the School Access to Emergency Epinephrine Act, allows schools to stock and use epinephrine auto-injectors (often

known as "epi-pens") in the case of life-threatening allergic reactions.

Previously, students with severe allergies could carry their own personally-prescribed epi-pen at school and could allow specific school personnel to administer it in case of emergency. However, schools were prohibited from administering epinephrine auto-injectors to children that had forgotten their epi-pens or to children that had never been diagnosed with a severe allergy. Instead schools were required to dial 911, potentially losing key moments during a life-threatening reaction.

"When a child suffers a severe allergic reaction, every second counts," Governor Quinn said. "With food allergies on the rise, we take action to help children with dangerous allergies. This law allows our schools to be prepared and for school nurses to take the immediate action that could save a child's life."

Caregivers should continue to make sure children have their own epi-pens with them. With the new law, they can know that there is now another option in case of an emergency at school.

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## MOVIN' ON UP: *As youth transition to adulthood*

### *Youth take charge on advisory councils*

The Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) works closely with DCFS to provide their peers information about resources, opportunities, policies, and programs that affect all youth in care. The SYAB is “committed to youth empowerment, development, leadership, and achievement across the state of Illinois.”

The heart of the statewide board lies in the regional boards: Southern, Central, Northern and Cook County regions. Each region has five executive board members who serve also on the Statewide Youth Advisory Board.

Every year the SYAB discusses the youth-related issues and concerns within each region. Then the board votes on the initiatives to address in the current year. In 2011 the board focused on education and stability,

legislation, pregnant and parenting teens, and recruitment/retention.

The advisory boards are open to youth age 14-21 who are in DCFS care or who moved to adoption or guardianship. The SYAB hopes that caregivers will encourage youth to get involved in this leadership opportunity. The organizations that support the boards also assist in transportation with advance notice.

**Central - Champaign**  
3rd Wednesday, 6 to 8 p.m.  
1010 W. Nevada, Champaign  
School of Social Work

**Central - Springfield**  
3rd Tuesday, 6 to 8 p.m.  
Primed For Life  
816 S. College, Springfield

**Southern - Carterville**  
1st Monday, 6 to 8 p.m.  
700 John A Logan Dr.  
Carterville

**Northern Region**  
3rd Tuesday, 6 to 8 p.m.  
DCFS, 8 E. Galena  
Aurora

**Central - Peoria**  
3rd Monday, 6 to 8 p.m.  
DCFS, 2001 NE Jefferson,  
Peoria

**Cook Regions**  
3rd Thursday 6 to 8 p.m.  
DCFS, 1911 S. Indiana  
Chicago

**Southern - E. St. Louis**  
1st Tuesday, 6 to 8 p.m.  
(following week if month  
starts on Tuesday)  
602 James R Thompson  
ESTL Community College

**Contact: Cook/Northern**  
Tony Lawlor, 312-401-5462

**Contact: Central/Southern**  
Leshonda Rogers,  
217-789-2908

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## Holidays are the right time to bring siblings together for a visit



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

DCFS rules require that sibling visits among youth in DCFS care occur at least two times a month for a minimum of two hours each for all siblings placed apart. 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 unavail-

ability 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 providing transportation. A caregiver who hosts an overnight or weekend visit in their home can be reimbursed \$100 for supervising the visit, one time a month. Supervising shorter visits is reimbursed at \$25 an hour for up to four hours each month. Driving a child to or from a visit is also eligible for reimbursement at the rate of \$0.51 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.



# Illinois Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Bulletin

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council did double-duty for the September meeting. The regularly scheduled meeting began at 3:00 p.m., rather than in the morning. This was to accommodate the evening arrival of the Statewide Youth Advisory Board. Even with the adjusted schedule there was still a full agenda, covering several timely topics.

Many members were concerned about changes to list of psychotropic medications that would be approved for payment with the state medical card. Some spoke from personal experience and some on behalf of other caregivers. Lisa Arndt of the Department of Healthcare and Family Services came to explain the reasons for the changes. The Council also inquired about a change to end payment for certain over-the-counter products previously covered by the medical card. Members voted to form a committee to swiftly review the implications to caregivers and weigh in with comments.

*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.*



Janice Hopson



Doreen Henry

After an evening of more robust discussion, new members Doreen Henry and Janice Hopson felt thoroughly initiated. Hopson will represent Cook Central and Henry fills the post for a caregiver to serve jointly on the Child Welfare Advisory Council.

*The next meeting of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council will be on January 20 at 9 a.m. in Springfield. Call the Office of Caregiver and Parent Support at 217-524-2422 for details.*

## *Foster parent council meets with youth advisory board to discuss joint concerns*

The foster care council adjourned the September business meeting at 7 p.m. and welcomed members of the Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) and their support staff. The adults of the foster care council shared dinner and networked with the young people of the statewide youth board before the councils officially opened their joint meeting around 8 p.m.

Members of both groups introduced themselves then they eagerly participated an "icebreaker" activity that inspired everyone to get up and move around the room, intent on finding their assigned partner and getting to know one another before reporting out what they just learned. By design, adults were partnered with youth.

Getting down to business meant breaking into four regional groups

to discuss ideas and strategies for increasing the number of youth who participate in the youth board program. The discussions were lively as the groups quickly jumped into discussions and brainstormed.

Each group reported their ideas, while a young person recorded the ideas for future use. The SWYAB agreed to transcribe the ideas of each group and send them to the foster care council chair. Both groups will work on the activities



*Angela Barber, chair of the foster care council; Ray Gates of DCFS, vice-chair James McIntyre from the youth board; and Lynda Swan-McClendon of DCFS prepare for the joint meeting.*

assigned to them, and all agreed to continue the tradition of meeting together every September.

# Families and the Governor celebrate Adoption Month in Illinois

The Illinois Adoption Advisory Council joined with the adoption workers and other Cook County staff, for more than six months to plan every detail of the annual adoption celebration. The event was held Saturday, November 19 at the DCFS Cook South regional office on Emerald Street in Chicago. For nearly 100 adoptive parents and their children, the day proved to be an important learning and networking experience with some fun.



WHEREAS, adoption is a rewarding and enriching experience for individuals and couples who want to provide children with a stable, loving family environment; and,

WHEREAS, Illinois is recognized as a national leader in finding permanent homes for waiting children, placing more than 52 thousand foster children into adoptive and subsidized guardianship homes since 1997; and,

WHEREAS, largely because of its success in adoption recruitment, Illinois has become the first state in the nation to support more children in permanent adoption guardianship placements than in substitute care; and,

WHEREAS, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, the Child Care Association of Illinois, the Adoption Information Center of Illinois, the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council, the Illinois Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, the Chicago Bar Association, and the many Illinois child welfare agencies and adoptive parent groups all encourage families to consider adopting a child in need of a home; and,

WHEREAS, hundreds of children in Illinois are still awaiting adoption; and,

THEREFORE, I, Pat Quinn, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim November 2011 as **ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH** in Illinois, and encourage all families to consider adopting a child into their family.

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



*Dessie White*  
SECRETARY OF STATE

*Done at the Capitol, in the City of Springfield,*  
*this TWENTY-SIXTH day of OCTOBER, in*  
*the Year of Our Lord two thousand and*  
*ELEVEN, and of the State of Illinois*  
*the one hundred and NINETY-THIRD*

*Pat Quinn*  
GOVERNOR

DCFS adoption staff and other adoption experts provided presentations on the adoption process, post-adoption services and standby adoption. Caregivers could also choose from five different workshop topics ranging from educational resources to life books. The lunch break was designed to allow for networking and to view exhibits. The Heart Gallery displayed portraits of beautiful children who are seeking adoptive families. Professional photographers donated their time and expertise to highlight the youth.

Since the Cook County staff made arrangements to keep the children happy and busy, the adults had an opportunity to learn and make new friends. The day ended by reading the Adoption Month in Illinois proclamation from the Governor and enjoying plenty of cake. The Adoption Celebration all too quickly came to an end as adoptive parents re-claimed their children and left on a happy note filled with much new knowledge about adoption.

## Advisory Council provides platform for local foster care issues

The Southern Region Foster Care Advisory Council meets four times a year to discuss DCFS policy and practices that affect caregivers. The advisory council is structured to accommodate the vast area that comprises Southern Region. Caregivers can participate in person at one of several DCFS offices or by phone.

The meetings begin with a pre-meeting in each site at 6:00 p.m. to allow those present to get familiar with local issues. The various offices and individual callers are linked by teleconference starting at 6:30 p.m.

As one example of the kind of concerns the

council can address, a caregiver raised the issue about the length of time it takes for a child to receive specialized services. The caregiver reported that if a child is placed with a DCFS-supervised home it is sometimes three months after CAYIT approved changing the level of care before a private agency contacts them. In the meantime, the DCFS-supervised caregiver has to continue to provide care without the applicable resources.

Valda Haywood, Acting Regional Administrator, responded that DCFS does not have specialized foster care and that private agencies are contracted to do this. They can only

carry a limited number of specialized cases at a time. Haywood recommended that families work up the chain of command if timeframes are unreasonable. She also directed the supervisors in her chain to collect data on how often this happens so she can address it with the management team at the executive level.

If an issue has the potential to impact foster care homes across the state, the regional representatives can elevate it to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council.

All caregivers are encouraged to actively participate in the regional advisory council.

### Meeting Locations

Belleville Field Office  
1220 Centreville Ave. Ste. 101

Wood River Field Office  
1403 Vaughn Road

Effingham Field Office  
401 E. Industrial Blvd., Suite B

Mt Vernon Field Office  
321A Withers Drive

Marion Field Office  
107 Airway Drive

Cairo Field Office  
1315 Washington

### Meeting Dates

A calendar of the meeting dates for 2012 will be mailed to all Southern Region homes.

## Get all the news without the paper

Illinois Families Now and Forever will soon be available for digital download. Caregivers who prefer to enjoy the newsletter electronically can participate in a pilot program, starting in 2012.

Households that opt for the online version of the newsletter will still have access to all the information contained in the mailed copy. However, the digital version will be more convenient, more timely and more eco-friendly.

DCFS is committed to providing families the information you need in a way that is efficient, preserves resources and safeguards future funding.

To sign up for the electronic newsletter, send an email to the Editor at [vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov).

## *CASA speaks up for kids' interests in court*

ASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate. CASAs are specially trained volunteers and are assigned to cases of abused and/or neglected children by the juvenile court judge. The CASA speaks exclusively for the best interest of a foster child throughout the juvenile court process. The CASA volunteer searches for information, reviews records and interviews parents, teachers, neighbors, foster parents and, of course, the child. After completing this process a CASA makes recommendations to the judge as to what is in the best interest of the child.

In St. Clair and Monroe counties last fiscal year there were 104 CASA volunteers. Caregivers can request a CASA be assigned to represent a child placed with them through the caseworker. For more information go to [www.illinoiscasa.org](http://www.illinoiscasa.org).

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## Southern Region Caregiver Training

DCFS Office of Training has scheduled sessions of in-service training modules and other courses in locations across the Southern Region. The listing below can help caregivers plan for their training needs. To get specific dates and locations, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center (VTC) anytime at [www.DCFStraining.org](http://www.DCFStraining.org) or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during regular business hours. In addition to classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of videos, books and online training.

### DECEMBER

Educational Advocacy	Marion
Reunification Training	Vandalia, Alton
Module 12	Mt. Vernon
CPR/AED training (free)	Vienna

### In-service Training Modules (scheduled in classroom sessions and available on DVD)

For full descriptions of the Modules, log in to the VTC.

Module 1 – Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk (12 hours)

Module 2 – Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs (9 hours)

Module 4 – The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (9 hours)

Module 5 – Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families (9 hours)

Module 6 – Working as a Professional Team Member (9 hours)

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

Module 8 – Promoting Permanency Outcomes (9 hours)

Module 9 – Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family (6 hours)

Module 10 – Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children and Families (15 hours)

Module 12 – Understanding & Promoting Pre-Teen and Teen Development (6 hours)

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## 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 on the back page of 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 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 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 are having extreme family problems with your adopted child?** The Adoption/Subsidized Guardianship Preservation Program can provide in-home counseling and case services to help hold a family together. To find the program that serves your area call Cook County Post-Adoption/Guardianship Unit at 855-548-5505 or the subsidy worker in nearest DCFS regional office.

**...You have an idea for an article in the newsletter?** Each region has a regional reporter to help gather local news. The names and contact information are listed in the regional section of each edition. Or you can contact the Editor, Vanessa James, at 312-814-6824 or send an e-mail [vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov).



## 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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Department of Children and Family Services©

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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](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs)