

# Illinois Families Now and Forever

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship®

## DCFS sends 48 youth to college with scholarships

**T**hat magical period between high school and college was a dream come true for 48 students who earned the 2012 DCFS Scholarship. They head to school with medical benefits, a \$471 monthly maintenance grant and a waiver of tuition and mandatory fees if they attend one of the nine designated Illinois state universities or an Illinois community college.

The DCFS Scholarship Program is open to any college-bound youth with an open DCFS case or to youth who left DCFS custody through adoption or guardianship. This year more than 325 students applied. The selection committee pored over impressive submissions that highlighted the student's scholastic accomplishments, their demonstrated community involvement and compelling personal statements. After thorough review, the 48 recipients celebrated at a luncheon coordinated by the Division of Service Intervention and the Walter and Connie Payton Foundation. The luncheon was preceded by an informative session to prepare the young people for a successful start to their college careers. Then it was time for the fun. Alhambra restaurant provided a lush landscape for a buffet lunch and an upbeat program.

Director Calica encouraged the students to soak up knowledge and also all the experiences that come with college, even coping with  
*Continued on Page 2*



*The 48 recipients of the 2012 DCFS Scholarship Program celebrate the accomplishment at a July luncheon before heading to their new campuses and new academic pursuits.*

### 2012 DCFS Scholarship Recipients

Darrius Atkins	Riviera McCollum
Whitney Berman	Learesi Montes
Ciara Bleichner	Darcie Nettleton
Andrew Cerveny	Shannon Panzica
Shaneka Crawley	Amber Peterson
Daniel Daley	Michael Raab
Stephanie DeLong	Kaylee Randolph
Tasha Doerr	Teona Richmond
Danielle FitzSimmons	Janeya Rivers
Dante Gabourel	Kyle Robinson
Shannon Gaetz	Jarrett Roby
Jacob Griggs	Andrew Semkiw
Bianca Gruns	Ashley Shula
Stephon Harper	Jasmine Smith
Dustin Hicks	Nathaniel Stewart
Clairese Hollis	Chante Summers
Justin Jensen	Anthony Thomas
Myshell Johnson	Deziree Vaughn
Deanna Keller	Luella Villanueva
Thomas Korte	Shamir Villeda Cruz
Allison Mack	Tyisha Wheeler
Sarah Mann	Don Williams
Kimberlee Mathews	Jessica Wilson
Lesla McAuliff	Lucy Wylder

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## From the DCFS Director

**Richard H. Calica**



In the nine months that I have been DCFS Director, much has happened in terms of budget and programs and I believe caregivers deserve a candid snapshot of our current condition.

Each state department goes before the state's budget office in the spring to discuss how much money it needs to get the job done. The Governor then presents the overall budget to the state Legislature for approval and funding. However, this simple process often gets complicated by reality. Our state owes \$8 billion in unpaid bills, there's a \$2.6 billion Medicaid problem, and the pensions are grossly under funded. Even as I write this it is impossible to predict where all the dust will settle. By the time you read this, things could have changed significantly.

This is what I can tell you. The DCFS budget that was eventually approved by

the Legislature arrived at DCFS with deeper cuts than I anticipated. I knew I could cut 250 non-critical positions and move those employees to front-line jobs, serving families directly and providing us with adequate staff to do investigations and work with children in foster care. Yet, the budget handed down was slashed by \$50 million more than the Governor's budget proposed. The Legislature specifically targeted a \$27,000,000 reduction in staff salaries. That required a reduction in the DCFS workforce of 375 employees, beyond what was already in play. Thus, in August almost 600 employees received notice that their positions were being eliminated as of September 30.

Our agency has to focus our limited resources on the core, legally mandated responsibilities of safety, permanency and well-being. The positions targeted by the layoff were therefore concentrated in areas outside of those core responsibilities, even though the work done in those jobs may have had a very positive impact on the families we serve. No cuts were made to contracts or staff associated with foster care. At the same time, 200 direct service vacancies will be opened in casework and investigations. There is a very specific

process that the labor union must conduct to move employees into other positions. While the process is precise, it will not be neat and tidy. As it plays out, I can only ask for your patience.

Meanwhile, I have been working diligently to realign the agency's structure so that we can do more than just get the job done. We have to do a better job and do it more efficiently. We have moved resources in ways that make more sense and will lead to better outcomes. We have also lost programs that we simply could not afford to continue.

I know that we all do this work out of passion and with a purpose that cannot be quantified on a balance sheet. Given what we have to work with, I will ask you what I have asked of every DCFS staff member. In the midst of all this, we have to keep focused on serving children and families. With our help, children and families will feel safe and secure, will be able to engage in meaningful relationships, and will be able to work productively as students, parents, and employees. It is our core mission and it is one that together we can accomplish.

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## Scholarships, con't.

roommates. The words of the Chicago Bears legend Walter Payton echoed in the room as DCFS Guardian D. Jean Ortega-Piron read from his autobiography, "If you believe in something and you work at it, there is going to be hope and there is going to be a way," he stated. The Payton Foundation, the Department and the family members, caseworkers and mentors that supported the students helped make a way for these 48 to start a new chapter in their education life.

To give them a glimpse of what success can look like, two young people who had graduated college with the DCFS Scholarship addressed the audience. Kethan Hedrick graduated this spring after only three years, while caring for his younger siblings as an adoptive parent. He is about to begin law school. Denae Knox, a recipient from 1999, offered advice on putting past negative experiences in perspective and using them to drive you forward. Now on campus, the future shines brighter for 48 fortunate students.

*The DCFS Youth in Scholarship Program is available to youth currently in DCFS care and to those who left Department guardianship through adoption or private guardianship arrangements. The purpose of the program is to ensure that those selected have the opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree in four years or less.*

*Scholarship Program Student Applications are routinely available in January with a deadline of March 31. Applicants must have a high school diploma or GED by the end of the current school year. Contact the Office of Education and Transition Services at 312-814-5959 for more information.*



*The American Legion awarded \$300 scholarships to children of veterans: Jacob Griggs, Shannon Panzica, Teona Richmond, Kyle Robinson, Chante Summers, Luella Villanueva and Lucy Wilder.*



# Illinois Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Bulletin

The Northern Region hosted the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council for its July meeting in Aurora.

## Healthcare changes

The council continued to track the potential impact on families from the recently upheld federal Affordable Care Act and changes to the state Medicaid Program. Vince Champagne from the DCFS Office of Health Services reported that few of the Medicaid changes will directly affect children in care. The Department of Healthcare and Family Services did create guidelines about how to handle pre-approval for patients with more than 10 prescriptions. The good news announcement was that children in foster care are exempt. Staff in the Office of Health Services is available to answer other Medicaid questions at 312-814-5516.

## Media Campaign

Caregivers (and the general public) may soon see another phase of the Foster Kids Are Our Kids media campaign on television. Ann Klassman unveiled the newest public service commercials with the theme "Where is the love?" The public service announcements encourage individuals to take an active role in supporting youth in foster care.

## Discussion with Director Calica

The Director had frank discussion with the council on the budget situation and the agency restructuring. All direct service is in one place under one administrative structure. "Everything else is to help achieve our core mission of permanency, safety and well being," he said.

He also addressed the layoffs notices that had to be sent to 597 people,

a number much higher than he had planned before losing another \$50 million in the final budget. Many of those receiving notices are union employees so he is reviewing the options for laid off employees. Realistically, service level may degrade some as the dust settles. He is asking everyone to stay focused, remembering the most important job is to care for kids.



The council elected Gladys Boyd as vice chair and Cathy McCoy as chair for the new fiscal year.

## Caregivers help craft new Implementation plans

Each year the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council must review each of the foster care programs' Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans. The public period for review and comment begins in September. Typically the DCFS and private agency programs take any public input into consideration as they prepare the plans for 2013. The new plans will be due to the council by November 30.

The Foster Parent Law stipulates that agencies demonstrate that caregivers participated in creating the implementation plan. Typically they announce meetings in the fall to discuss the previous plan and changes for the new plan. The implementation plans must

clearly describe how each foster care program upholds the foster parent rights and responsibilities in the Law.

All caregivers can review the previous year's plan. Some programs mail the plan to licensed homes. Others may have copies available at the administrative offices. If a foster caregiver needs more information about the actual plan or the process for drafting the new plan, each program has a Foster Parent Law liaison. The liaison is the primary contact for matters concerning the Law. Caregivers can also contact the DCFS Office of Caregiver and Parent Support at 217-524-2422 for assistance.

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 October 19 in Effingham at 9 a.m.

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

## More than just a free lunch with completed forms

Among the many forms that schools require families to complete, one that is especially important is the application for free or reduced price school meals (commonly referred to as the free lunch form). Funding from federal resources is often based on the number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. Additionally, the income information from the applications can determine what programs a school may be able to offer.

Students who have an open DCFS case will automatically qualify for free meals. The form asks for a check mark “if a foster child (legal responsibility of welfare agency or court).” However, once a child moves to adoption, his or her case is closed; there is no longer an automatic qualification. Adoptive parents will have to complete the

form with income information to determine if the family is eligible for free or reduced lunch based on income.

Some families choose not to apply, knowing their income will not be eligible. Still, it is important to write that on the form, sign it and return it. From the school’s perspective, every form counts when funding is at stake.

As one more reason to fill in the form, consider this warning. Some caregivers have reported that their child received meals at a reduced rate without a form, and then received a bill at the end of the year. The DCFS Educational Advisors urge caregivers to return the forms promptly so they take advantage of the benefits and avoid possible problems.

## State fair tradition continues



*The Sally family of Creve Coeur enjoyed discounted fun at the fair.*

Attending the state fair in Springfield and in DuQuoin has become a long-standing tradition for foster, adoptive and guardianship families. Families receiving DCFS support came in droves. In addition to reduced rate parking and admission to the fair, DCFS pro-

vided each eligible family member discounted carnival rides and \$3 in free meal tickets. The State’s budget constraints prevented DCFS from sponsoring free bus transportation this year, but families carpoled and otherwise still found a way to make the trip.

At the DuQuoin State Fair, families gathered on Saturday, August 25 for a picnic-setting that included rides, games and food. Local organizations made contributions, and DCFS staff volunteered weekend time to ensure everyone had fun.

This year, DCFS sent out tickets to more than 800 foster, adoptive and guardianship families for Springfield. More than 150 families requested tickets to the picnic at the DuQuoin fair.

## Fall flu season calls for flu vaccination

Getting the flu vaccination in October through December is the primary tool for preventing influenza. Most people over the age of five months can get the flu shot, including breast-feeding mothers.

Some of the symptoms associated with the flu are fever, headache, cough, sore throat, chills and fatigue. Some people are at higher risk of complications from having the flu, such as developing pneumonia. Those people who may be at higher risk for complications are children between six months and five years, pregnant women, people 50 years or older, and those with chronic illnesses.

The flu vaccination is available at no charge through the Vaccination of Children Program for those children enrolled in Medicaid; children with no health insurance; or children whose health insurance plans do not include vaccinations. For more information about the upcoming flu season, contact the Illinois Department of Health at 217-782-4977.

### *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](mailto: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.*

# Our Kids

News for Southern  
Region Families

## Southern region sends 7 to college with DCFS full scholarships

This year, seven students whose cases were served by programs in the DCFS Southern Region headed to college with the benefits included in the DCFS Scholarship program. The scholarship includes a waiver of tuition and mandatory fees at one of the nine Illinois state universities or an Illinois community college, a monthly maintenance grant of \$471 and a medical card.

Scholarship recipients were chosen statewide on the basis of scholastic aptitude, a written personal statement and demonstrated community involvement. Next year's scholarship application process begins in January and ends in March. Contact the youth's caseworker or the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services at 312-814-5959 for more information on the scholarship program.

### Tasha Doerr

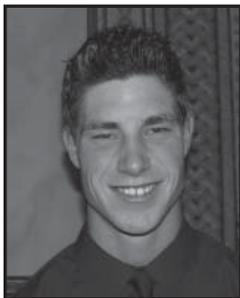
Tasha, from Mulkeytown, graduated from Sesser-Valier High School where she earned a 4.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale. While in high school Tasha participated on the basketball, volleyball, and track teams and was a member of the art club, student government, and the National Honor Society. She was recognized as an Illinois State Scholar and received an All-State Academic Team Honorable Mention for her combined athletic and academic achievements. Tasha now attends McKendree University and is deciding on a major.



### Deanna Keller

Deanna, from Vandalia, graduated from St. Elmo Jr/Sr High School where she earned a 3.98 GPA on a 4.0 scale. She was a member of the National Honor Society and she earned multiple academic awards in high school in the areas of biology, chemistry, history and English, including

selection as a National Scholar by the Horatio Alger Foundation. Deanna earned work experience as a waitress and also volunteered with her youth group and local vet clinic. Now Deanna is now a student at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, majoring in veterinary medicine.



### Dustin Hicks

Dustin, from Scheller, is a graduate of Sesser-Valier High School. He earned a 3.99 out of 4.0 GPA. While in high school, he played football, basketball and was on the track team. Dustin earned his Associates of Arts and Science degree from Rend Lake College. While in college,

Dustin worked at his high school through the Rend Lake student worker program. This year Dustin has transferred to Southern Illinois University at Carbondale where he is majoring in pre-physical therapy.



### Thomas Korte

Thomas is graduate of Highland High School. He earned a 4.16 GPA on a 5.0 scale. Thomas enjoyed varsity football and bowling in high school. He volunteered as a basketball coach and also volunteered at Highland Elementary School, working with second graders. Thomas is now

studying mechanical engineering at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.

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## Scholarships, con't.



### **Darcie Nettleton**

Darcie, from Olney, graduated from East Richland High School where she earned a 4.36 GPA on a 5.0 scale. In high school Darcie was involved in the JROTC program and was a battalion commander for three years. She was awarded the "Rising Above and Beyond the Call of Duty"

award as well as the "Super Cadet" award for her outstanding dedication and commitment. Now, Darcie is attending Olney Central College with plans to major in mathematics.



### **Chante Summers**

Chante, from Bethalto, is a now a sophomore at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville. She has earned a 4.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale and is majoring in chemistry. She is a volunteer with the Big Sisters Program, a member of the Campus Crusade for Christ and Wagner Potter's Association.

Chante is also the recipient of the SIUE Johnetta Haley Scholarship for academic excellence.



### **Don Williams**

Don is a 2012 graduate of Belleville Township High School, where he earned a 3.5 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. Don always maintained good grades and, as a result of his multiple academic achievements, he received an invitation to and attended the inauguration of President Barack

Obama. Currently Don is studying at the University of Illinois at Chicago and will major in Biology.

## *New Regional Administrator is right at home in Southern Region*

As part of the restructuring of DCFS, the functions that most impact children are going to be in one service unit. In the Southern Region, newly announced Regional Administrator Derek Hobson will oversee the Department's interventions, spanning from the investigation, through foster care or other placement, including services to parents and on to subsequent adoption/guardianship.

Hobson has been with the Department for 28 years, all spent in Southern Region. He began his career in Child Protection as an investigator. His path in administration took him through the contract function, evaluating programs that served families in the Southern Region. Most recently, he served as the Statewide Contracts Administrator. Even in that, he kept his base here and was involved in establishing

many local offices and monitoring programs to benefit Southern Region families.

"I look forward to continuing a working relationship with foster parents," Hobson said.

He was able to start that relationship at the DuQuoin State Fair picnic for caregivers. Hobson invites caregivers to stay active in the Regional Advisory Council so they can offer their insight on the children in their care, the services they receive and resources that may be needed. Additionally, families served by the DCFS regional foster care program will receive notice about upcoming meetings to draft the new Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan.

Hobson can be reached in the East St. Louis regional office at 618-583-2600 or in Marion at 618-993-7100.



*Derek Hobson (right) joined caregivers at the DuQuoin State Fair picnic for foster and adoptive families.*

## Southern Region Training

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](http://www.DCFstraining.org). Click on any of the links under Training Schedule to access course descriptions, in-service training and Educational Advocacy Training.

The Virtual Training Center (VTC) is your tool to:

- See training news and general information
- Check available trainings
- View/Print your training transcript
- Register and take on-line courses

Or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877-800-3393 during business hours.

### Training course materials now available online

As the Department has fewer printing resources available and moves into the digital age, the Office of Training has responded by making more materials available online. Caregivers can easily access many PRIDE materials on the home page of the Virtual Training Center at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org). Anyone may print the materials or download them for ready access on their mobile device during class. For most courses, individual sets of printed materials will no longer be given to all participants. However, those who do not have electronic access should speak with their trainers when they arrive to class, so they can be accommodated.

### Lending Library Update

Due to reduced human and dollar resources the DCFS Lending Library has limited capacity to ship materials to caregivers. Although we will continue to ship as we are able, we need to avoid depleting these resources before the end of this fiscal year. Therefore, we are asking that caregivers go to [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org) and view the recently-updated lending library catalog. Find resources you wish to use and please go to your local library to order them. Most libraries can get materials from other libraries if they do not have them in their own stock.

To receive credit hours to meet licensing requirements, caregivers should complete and return the Training Credit Approval Form (TCAF). The Office of Training recently re-evaluated the eligible credit hours for items in the updated Lending Library catalog. The TCAF will reflect the credit hours. In-class and on-line courses will continue to receive credit based on the approved clock hour.

## 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 family problems with your adopted child?*

Contact the Adoption/Subsidized Guardianship Preservation Program that

serves your area. Call the subsidy worker in the nearest regional office or the toll-free number to the subsidy unit 855-548-5505.

### *...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 caseworker?*

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



## Illinois Families Now and Forever

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