

Wishards have recipe for blending teen boys into the mix

Often in foster homes (and many non-foster homes) the mother shoulders the majority of the daily caregiving responsibilities. In Scott and Delores Wishard's home in Mattoon, they take a different approach. Scott Wishard is the stay-at-home dad for three sons by adoption and guardianship and their daughter by birth whose health requires full-time care. Despite two kidney transplants, he can still take up the parenting reins when Delores leaves for work at her second shift job. They find their "non-traditional" set-up still provides just the right structure to take care of teenage boys who previously struggled to find stability and success.

The door to foster care opened for the Wishards 10 years ago when, after being involved with youngsters in different settings, they were asked to take guardianship of a 12-year-old boy with an open DCFS case. They felt they had a calling for caring for troubled teen boys. One teen joined their family at 15, after being in close to 20 foster homes. Yet, he responded to Scott and Delores. They adopted him and had two years together before he died in a car accident.

Kelly Compton, DCFS licensing worker, said, "This is a very exceptional home. Seeing the

changes in these boys is miraculous."

More than 25 young men have called the Wishard home their home. Most of them came under difficult circumstances and with rough challenges to overcome.

"Sometimes it's tough to get the kids to see the light," Scott said. "They are not used to rules and having them enforced."

The Wishards believe every child is unique and functions differently; consequently, you need to have realistic goals based on that child's abilities. The goals must be reachable. Children need to focus on their strengths. The parenting "bottom line" for Scott and Dolores is to insure their children have faith in themselves.

Despite the expected frustrations and occasional setbacks, they enjoy seeing the growth that these boys can achieve. They attribute this to the structure they provide in their home, creating a safe and stable environment.

"Kids can see if you are really trying and are there for them," Scott said.



"Generally when that happens, kids see the light."

When the Wishards look back on their experiences in foster care, they offer these recommendations: do not jump into foster care over your head; have realistic goals; don't take too many kids; and learn what your limitations are in foster care.

To be a good foster parent, they feel that caregivers need patience, a good temperament, understanding and an ability to be firm. Equally important, they say you need to be willing to deal with many issues, be committed to hard work and be flexible. With those ingredients, their recipe for foster care with teenaged boys seems to be working well for them and the boys.

LAN 13 helps Macoupin and Montgomery county students succeed

Local Area Network (LAN) 13 is home to the After School Group. Catholic Charities began the group in 2007 for what was only to be a summer program for youth ages 12 to 16. The teens liked their group so much that they clamored for it to continue into the school year.

The group’s main goal is to increase school attendance and performance. However, many topics are addressed to accomplish that goal. Even though the students all have school attendance issues in common, there are many different factors that are affecting their lives. Like many young people, they may struggle with depression, bulimia, over-eating, suicide, cutting, risk taking or drug abuse. A majority of the youth in the group has had at least one psychiatric hospitalization. Fortunately, by having a safe place to work through their personal challenges, students learn to face school with a more positive outlook. They spend time each week reading and discussing their reactions to the book they have selected. Despite all that they must deal with, each youth is making progress. They are learning how to cope with the factors affecting their lives.

Dawn Morris has been with the group from the beginning. She has coordinated efforts with countless support providers over the years to meet the student’s needs. She even takes care of transportation for the teens to get from school to the group, which is complicated because they

can live anywhere in Macoupin or Montgomery counties. That task is on top of creating special programming and the all-important refreshments served at each meeting. The fact that students voluntarily attend each week speaks to how valuable they find the group.

To make a referral to join the After School Group, caregivers can contact Diane Copeland at Catholic Charities 217-854-4511. There are plans to start a similar group for Greene and Jersey county students.

School help in other areas of Central Region

There are similar programs for youth living in the other LANs in Central Region. For more information on local resources contact one of the DCFS LAN Liaisons. These services are open to all families, including foster, adoptive and guardianship families.

Champaign area:

Lisa Massa
217-278-5400
email: lisa.massa@illinois.gov

Peoria and Quincy areas:

Greg Hixon
217-779-2522
email: greg.hixon@illinois.gov

Springfield area:

Kip Smith
217-854-2566
email: kip.smith@illinois.gov

Facebook call for help transforms Bloomington visiting rooms for kids’ families



Jami and Clint Kaeb became interested in foster care while waiting to complete a second adoption. For Jami, the notion extended beyond their home to include transforming the visiting rooms where children come to share time with their parents at the offices for DCFS and Catholic Charities in Bloomington. Kaeb put out the word on Facebook, resulting in \$3000 donated and a group of more than 20 volunteers for the “extreme makeover.”

The group replaced all the toys, added new furniture and cleaned carpets. They even cleaned windows, screens, the lobby and the bathrooms.

“They are amazing people who worked very hard for two days. Unless you really see it, you cannot appreciate all they did,” Dianna Whiteside, a DCFS office associate said of the new room.



Education Advisors explain new Response to Intervention process

The Central Region Education Advisors want caregivers to know about Response to Intervention (RtI). This new program will be 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 about RtI:

1. Is the school district currently using an RtI process to provide additional support to struggling students? If not, do they 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 the teacher 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?

Contact a DCFS Education Advisor:

Champaign Sub-Region

Ann Wells
2900 N. Oakland, Decatur, IL 62526
217-875-6568

Peoria Sub-Region

Kristal Shelvin
2001 NE Jefferson, Peoria, IL 61603
309-671-7952

Springfield Sub-Region

Mary Chepulis
521 S. 11th St., Springfield, IL 62702
217-557-3985



Team building was the main focus of the Central Region Caregiver Institute held in Danville. Judy Rehder (center) led a discussion on how to get the most out of Child and Family Team meetings.

Central Connections

Sponsor

Robert Blackwell, DCFS Central Regional Administrator

Regional Reporter



Sam Saladino, Peoria Field Office
2001 NE Jefferson, Peoria IL 61603
E-mail Samuel.Saladino@illinois.gov
Phone: 309-671-7921
Fax: 309-671-7923

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.



Central Region Caregiver Training

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Training. The descriptions below will allow you to decide which classes fit your family's needs or circumstances. Advance registration is required for all classes. In addition to the slate of classroom courses, caregivers can also take advantage of Digital Pride modules on CD and the full offering of Lending Library materials.

For the most up-to-date and complete schedule information for classes offered in your area, 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.

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

This module focuses on building self-esteem in children. It covers how kids act when they need recognition, power, freedom, enjoyment, and a feeling of belonging. Caregivers will learn how to listen to what kids say and not what we think they say.

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

This workshop provides practical information to foster parents about how to use effective discipline techniques such as I-messages, natural and logical consequences, time out and how to catch kids being "good" and what to do to encourage positive behavior.

Module 3 & 4 - The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (9 training hours)

Participants learn to differentiate normal from problematic sexual behaviors in children and youth, signs and symptoms of sexual abuse and ways to help sexually abused children recover.

Module 5 - Supporting Relationships between Children and Their Families (9 training hours)

This training focuses on helping foster parents learn how to help kids attach to caregivers and at the same time stay loyal to birth families. Caregivers learn about how to prepare and support children for and after visits with the birth family and how to share the parenting role with birth parents.

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

Foster parents learn team members' roles, when and how to be an advocate for children, what conflict is and their own

personal style for managing it, and how conflict can be a "win - win" situation for everyone involved.

Module 7 - Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity (6 training hours)

Culture includes traditions, values, customs and history. What "culture" means to a child's self-esteem, how to manage cultural diversity in a foster home, how to discuss sensitive issues with children and how to help a child record his or her history are topics covered in this module.

Module 8 - Promoting Permanency Outcomes (9 training hours)

The focus of this training is on families who have children in care and supporting reunification of the children and parents.

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

In this training, caregivers learn how fostering children can affect family relationships and how to minimize stresses that can result. They also learn about the supports that are available.

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

Foster parents study the risk factors for chemical use, abuse, and dependency and understand relapse and recovery and be able to acquire skills necessary to be an active member of the team to support recovery in birth parents.

Module 12 - Understanding and Promoting Preeteen and Teen Development (6 training hours)

This new course assists caregivers to identify developmentally appropriate ways to best

promote healthy development for preteens and teens who have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma. This six-hour module will help foster/adopt caregivers understand teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use when fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.

The Teen in Foster Care: Supporting Attachment (6 training hours)

Attachment and the Teen in Family Foster Care will help foster/adopt caregivers to understand how early attachment experiences have impacted the teen's development. The training covers the teen's perspective on how the accumulation of loss, separation and trauma impacts his or her beliefs, feelings, behaviors and relationships. Participants will learn specific tips for helping manage behaviors that develop over time from the teen's adaptive responses to trauma, grief and loss.

Educational Advocacy 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.