

## Court finds new ways to avoid delays for termination of parental rights

Some parents in the process of adopting children have faced disappointment or frustration when the birth parent(s) appeal a trial court's decision to terminate parental rights and free the child for adoption. While waiting for the "wheels of justice to turn," the child and potential adoptive parents remain in a legal limbo until the case is decided. Illinois Appellate Court Justice Anne M. Burke recently shared new information on the appeal process of termination of parental rights (TPR) cases with the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council.



*Justice Anne M. Burke*

In Cook County, as of April 2001, attorneys representing potential adoptive parents must notify the trial court if the TPR decision has been appealed. If so, the adoption will be stayed pending the appeal. This measure was taken to avoid proceeding with an adoption that would later have to be overturned if the birth parent won the appeal to retain parental rights. While that circumstance rarely occurs, the decision to wait for the appeal decision was weighed against the emotional fallout of having an adoption dissolved. Against that backdrop, Justice Burke explained the appeal process and the inherent timelines to the Adoption Advisory Council. The root of the matter is that the appeal of a lower court decision cannot be heard until all sections of the record are prepared correctly and gathered into the official record.

"This can take time, particularly when you have birth parents representing themselves. But even the attorneys may need more time and request extensions. It could, within the law, take many months or more than a year to complete the record and hear the case," said Justice Burke.

For some time, foster and adoptive parents have spoken up about the delays and the possible overturn of adoptions. After gaining a better understanding of the impact that kind of timeframe can have on a family and a waiting child, the First District Appellate Court decided to change its administrative policies to help. Now, when a case gets filed, a court researcher will determine if it is a TPR case. If so, all TPR cases will be flagged for expediting and immediately assigned to Panel. All requests for extensions would then come to the specific Panel who will manage the case judiciously and in a timely manner.

As a seasoned foster parent, Justice Burke knows what is at stake for children in need of a permanent home. Yet, as an appellate court justice she has a high degree of objectivity to meet. Before the case even comes to her bench, decisions based on the best interests of the child have been made in the lower courts.

"At the appeal level of the court system, my job is to look only at the facts to be sure that the birth parent's case was handled fairly to lead to a just decision about that parent's rights," said Justice Burke. "As hard as it is, I have to close my mind to other things I know about the system and the children in it."

By objectively and swiftly considering TPR cases, the hope is that the new administrative policies will lead to better outcomes for the children and families affected by the court's actions. The appellate justices throughout the state's court system work with each other and will be monitoring the effects of these changes.

## And the survey says...

As part of the ongoing efforts to provide and improve quality service delivery to children and families, the Cook North Region continues its efforts to provide opportunities to hear from foster parents about their experiences in fostering DCFS children. One of the ways this is done is by sending out annual consumer satisfaction surveys to all foster parents caring for Cook North children. The information gathered from the surveys is used to assist the Region in reviewing how it delivers services and identifying practice areas that need improvement.

This past year Cook North sent out 273 surveys; 68 (25%) were completed and returned. The following are the results of the Cook North Foster Parent Survey for July 2001:

- 92% of the foster parents answered that they view themselves as a contributing member of the team that services their foster child (76% frequently, 16% sometimes).
- 84% of the foster parents answered the foster child's caseworker seeks information and input from them regarding case planning and their foster child's future (50% frequently, 34% sometimes).
- 81% of the foster parents answered that they had received sufficient training to address the needs of their foster child and family (50% frequently, 31% sometimes).
- Knowledge regarding the following support services available to foster parents:
  - Foster Parent Advocate/Support Specialist Program (98%)
  - Placement stabilization (96%)
  - Intensive Therapeutic Services (86%)
  - Respite (85%)
  - SASS (80%)
  - Wraparound (72%)
  - Homemakers (58%)
- 78% of the foster parents felt their foster child's caseworker assisted them in obtaining services for their foster child and family (46% frequently, 32% sometimes).
- 73% of the foster parents felt their foster child's caseworker provided them with relevant medical, developmental, mental health and historical information about the foster child (41% frequently, 32% sometimes).
- 72% of the foster parents felt their foster child's needs were taken into consideration upon initial placement in their home (43% frequently, 29% sometimes).
- 65% of the foster parents felt that casework staff provided the foster family with support and services when they had a crisis in their home (31% frequently, 34% sometimes).
- 65% of the foster parents answered that they would recommend to other families to become foster parents.

Results from the surveys are shared with the Local Site Quality Improvement Teams for them to review and develop action planning to enhance performance. In December of 2001, Regional Administration met with all of the permanency supervisors to discuss the results of the survey. The group brainstormed regarding the results and ways to enhance areas that need to be addressed. The supervisors were then asked to review the findings with their teams and work with the Local Site Councils on action planning.

Besides the foster parent survey, the region also sends out surveys to adoptive families, surveys regarding the licensing process, and surveys to DCFS youth. The information gathered from these surveys is very important. It helps assess areas where the Region needs to improve service delivery and enhance relationships. Surveys are also another way that parents can have a voice in the ways that the region works with children and foster families. **Many thanks to those who have responded to our surveys.**

Many private agencies also send surveys as a way of gathering information about their services. DCFS encourages everyone to take the opportunity and fill out and return surveys regarding the children in your care and the services that families receive.

## Know your rights and responsibilities

At the suggestion of foster parents, Cook North will revisit a Foster Parent Law Right and/ or a Responsibility and how the Cook North implementation plan addresses it. If you have any questions, concerns or comments regarding our plan, you may contact either: Jackie Bright at 312/328-2507, e-mail address: JBright@idcfs.state.il.us or Sari Rowitz at 312/328-2481, e-mail address: SRowitz@idcfs.state.il.us.

This issue we will be reviewing Foster Parent Responsibility #6.

<p><b>6. The responsibility to be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent associations in improving the quality of care and service to children and families.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal support groups encouraged and information provided to foster parents</li> <li>• Affiliations with foster parent associations are encouraged and facilitated</li> </ul>	<p>As a region we work with foster parents to ensure their recognition of the benefits of networking with other foster parents on a local as well as a statewide and national basis in a continuing effort to improve the quality of care and service to children and families. Efforts are taken by our local council and regional LAN representatives to provide opportunities for these interactions with the broader community.</p> <p>We believe that foster parents recognize regional activities as an opportunity to network, offer and receive support, participate in activities to improve service delivery and increase their knowledge about child welfare issues. We encourage foster parents to participate in the advisory council, Illinois Foster Parent Association (IFPA) and other local foster parent or relative caretaker support groups.</p>
--	---

## Looking for Support?

Children’s Home and Aid Society offers a support group for adoptive, guardianship or foster families in the process of providing permanency for children. It is a great opportunity to meet other parents who have formed their families through adoption or guardianship. It’s a time for sharing solutions and brainstorming around problems. The group also provides the opportunity to identify areas that you are interested in learning more about or need help with.

The group meets the 4th Wednesday of every month at 1279 N. Milwaukee, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, suite 405. Refreshments are served from 6:00 to 6:30 and a group discussion occurs from 6:30 to 8:00pm. Child care is provided. To learn more about the group or RSVP, please contact Sue Puffpaff at 847/424-5166.

## Teens Honor Their Cultural History

African-American teens in the Specialized Adolescent Foster Care Program of Catholic Charities learned and taught others about the contributions of African-Americans throughout history.

The teens demonstrated the language of Ghana and presented the principles of the holiday Kwanzaa. Teams of teens competed in “Sharing the Knowledge,” answering tough and educational quiz session, covering history, art and African-American culture. A reading of the poem “Phenomenal Woman” by Maya Angelou, inspired the young people to embrace the things that make each person truly phenomenal. The event ended with a buffet lunch for the teens and their families.

“By building an awareness of their heritage, the teens could learn to value the culture of others,” said Berthena Davis, Service Coordinator.

Catholic Charities Specialized Foster Care program hopes to continue the African American Heritage Celebration and explore other cultures.

## **Cook Central receives backpack donation for children in transition**

NA'AMAT USA, Greater Chicago Council presented the Cook Central Regional Advisory Council with 50 donated backpacks. The NA'AMAT Project Backpack is a recently developed community project aimed at lessening the burden of the "silent victims" of domestic violence, the children.

NA'AMAT provides backpacks filled with emergency items such as sleepwear, toys, toiletries and school supplies that are age and gender identified. The bags will be given to children in Cook Central to ease the transition when they must be placed outside of their home for safety reasons. The region is appreciative of the generosity demonstrated by NA'AMAT members in response to a critical issue for children.

## **Family to Family begins Cook Central Pilot**

The Department recognizes the need to incorporate neighborhood resources and a community-focused approach into the way we serve families. DCFS has been working closely with the Casey Foundation to incorporate its Family to Family principals into DCFS Best Practices for serving families. DCFS piloting the Family to Family model in Cook Central Region in LAN 67, including the Humboldt Park and Lawndale communities. There are also pilots in Central Region's Local Area Network (LAN) 20 in Peoria and in Northern Region's LAN 29 in Rock Island.

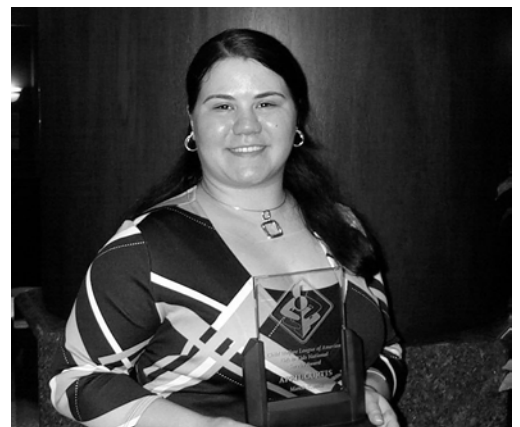
Family to Family is a more family-centered approach that is responsive to the individualized needs of children and their families, rooted in the child's community or neighborhood and sensitive to cultural differences.

The goal is to develop a network of family foster care that is more neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive and located primarily in the communities in which the children live. In addition, the goal is to reunify children with their families as soon as that can safely be accomplished based on the family's and children's needs.

The LAN 67 Family to Family steering committee meetings are currently scheduled every other Tuesday at 10 a.m. to noon at the 3518 W. Division office. Community members, groups and agencies are invited to participate. For more information, contact Mayra Burgos-Biott, at 773/292-7700.

## **Cook Central Youth Advisory Board Member Receives Award**

On March 7, 2002, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) flew April Curtis to Washington where she was awarded the "Kids to Kids National Service Award" and appointed to the CWLA National Foster Youth Advisory Council. April is actively involved in the Youth Advisory Board and is a model youth to her peers. She is an advocate for other youth who are in need of direction in accessing services.



## News from the Regional Advisory Council

Cook Central Regional Advisory Council Meetings are scheduled the fourth Tuesday of each month. The meetings are from 9:30am to 11:30am at DCFS, 3518 W. Division. All DCFS and private agency foster parents are invited to attend.

The February meeting for foster parents and staff introduced valuable information and inspiration.

### Fire Safety at Home

DCFS Family Development Specialist, Clyde Thompson, coordinated a presentation on fire safety. The group viewed a 30-minute video on home fire precaution and safety tips. Invited guest Albert Batiz, a Chicago Fire Department paramedic, gave advice and answered many questions regarding fire safety. Primary safeguards include:



**COOK  
CENTRAL**

- Install at least one smoke detector on every level of your home.
- Check the batteries in your smoke detector monthly by using the test button.
- Change the batteries in your smoke detectors annually – on a particular anniversary such as your birthday.
- Establish and practice a fire evacuation plan. Practice the plan while crawling and blindfolded.
- Fire and smoke escalation is rapid. There is no time to waste. Everyone in the home must get out immediately and without delay.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector. Carbon monoxide is an odorless killer.

The presentation provided disturbing facts about fires and fire safety and dismissed well-known myths and assumptions. The video, titled “Plan to Get Out Alive,” is available for loan to other groups, meetings or organizations. If interested, contact Clyde Thompson at 773/292-7781.

### Maintaining Foster Family records

Foster parent attendees of this meeting also received a multi-pocket file folder for record keeping of foster child documents and other DCFS information. Family foster home licensing standards require all records in relation to each foster child be maintained and open to inspection by the licensing representative during monitoring visits. The DCFS Cook Central Foster Care licensing staff (3518 W. Division and Maywood sites) will provide each foster parent with a folder to promote organized record keeping.

Furthermore, this is a project to improve the quality of services as well as to promote implementation of the Foster Parent Law.

**Correction:** Please note that Foster Parent Support Specialist Betty Anderson serves families in zips 60623 and 60624.

## **Dear Cook South Foster Parents:**

We would like to express our appreciation for the support and services you have provided to Cook South and the children and families we serve. Throughout this year, we have called on you to assist with our recruitment efforts, to help promote our Profile Meetings, to help coordinate activities for our children, and to help assure that all of our children are registered with HealthWorks. You have answered the call.

Through the efforts of your Foster Parent Support Groups, you have supported our back-to-school parade, sponsored a summer picnic and organized Halloween and Christmas parties for our foster children. During Adoption Month in November, you helped us to organize a trip to the Shedd Aquarium for our adoptive and waiting children.

You have been a vital part of the team here at Cook South. Without your help, we could not continue to provide the quality services that our children and families need and deserve.

May is the month set aside to recognize Foster Parents. You should be recognized every month. But, since this month has been especially set aside for you, we would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest appreciation for the work you have done, and the support you have given to Cook South.

In the upcoming months, we will highlight individual foster parents and staff who are making a difference.

Thanks again!

Sincerely,

Timothy Snowden,  
Regional Administrator

Charles Bowden,  
Resource Manager

### **My Rules for Online Safety:**



I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school.

I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.



I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online.

I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. If I do get one, I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the online service or [www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com).

I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.

I will talk with my parents to decide what time of day, how long and what sites I can visit online.

I will not break any of these rules.

 Clip this out and place it on your computer. 

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's signature

## Cook South Foster Parent Advisory Council Update

Each month the Cook South Advisory Council invites guests to present information that would be beneficial to our foster parents. One of its goals is to improve communication between the foster parents and the Department, and to keep them informed of any changes within the Department. Ms. Ann Buckingham is the chairperson of the committee.

In February, the Council had Jane Elmore, Deputy Director of Foster Care and Permanency Services, a representative from HealthWorks, and Cook South Regional Administrator Tim Snowden to make presentations. Deputy Director Elmore emphasized the need for continued recruitment for permanent homes for our children, the need to license all relative placements, and the need to encourage our children to read. She asked our foster parents to teach our children the importance of reading, to read to them, and to let them see their parents reading.

The representative from HealthWorks reminded foster parents that their organization could be a resource to find medical information about children placed in their homes. They can also provide assistance to foster parents in locating doctors who may accept the medical card.



**COOK  
SOUTH**

Regional Administrator Tim Snowden spoke of the changes taking place at Cook South. The Target Case Managers (TCM) are now direct service workers. They will be providing case work services to many of our children who are in residential and group home care. Our adoption liaisons will also become case carrying workers. They are going to be assigned to work with some of the older children who need adoptive resources. He also emphasized that although the agency is being impacted by budget changes, it will not affect the quality of services to our children and foster parents.

Cook South encourages all its foster parents to become involved in the region's foster parent support groups. They are a vital source of information and support to all our parents.

- **The Advisory Committee Meeting** is the third Wednesday of the month.
- **The Cook South Foster Parent Meeting** is every second Thursday of the Month.

## Cook South Profile Meeting

The Cook South monthly profile meetings to feature children who need foster home placements continue to be a success. We appreciate the efforts of the foster parent support specialists, in publicizing this event. As a result, the number of foster parents who attend this event has increased significantly, and the number of children who have gotten placements through this process continue to grow. Any foster parent who would like information about this meeting, please contact Linnie Jones at 773/371-6071.

# Cook County Training Calendar

## FosterPRIDE In-Service Training

All licensed foster parents and adoptive parents are welcome to attend any or all of the PRIDE In-Service Trainings to enhance their skills and meet yearly training requirements.

**Module 1** - *The Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children* (Four 3-hour sessions = 12 training hours)

**Module 2** - *Using Discipline to Protect and Nurture* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

**Module 3** - *Addressing Developmental Issues Related to Sexuality* (One 3-hour session = 3 training hours)

**Module 4** - *Responding to the Signs and Symptoms of Sexual Abuse* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

**Module 5** - *Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

**Module 6** - *Working as a Professional Team Member* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

**Module 7** - *Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

**Module 8** - *Promoting Permanency Outcomes* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

**Module 9** - *Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

**Module 10** - *Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children & Families* (Five 3-hour sessions = 15 training hours)

### COOK NORTH

	Module
<b>Irish American Center</b>	
June 4, 6, 11	
13 & 18 (Tue/Thu)	6:30-9:30 p.m. 10
Aug 12, 14 & 19 (Mon/Wed)	6:30-9:30 p.m. 2
September 10 & 12 (Tue/Thu)	6:30-9:30 p.m. 7
<b>Galewood Church</b>	
August 6, 8 & 13 (Tue/Thu)	6:30-9:30 p.m. 3&4

### COOK CENTRAL

	Module
<b>Circle Family Care</b>	
June 1 & 8 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. 9
May 4, 11 & 18 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
<b>Association House</b>	
August 17 (Sat) &	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. 2
August 24 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

### COOK SOUTH

	Module
<b>African American Images</b>	
June 1, 8 & 15 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. 2
June 22 (Sat) &	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. 8
June 29 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
<b>DCFS, 6201 S. Emerald</b>	
July 30, Aug 1,	6:30-9:30 p.m. 1
6 & 8 (Tues/Turs)	
August 13, 15 & 20 (Tue/Thu)	6:30-9:30 p.m. 5
<b>DCFS, Harvey Office</b>	
Sept 23, 25 & 30 (Mon/Wed)	6:30-9:30 p.m. 2

## Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training

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.

### COOK NORTH

<b>DCFS, 1921 S. Indiana</b>	
June 15 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
<b>Irish Center</b>	
June 24 & 26 (Mon/Wed)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
July 6 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
August 15 & 20 (Thu/Tue)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
August 17 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
<b>Harold Washington</b>	
July 6 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
September 14 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

### COOK CENTRAL

<b>Circle Family Care</b>	
June 17 & 19 (Mon/Wed)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
<b>DCFS Maywood Office</b>	
June 22 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
<b>DCFS, 3518 W. Division</b>	
July 6 (Sat)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
<b>Hephzibah</b>	
August 24 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
<b>Lutheran Child &amp; Family Services</b>	
June 27 & July 2 (Thurs/Tues)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
September 21 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
<b>Seguin Services</b>	
August 7 & 12 (Wed/Mon)	6:30-9:00 p.m.

### COOK SOUTH

<b>ABJ Community Services</b>	
June 15 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
July 8 & 10 (Mon/Wed)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
<b>Ada Park Fieldhouse</b>	
June 1 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
<b>Chicago Commons</b>	
July 9 & 11 (Tues/Thurs)	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
<b>DCFS South Area Office</b>	
June 22 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
July 6 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
July 9 & 11 (Tues/Thurs)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
August 17 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
September 9 & 11 (Mon/Wed)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
<b>Harvey</b>	
June 27 & July 2 (Thurs/Tues)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
July 6 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
August 15 & 20 (Thurs/Tues)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
September 21 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
<b>Park Forest - Church of the Holy Family</b>	
June 6 & 11 (Thurs/Tues)	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

All classes are coordinated by Harold Washington College in Chicago.

Call 312-553-5829 or -5830 to register.

