

Education Advisors are on call to help with school issues

Caregivers can count on a team of three professionals to help with education issues for youth attending school systems in the Northern Region. 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.



**Rhonda
Best**

Education Advisor Rhonda Best and Assistant Advisor Aundrea Nabors work from the Rockford office. They handle questions from families who live in the following counties: Boone, Carroll, Jo Daviess, Lake, Lee, McHenry, Ogle, Stephenson, Whiteside and Winnebago. Robena Morgan recently transferred to the Northern region, to replace Mitch Kremer. She will be available to assist families who live in DeKalb, DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall and Will counties. Morgan works from the Joliet office.



**Aundrea
Nabors**



**Robena
Morgan**

The advisors all come with a wealth of knowledge and experience in education. Having taught in schools before joining DCFS, they know how to navigate the system from that side. They understand school instructors and staff members. Moreover, they identify with and highly value foster parents and the children in their homes. They recognize and empathize with the frustrations and needs of both, making them invaluable advocates.

They can advocate effectively, because they know what children have the right to expect from school. The advisors are each well-versed in the federal and state education laws and DCFS Rule 314 concerning education services that must be provided to children in DCFS care.

It is important to recognize that every school can have a slightly different way of doing things. The education advisors can help caregivers be better advocates. 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 can assist with the assessments and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for special education. When there are behavioral issues, they can work out an intervention with the school. They also will help caregivers plan for education after high school.

When the advocates were asked what would they like to say to foster parents or caseworkers, their answer was simple: Don't wait, just call.

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Recently, the advisors have been holding "drop-in" events called Helping With School Problems on the second Tuesday each month going from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Rockford office, 107 North Third Street. Caregivers are invited to stop by informally to discuss education issues that they may be facing with the children in their care. The advisors will be on hand with general tips and strategies and will make time for individual, confidential discussion as well.

Northern Region students earn DCFS college scholarships

The 2009 DCFS Scholarship program sent seven students, whose cases were served by programs in the Northern Region, to college with several added layers of support. The scholarship includes the waiver of tuition and mandatory fees at one of the nine Illinois state universities or an Illinois junior 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.



Shawna Bocek

Shawna is a 2009 graduate of Plano High School where she earned a 3.56 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. She participated in many school activities including track, volleyball, chess club, marching band, symphonic band, and pep band. Shawna achieved Honor Roll and High Honor Roll recognition. She received five first place awards and one second place award in solo and ensemble music competitions, along with the Illinois Music Achievement Award for participating in both Symphonic and Marching Band. Shawna now attends Northern Illinois University, where she will pursue a double major in psychology and music education.



Heather Burgard

Heather, formerly of Rockford, is a 2009 graduate from Lone Oak High School, in Paducah, Kentucky, where she earned a 3.56 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. Heather was a member of her high school's Color Guard, Math Club, and Biology Club. She was on the Honor Roll and was commended as an Outstanding Student for Excellent Academic and Disciplinary Record for 2006 – 2008. Outside of school, she volunteered with the seniors, nursing home, and children's church ministries within her church. In her job at the local Chuck E. Cheese, she earned Employee of the Month honors. Heather is studying at St. Louis University in St. Louis and plans to major in pediatrics.



Carol Drey

Carol is a 2009 graduate of Morrison High School where she earned a 3.5 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. Carol participated in cheerleading, track and field, Student Council, Prom Committee, Madrigals, Robed Choir and Concert

Choir. She was a class officer each year during high school. Carol achieved Honor Roll recognition and was a member of the National Honor Society. Carol was also one of only six students in her class chosen to be a D.A.R.E. Role Model. Role models are chosen based on grades, attendance, and attitude. Carol is now a student at Sauk Valley Community College, pursuing a degree in Early Childhood Education.



John Gaspar

John, from Lombard, is a 2008 graduate of Glenbard East High School where he earned a 4.08 grade point average on a 5.0 scale. John participated on the track team and in Big Brothers/Big Sisters while in high school. He was very active in the school theatre where he worked in lighting, sound, scenery, props, publicity, and ushering. John completed a service learning project that required him to work on the campaign that elected Steve Sauerberg to the U.S. Senate. John completed his freshman year at the College of DuPage and recently transferred to Western Illinois University to continue pursuing his degree in Criminal Justice.

Sabra Julian

Sabra, formerly from Bolingbrook, is a 2009 graduate of Laurel Springs High School in Magnolia, Texas. There she earned a 3.94 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. She is member of the National Honor Society and an accomplished artist who has been the recipient of awards for both her art work and vocal performance. Sabra has traveled extensively and resided for two years with her family on Sakhalin Island in Russia. She volunteered at an after school program where she taught art and tutored students in math and reading. Sabra is studying at Trinity University, where she plans to major in fine arts with music and psychology.



Brian Nissen

Brian is a 2009 graduate of Freeport High School where he was an accomplished musician and member of the Marching Band, Jazz Band, Symphonic Band, and the Rockford Wood Ensemble Honor's Band. The many instruments he plays include: piano, clarinet, bass clarinet, double bass fiddle, electric bass, tuba, harmonica, acoustic and electric guitar. Brian is also a leader in Student Ministries at Crossroads Community Church, where he participated in mission trips and is a member of the Student Ministries Band. He maintains part-time employment at McDonalds. Brian is now studying music at Highland Community College.



Kaera Watson

Kaera, of Davis Junction, graduated in 2009 from Stillman Valley High School, where she achieved a 9.3 grade point average on an 11.0 scale. She was a member of the National Honor Society, earned Perfect Attendance for four years, and was named Student of the Month her sophomore and junior year. Kaera was also the coordinator for Students for Students, Athletes for Literacy, and Reading Buddies which both promote literacy to young children. She received the Northern Illinois Red Ribbon Youth Award for promoting drug-free life. She was a mentor for Big Brothers/Big Sisters and volunteered with the CLOWNS program (Children Learning Other Ways Naturally). Kaera is now a student at Quincy University, where she will major in Elementary Education.

Caregiver recruitment targets specific areas and Spanish-speakers

DCFS is rolling out a targeted recruitment effort across the state. In Northern Region, there are four councils developing the strategy and conducting the outreach to communities where the number of cases outpaces the number of available homes. They are focusing efforts to identify more resources in or near Rockford, Joliet, Round Lake and DeKalb.

The councils are made up of child welfare staff from a variety of functions in both DCFS and private agency programs. Caregivers are also encouraged to join the recruitment effort. Together they will attend community events, visit churches and reach out to schools to create awareness about the value and rewards of foster care.

Frank Navarro, the DCFS Resource Manager, said that the councils are holding or attending one to four events each month and are seeing some results. Each council tracks the individuals that could be prospective caregivers. They follow up with a phone call at 90 days. They also work to match the prospect with licensing staff to they can take the next steps, including Foster PRIDE training.

There is a real need for more homes where Spanish is spoken. The recruitment councils are collaborating with the Latino Consortium. That effort will include televised announcements on Univision, the Spanish-language television network.

While the steering committee is involved in many types of outreach, the members recognize that the best "advertisement" for foster care are the foster parents. Caregivers have the credibility that can convince a person that they can make a difference for a child. Anyone who would like to be involved with the recruitment effort can contact Frank Navarro at 630-801-3400.

Northern News

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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.



Northern 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 will cover 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 what everyone's role is on the team, 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 will 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 Preteen and Teen Development (6 training hours)

This new course will assist 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 to 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.