

Parr family appreciates the long-term links

After providing foster care to almost 100 children over 25 years, Dan and Arlene Parr cherish the long-term connections they still have with many. Having done emergency placements, return homes and adoptions, they experienced many highs and lows. However, the surprise phone calls and visits from kids formerly in their care are special gifts. These connections help give them a positive perspective on their devotion to foster care.

Almost 20 years ago in 1981, an eight-year-old girl lived with them for just six months. She was ambivalent about going back home to her mother right up to the day she had to leave. Eleven years later, she phoned the Parr's from Alabama where she had settled with her husband and two children. Later she brought her family up for a visit. She brought flowers for Arlene. The extended family had dinner and a lovely trip down memory lane.

Dan had a more recent connection that stood out for him. Last year, a young man who was with the family for one month last year called him on Father's Day.

"We have been kicked, pinched, punched, spat on, cursed at,

accused of child abuse, and threatened with calls to DCFS or the police...We have also had 'I love you' letters and cards, hugs and kisses, and children asking to return to our home when they have had to go back into foster care," said Arlene.

Some seeds take longer to grow, but blossom with surprising beauty. The Parr's had once been foster parents to two sisters. In just two months they had left an impression. They were unhappy about being with the family and showed it over and over again. This past summer, after 20 years without a word from them, the Parrs got a phone call. The "girls" at age 29 and 30 were living in Tennessee, married with children of their own. When the younger called, one of the first things she said was, "we gave you a lot of trouble didn't we?"

The call was followed with e-mail notes and pictures sent back and forth. The whole exchange was unexpected and exciting for Dan and Arlene. They had initially thought these two would not be able to make it.

"It is a thrill to see that they are doing well. Even though it seemed our influence did not take effect,



Dan and Arlene Parr

something about our nurturing did stick with them," said Arlene.

Some connections take unexpected turns. Through the daughter they adopted at 11, now the Parrs have a two-year-old granddaughter living with them. Their daughter's older sister lived with them too, but was not adopted. She left the home after six years, but is again part of the family.

"Some of our kids were with us only overnight; some a few months, and others for a few years. They are all special in their own way. When they keep in touch later it makes it all worthwhile," said Arlene.

She hopes that foster parents will remember not to give up, even on particularly difficult children. The influence foster parents have may remain dormant, "but could blossom when you least expect it."

From the Regional Administrator

To the Central Region families, I extend a warm thank you during Foster Parent Appreciation Month. Because of your commitment, day in and day out, the young people you take care of are in a better place with a brighter future.

We don't expect you to carry the load alone. In 2006 we restructured and hired new regional staff to bring a higher degree of service to families. My hope is that you can feel the results. We also continue to work closely with the private agency programs that serve many foster homes in Central Region.

In February and March, we introduced foster parents to the Department's new birth parent initiatives, by hosting three sessions of the Caregivers Institutes on reunification. We have a head start in our region, because so many of you have already demonstrated a willingness to work more interactively with both children and their parents as they move toward returning home. In the coming months, we will introduce even more resources to support you.

Central region has more than 2,651 licensed foster homes meeting the needs of 4,403 youth with varying permanency goals and a range of special needs. With every sibling visit, school conference and birth parent that you mentor, you are improving the safety, well-being and permanency of the children in your care. Thank you.

Robert T. Blackwell
Regional Administrator

Caregivers get preview of reunification

The 2007 Caregiver Institutes this year focused on *Building Families: Connecting Caregivers, Parents and Youth*. The DCFS Office of Foster Parent Support Services presented the daylong training that previewed the Department's new emphasis on reunification.

Caregivers attended three events in Charleston, Rock Island and Bloomington. The morning opened with several young people and a foster parent sharing their perspectives on maintaining connections to families of origin while in foster care. After their moving personal testimonials, Regional Administrator Robert Blackwell gave an overview of recent changes at the Department and how they affect foster families.

For the remainder of the day, caregivers had an opportunity to learn how they can interact with parents, collaborate with caseworkers and support children's emotional needs when the goal is to return home. A video presentation of parents whose children had been in DCFS care dramatically described what it was like while they were apart from their children and how they worked to reunite their family.

"It was a wonderful chance to have caregivers, staff and youth in the same room learning how to work together to achieve the best outcomes for children," said Ray Gates, Administrator for the Office of Foster Parent Support Services.



Regional Administrator Bob Blackwell spoke with caregivers during the lunch break at the Charleston institute.

DCFS held nine institutes in locations throughout the state, from February through April. Many DCFS staff representing several Department divisions and agencies helped plan and present the workshops.

"Each year, we sponsor these institutes so our caregivers can have first hand information about DCFS initiatives that will help them care for children more effectively," said Clinical Division Deputy Director Velma Williams. "I am pleased that the feedback from caregivers was so positive."

After each session, the caregivers filled out an evaluation form. They also submitted questions they had about reunification. In many cases, questions were answered that same day. Their feedback was also used to tailor the presentations at subsequent institutes.

Groups and associations offer advice and assistance statewide

DCFS, private agencies and community initiatives have sponsored many support groups and associations to assist foster and adoptive parents. The following lists can help identify a group that may suit your family. This list is a beginning and will be updated. Please contact the Editor at 312-814-6824 with any corrections or information on other groups that should be listed.

CENTRAL ILLINOIS ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Contact: Candy Ogden
309-662-3349
2206 Oakwood Ave., Bloomington
Serves families in Dewitt, Fulton,
Ford, Logan, Mason, McLean and
Woodford counties

CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

Contact: Bessie Rush
309-682-4621
Meets monthly (September to
May) from 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Glen Oak Christian Church
1115 E. Republic, Peoria
Serves Peoria families

KEEPING THE PROMISE – CHAMPAIGN COUNTY AND MCLEAN COUNTY

Contact: Maggie Gould
309-454-1770

LAND OF LINCOLN FAPA

Contact: Cindy Backstein
217-498-8774 or
backstein@mchsi.com
Meets third Monday at 6 p.m.
Carol Jo Vecchie Center
9th and Carpenter, Springfield
E-mail newsletter available

LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF IL ADOPTIVE FAMILIES TOGETHER

Contact: Susan Goble
309-786-6400
Meets third Thursday from 6 p.m.
to 7:30 p.m.
4709 44th St. Suite 1, Rock Island
Childcare available with reservation

LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF IL ADOPTIVE FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP

Contact: Alisa Hilliard or Jill Harris
at 309-671-0300
Meets 4th Wednesday of the
month from 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
3000 W. Rohmann Ave., West
Peoria

For adoptive families and those
waiting to adopt or with pre-
adoptive placements

LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF IL ADOPTIVE PARENT SUPPORT GROUP

Contact: Judie Watson
217-398-3011
Meets third Thursday of the
month from 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
103 S. County Fair Dr., Champaign
Childcare available with reservation
Open to adoptive and pre-
adoptive families

PARENT TO PARENT (LSSI)

Contact: Bea Voris
217-348-3333
Meets third Thursday at 7 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran Church
9th and Cleveland, Charleston
Serves families in Cumberland,
Clark, Coles and Edgar counties

SAFE HOMES FOR KIDS

Contact: Joyce Loy
309-794-3575
Meets third Tuesday at 9 a.m.
starting in June
DCFS Office
500 42nd Street, Rock Island

SOUTH CENTRAL ILLINOIS ADOPTIVE PARENTS ASSOCIATION (SCIAPA)

Contact: Karen deCastro
217-793-9646
www.sciapa.org
5004 Manhattan Dr., Springfield
Serves families in Sangamon,
Christian, Macon, Montgomery,
Morgan and Menard counties

Central Connections

Sponsor

Robert Blackwell, DCFS
Central Regional Administrator

Regional Reporter

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

Families get help with autism

Central region families can learn more about autism through assessment, treatment and support services offered by the Autism Program of Central Illinois. The organization operates from locations in Springfield, Champaign and Normal to serve children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders and their families.

The Program provides an initial screening and makes recommendations of the most appropriate assessment resource. If it is believed that the child might have an autism spectrum disorder, then a full assessment can be performed. A team of clinical experts will provide a diagnosis and recommendations for supports needed at home and school.

Family treatment and consultation are also available as a way of strengthening the family's relationship with the autistic child. Through the year, they also conduct seminars on autism throughout central Illinois. Several of their programs provide support groups where the parents meet in a group while the children are in their own group. Autism Centers also connect families for peer support.

For more information contact Anna Morgan at 217-525-8332 or visit www.theautismprogram.org.

Central Region Training Calendar

Transition to centralized training to finish in June

Starting July 1, the DCFS Office of Training & Professional Development will oversee and deliver all courses for caregivers. The transition from the local Pride colleges and universities that were performing this function in the past will be completed June 30.

Bringing it all under the roof at DCFS will allow the state to increase the amount of Pre-service and the variety of In-service training classes offered to meet the needs of caregivers.

Going into the new fiscal year, the DCFS Training Office is prepared to continue training offerings as caregivers have been accustomed, with some improvements. There is now one main number to call for customer services including registration, transcript requests and training-related questions. That number is 877-800-3393. The course schedule for pre-service and in-service training is on the DCFS Web site at www.state.il.us/dcfs. It is updated frequently and subject to change, so caregivers should always call first to register.

The Lending Library continues, but request forms should be faxed to Springfield at 217-557-4349 or 217-782-9301. Caregivers with training credit approval forms should mail them to:
 DCFS Office of Training
 ATTN: Jean Maher
 406 E. Monroe Station 122
 Springfield IL 62701

Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hrs.

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/ Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

Call the DCFS Office of Training to Register
877-800-3393

Peoria	<i>Children's Home</i>
June 11 & 13 (Mon & Wed)	6-9 p.m.
West Peoria	<i>Lutheran Social Svcs. of Illinois</i>
June 11 & 18 (Mon)	6-9 p.m.
Normal	<i>BabyFold</i>
July 16 & 23 (Mon)	6:30-9:30 p.m.