

Andrew and Deborah Baskin find four fit perfectly

Andrew and Deborah Baskin have been foster parents for 13 years. Their journey in adoption like many others' started after fertility difficulties. Yet, they learned just how well-suited and destined they were to build a very special family.

Deborah describes all four of their adopted children as being "just like me and Andrew. It's like they are ours in every way. I sometimes tell people I forget that they didn't come from my body. That's how much they are meant to be our children."

Their first child David is now 12 years old. Ten-year-old Takarra comes next. She was named after her caseworker. Their third and fourth children are siblings. Caleb is six, and his sister Kierra is three years old.

Deborah spends her days as a Special Education teacher at Joliet High School and has her master's degree in clinical counseling. Andrew works for Wal-Mart, and is a minister pursuing his dream of building a church. The Baskins believe that their faith and strong 28-year marriage prepared them to welcome the children into their lives at just the right time.

After David and Takarra joined the family, the Baskins threw themselves into parenting. With both adults working and Deborah in graduate school, they had to keep a lot of balls up in the air. During that time Deborah states that if it weren't for Andrew's support and help around the house and with the kids she couldn't have done it.

"He is so thoughtful. To this day I can come home from work a little late and he will have dinner ready, the kids fed, bathed, and all their homework done. I couldn't be more blessed," she said.

Andrew comes from a family of 13 children, so he learned early on how to take care of a family. Deborah discovered he is a natural with kids as well as a thoughtful husband. Still, even with both of them sharing the load, the stressors of juggling kids, work, and school started to take their toll. Deborah's dream of taking in more children, specifically a boy with a younger sister, seemed like it wasn't meant to be. Besides, she felt like her life was already full. She and Andrew were older, and weren't sure they had the energy to raise more kids. Deborah decided to call the DCFS caseworker to say they would not



take any more children into their home.

For several days she started to pick up her phone, but something always prevented her from doing so. Ironically, it was at that time the caseworker called her. There were two siblings, a six-year-old boy and a three-year-old girl who needed a home. They needed a home that would be willing to adopt them. The Baskins had a different decision to make.

After deliberation, meetings with the children's foster parents at the

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Baskins, con't.

time, and ultimately after meeting the children, the Baskins knew it was meant to be.

"It was like God's will," says Deborah, "It was still a huge responsibility and a little scary, but we had to accept them."

It is still new, but less scary since they receive help and encouragement from family and friends who have also adopted. Many in their circle all seemed to move toward adoption around the same time.

Andrew and Deborah are motivated to be positive role models for their children, and feel that their experience has sent a message to the people in their path. Deborah tells people who express an interest in fostering and adopting that "if it feels right, go with it. It's worth it, and we have no regrets."

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.

Winnebago court celebrates 25 adoptions

Winnebago County Court House celebrated its fourth annual National Adoption Day event on Saturday, November 15th. At a special weekend session, 25 children had their adoptions finalized. This is a new record since the inception of what has now become a local tradition for this community.

Winnebago County doesn't just recognize National Adoption Day, the community has embraced it and turned it into quite an event. Each November DCFS, along with several private agencies, including Lutheran Social Services, Catholic Charities, Children Home and Aid Society, and Illinois Mentor come together for this special event. This event of course would not be possible if it weren't for the three judges, including Chief Judge Janet Holmgren, who have been volunteering their weekend time, along with numerous Winnebago County court officials who donate their own time and services.



Chief Judge
Janet Holmgren

Not only do these judicial and child welfare professionals come together to ensure the future of these families, they celebrate the day. Once the official adoption proceedings were done, the families were honored with a banquet of food and gifts, as well as donated



National Adoption Winnebago County Committee: Noelle Seriang, Robert Atchinson, Tom Jakeway, Rebecca Lamont, Melissa Johnson (not pictured: Renee Stewart, Elizabeth Smith and Jennifer Zaluckyj)

gift bags for the newly adopted children. Add some balloons and you get quite a party.

Winnebago County has set a high standard for National Adoption Day, and hopes that other counties, along with dedicated judicial and child welfare professionals will follow their example in securing the futures of our children and families.

National Adoption Day is a collective national effort to raise awareness of children in foster care waiting to find permanent, loving families. More than 300 events are held each year throughout the country to finalize the adoptions of children in foster care, and to celebrate all families who adopt. Since 1999, more than 20,000 children have been adopted from foster care on National Adoption Day.

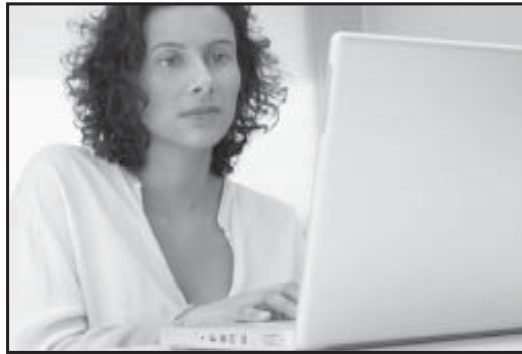
VTC offers on-line training convenience

The Virtual Training Center (VTC) is a new on-line learning resource center from the DCFS Office of Training. All caregivers, DCFS or private agency staff or other child welfare partners will be able to access the on-line training center through the Internet at www.dcfstraining.org. All training registration, current schedules, updated announcements, training transcripts, and learning resources (including the foster parent library), will ultimately be available on-line in the center. The Department is asking each licensed caregiver with both the Department and the private child welfare agencies to register for a VTC account.

With a VTC account, caregivers can see their own transcripts at any time, search for the most up-to-date schedules of classes available, and even search the foster parent library for resources. It will save time by allowing caregivers to register for training on-line using a computer. It will also make it easier for the Department to communicate updates through e-mail.

To start a VTC account, all users need to complete a VTC Training Account form, which only takes a few minutes.

1. Go to the VTC Web site, look in the announcements section, and click on the link to the form. Users can fill it out on-line and submit via e-mail, **or**



2. Complete the form on-line, print it, and fax to the Registration Unit at 217-782-9301, **or**
3. Contact the DCFS Registration Unit at 877-800-3393, and they will e-mail the form. For caregivers who don't have e-mail, the Unit can mail the form or complete it by telephone.

Even caregivers that do not have access to the Internet are still being asked to complete the personal account form to ensure an accurate training profile for them is included in the DCFS database.

The Registration Unit and toll free number 1-877-800-3393 will still be operational. However, the VTC is the gateway to training schedules, on-line registration, accessing your transcripts, and taking on-line classes.

If you have questions, contact Mary Ochman-Ahmed by e-mail at Mary.Ochman-Ahmed@Illinois.gov or by phone, at 217-785-5689.

From your RA

With the holiday season upon us, I am always glad to take a moment and reflect on the past year, and to acknowledge our foster and adoptive families who are the foundation of our mission to provide for the well-being of children in our care. It never ceases to amaze me how willing you are to open your doors, hearts, and lives to provide not just shelter, but a safe haven for a child or children to call home for a little while, or in some cases permanently.



The holidays are for most of us a time to enjoy the warmth of family and friends. It is this spirit of the season that speaks the most to me, not the hustle and bustle of city streets or the rush to buy gifts. While the decorations and lights may be shining brightly, you have within you the brightest and most colorful light of all. You spark a sense of hope, a feeling of generosity, and warmth that envelops your soul because there is beauty and celebration of what is good in life. The young ones in your home will grow up knowing that the world can be a good place because people like you choose to make a difference.

On behalf of the Northern Region I wish you all many blessings this holiday season, and into the year ahead.

*Debbie Palmer-Thomas
Regional Administrator*

Northern Region Training Calendar

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers can attend PRIDE In-Service Training. Advance registration is REQUIRED. Detailed address information will be provided with registration. Information included here is accurate at the time of publication. Training dates, times and locations may change based on enrollment and other circumstances. For the most up-to-date schedule information, 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 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 the teen brain development and the impact of trauma and loss on preteens and teens. Participants will learn specific strategies that caregivers can use fostering teenagers in the day to day life of the foster family.

Loves Park **Illinois Mentor**
February 3 and 10 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Tue)

Romeoville/Joliet **Comfort Inn**
February 10 and 12 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Tue/Thu)

Nachusa **LSSI**
February 21 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
(Sat.)

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.

Nachusa **LSSI**
January 27 and 29 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Tue/Thu)

Romeoville/Joliet **Comfort Inn**
February 24 and 26 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Tue/Thu)

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.

Elgin **Judson College**
February 21 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
and 28 (Sat.)

Loves Park **Illinois Mentor**
March 17 and 19 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Tue/Thu)

Romeoville/Joliet **Comfort Inn**
March 23 and 25 6:30-9:30 p.m.
(Mon/Wed)

Child Trauma

This four-hour course helps caregivers recognize the signs of trauma and understand how to work with children who have experienced trauma.

Romeoville/Joliet **Comfort Inn**
March 28 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
(Sat.)

Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes. Call the DCFS Office of Training 877-800-3393 • toll free