



## DCFS Prepares for the Federal Child and Family Services Reviews

Foster parents may be called on to demonstrate to the federal government how DCFS is meeting the needs of children and families. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHSS) is mandated to review how child welfare services are delivered across the country. Part of that review will include interviews with randomly selected Illinois families who are fostering children. The results could impact funding for the Department's administrative costs.

In preparation for a massive review, Illinois voluntarily participated in a pilot study of the new review process DHHS developed in 1996. The Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) focus on outcomes for children and families and the various systemic factors that affect how states deliver child welfare services. While Illinois' official review is scheduled in 2003, the state is training agencies now on the federal government's expectations and goals.

The review will look at eight outcomes for children and families around the areas of safety, permanency and well being. It will also examine how the Department is structured to effectively operate the following systems within the state:

- o **Statewide information system** to provide accurate information on every child in care
- o **Case review system** that provides every child a plan of care with timely hearings and input from foster parents and other significant individuals
- o **Quality assurance system** for identifying the Department's strengths and measuring progress in areas that need improvement.
- o **Training** to prepare staff to carry out its duties and support birth and foster families as they care for children
- o **Service array** available to assess a family's strengths and needs, address those needs, enable children to remain safely with the parents when reasonable and help children in foster and adoptive placements reach permanency
- o **Responsiveness** of the state to the community by consulting with individuals, families, service providers, juvenile court and other private and public child welfare agencies provide annual reports of progress
- o **Foster/adoptive family licensing, recruitment and retention** with consistent standards and diligent effort to build a diverse pool of potential foster and adoptive families



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# Agencies Win Awards for Top Scoring Implementation Plans

The Foster Parent Law requires all agencies and DCFS regions that provide foster care services to develop an implementation plan. The implementation plan serves as the roadmap for how the agency will meet its responsibilities to foster children and the foster parents they serve, in accordance with the law. The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council, as part of its role to oversee the implementation of the law, reviews and scores each of the implementation plans.

Recently the Statewide Council and DCFS Director Jess McDonald honored five private agencies that garnered the highest scores for their plans. The winning agencies for 2001 were: Baby Fold, Catholic Social Services of Peoria, Lakeside Community Committee, Webster Cantrell Hall and YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago.

“The plans submitted this year were the first developed under the new DCFS Rule 340 Foster Parent Code. With a higher bar for passing and new requirements, the plans these five agencies submitted proved to be excellent examples,” said Director McDonald.

Of the 103 plans submitted in 2001, YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago scored the highest. This was the third year in a row the agency finished in the top five. Their plan stood out because of the high degree of dignity and respect for foster parents that was apparent throughout. One highlight from their plan was the requirement for agency supervisors to make quick decisions on foster parent reimbursements.



*Baby Fold's Director of Child Welfare Services Karen Blum, Supervisor Jean Guy and foster parent John Bowman accept the award from Director McDonald*



*Director McDonald congratulates YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago's Director of Child Welfare Sherise Alexander, YMCA Committee Chair Leon Intrater and foster parents Joyce Reed and Brenda Bland.*

Baby Fold in Bloomington, stressed the importance of teamwork in its programs and in the development of the implementation plan. Foster parents were an integral part in creating the plan, which includes several activities to bring together foster parents and the agency staff. As one example, foster parents and staff attend monthly trainings together to foster teamwork and insure information is shared.

## Agencies Win Awards (con't.)

At Webster Cantrell Hall in Decatur, foster parents participate in administrative team meetings with the agency CEO. Each quarter the staff meets with foster parents. The agency's board is so supportive of the implementation plan, which incorporated a policy statement about the new plan in the agency's policy manual and in its annual strategic plan.



*Director McDonald presents the award to Webster Cantrell Hall's Clinical Director Mrs. Kevin Morrison Otis, Foster Care Director Jane Waller Anderson and foster parent Ginny Karl.*

Catholic Social Services of Peoria made the implementation plan part of its day-to-day business. Licensing staff give the plan to all foster families on the first visit of the year. At each foster parent council monthly meeting, staff provides training on a different aspect of the plan. This level of involvement can be a real selling point as foster parents recruit other families to join them in fostering. The agency is also offering "finders' fees" to those who successfully recruit.



*Director McDonald presents the award to Ruth Urbanc, Foster Program Support Services Coordinator and Jennifer Walls, Resource Worker for Catholic Social Services of Peoria.*



*Lakeside Community Committee's Child Welfare Administrator Erwin McEwen, foster parents Irma Young and Director of Quality Improvement Willie Green, accept their award from Director McDonald.*

Foster parent interaction was also a key component of the plan submitted by Lakeside Community Committee in Chicago. The foster parent council and an oversight committee monitor the plan. The agency process for implementing and distributing the plan could be a model for other agencies. As one example of its commitment to foster parents, the agency developed a contingency plan to get emergency cash to a foster family in crisis within one hour.

"The Statewide Advisory Council pores over each of these plans for hours. We take them seriously. It is one way of making sure that children and the families taking care of them have the resources they need," said Council Chairperson Pat Cooper.

Each year, DCFS regions and foster care agencies that contract with DCFS must submit an implementation plan to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council for review and scoring by council members. The scoring is based on how the plan fulfills the rights and responsibilities outlined in the Foster Parent Law. The winning plans this year all scored 95 or higher out of 104 possible points. Those agencies received a \$5,000 grant from DCFS to be used for foster parent training.

# Transitioning Teens to Life Beyond the System

The Division of Education and Transition Services (DETS) has developed a training session to introduce its services that prepare youth for self-sufficiency and adult life after leaving the child welfare system. The training session is available to DCFS and private agency staff as well as members of the Regional and Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council. Below are highlights of the training and new developments to help caregivers meet the unique needs of teens preparing to move to adulthood.

## Life Skills and Transition Services

The Division is focusing efforts to make sure that all youth ages 14 -21 receive life skills training. Such training is mandatory, and is particularly important for those youth with an independent living goal. DCFS has contracted with several agencies around the state to provide classes and activities that teach basic skills such as budgeting money to advanced skills for youth who will establish their own households. One of the responsibilities of Transition Managers Holly Bitner (Cook County) and Chuck Murphy (downstate) is to coordinate referrals of youth to these classes.

“There are approximately 10,000 youth over the age of 13 in care. I want to make sure all of them have a chance to start their adult life with the knowledge, experience and skills to maintain self-sufficiency. These classes can make a difference,” Bitner said.

Caseworkers for the older youth should proactively register their clients for life skills training. Bitner assures that all referrals will be handled swiftly and that the providers are eager to serve more youth. Private agencies that provide life skills training apart from the contracted providers should maintain documentation that the courses have been completed. Questions about the courses or enrollment can be directed to Holly Bitner in the Division of Education and Transition Services at 312/814-5959.

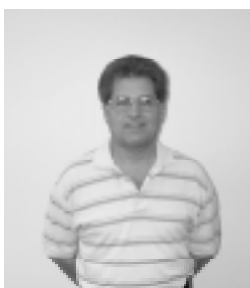


*Transition Manager  
Holly Bitner*

## Financial Support Coming for Community College Students

Education at a four-year university may not be the best option for every young person. Soon, DCFS youth seeking to continue their education at community colleges will receive additional financial support. DCFS recently announced an agreement with the Illinois Community College Board to provide tuition waivers at public, in-state community colleges.

Starting in July 2002, youth will be able to apply for tuition waivers at schools in the 39 community college districts in the state. More information on how to apply will be available through Dwight Lambert, Statewide Education Coordinator at 217/524-2030.



*Dwight Lambert,  
Statewide Education  
Coordinator*

## Help Is A Call Away With The Youth Hotline 800/232-3798

DCFS realizes that adolescents can have issues that need special attention. While the caseworker is the first resource to turn to for resolution, there is another option. The Youth Hotline is available to all youth 14-21. Youth can use it as often as needed. It is one way to ensure quick response to questions and issues. The Youth Hotline number is toll free at **800/232-3798**. It is answered by professionals from the Director's Advocacy Office, from 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday-Friday. After hours or weekend callers may leave a message that will be returned the next business day.

# Transitioning Teens (con't.)

## Support for Pregnant and Parenting Teens

DCFS is committed to making sure that youth in care who become pregnant and/or are already parents receive help in their new role. In the Northern part of the state, DCFS contracts with Uhlich's Teen Parent Network (TPSN) to refer youth to providers in Chicago and the collar counties. As soon as it is suspected or known that a youth is pregnant, the caseworker should submit an unusual incident report form and fax it to the Division of Education and Transition Services (DETS). The Division will then contact Uhlich for referral to a regional service partner. In downstate communities, the referrals are handled directly with the providers. DETS maintains a list of service providers.

The Department's primary goal is to preserve a stable placement for the youth during and after the pregnancy. For youth in foster care, ideally, the same placement could continue with additional supports for the family, the youth and the infant. If that is not the best option, the service providers can offer support for transitions to other types of residential settings.

In addition to offering the pregnant or parenting youth classes and services, the Department has made arrangements with other state agencies to provide resources. The young parent will be eligible to receive a monthly payment of \$102 for child-related expenses. The new baby, while not a ward of the state, will receive a state medical card to provide important health benefits.

"Our focus is to support the young people in DCFS care who become parents and to help them find success for themselves and their children," said Lori Moreno, Teen Parent Coordinator for Cook County.

The Division has numerous resources for girls who become mothers and boys who become fathers while in DCFS care. They include parenting classes, sex education and pregnancy prevention, educational support and employment counseling. For more information, contact Lori Moreno (Cook County youth) or Frances Elbert (Down-state youth) at 312/814-5959.

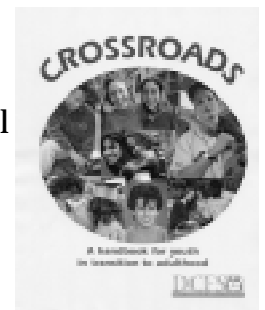


Lori Moreno

## New "Crossroads" Booklet Helps Teens Transition to Adulthood

Teens have a new resource to prepare for adult life after leaving the child welfare system. Crossroads presents comprehensive information on education options, DCFS programs to foster independence and additional public and private sources for information and assistance. Crossroads offers information on everything from filling out academic financial aid forms to obtaining social security benefits. It is relevant for young people who wish to go on to college, seek employment as they come of age or need adult guardianship as they leave the system. Foster, adoption and guardianship parents will also benefit from the chapters written specifically for adults.

The book is being mailed to youth 16 and older who are currently in foster and residential care, and those in adoptive and guardianship homes that receive subsidy payments. The book is also posted on the DCFS website at [www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs). After the initial mailing in January, booklets will be sent to youth after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.



# DCFS Scholarship Applications Now Available

Approved Dwight Lambert



DCFS awards 48 scholarships annually to youth who are in care or former wards in adoptive or guardianship families. Parents can help students gather copies of grades, letters of recommendation and other supporting materials to make your student shine. Caseworkers will be able to provide the applications to interested families. It is very important that caseworkers and families work with the youth to neatly and thoroughly complete the application package.

The requirements are that the youth must:

- Be at least 16
- Possess a high school diploma or GED accreditation by the end of the current school year
- Be in the child welfare system currently or immediately prior to the adoption or transfer of guardianship

**The DCFS Scholarship is a competitively-based process.** A panel of experts will review and evaluate all applications. A scholarship winner can use it for up to four years (if 18 or younger upon receipt) while pursuing a bachelor's degree. DCFS provides a medical card, monthly maintenance payments and tuition waivers at an Illinois state university.

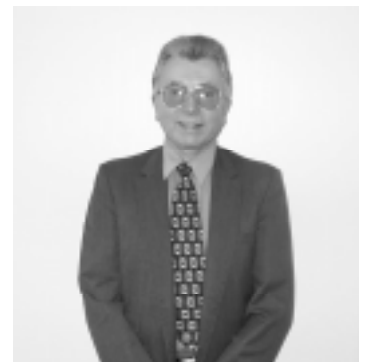
The student should complete the application packet and submit it to the Division of Education and Transition Services. Foster parents can help by making sure youth have all the documentation needed in time for the March deadline. The specific date will be in the application packet. Contact Dwight Lambert, Statewide Education Coordinator at 217/524-2030 with questions.

## Teens Can Build Careers Through YouthBuild Trade Program

DCFS youth can now participate in YouthBuild, a national comprehensive youth and community development program. YouthBuild utilizes the construction trade industry to offer job training, life skills, GED courses, counseling and leadership development to unemployed, out-of-school youth and adults 16-24 years old. Youth gain skills through construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing in their communities. This program helps prepare youth for the challenges in today's world. Youth build lives for themselves, while building homes for others.

Youth must undergo a selection process, which includes interviews, assessments and orientation. Trainees also receive a weekly stipend for food, clothing and transportation. Program cycles vary from six months to 12 months, depending on the YouthBuild site. Alumni of these programs can receive post-program counseling and job placement services.

YouthBuild is currently located in four Illinois cities; Bloomington, East St. Louis, Chicago and Rockford. Intake and programs can vary by site. For additional information, please contact John Kasper, Statewide Youth Employment and Training Coordinator at 312/814-5959.



*John Kasper, Statewide Youth Employment and Training Coordinator*

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# Home Study Reports are Available to Foster and Adoptive Parents



A recent policy interpretation by the Department clarified that foster and adoptive families can have access to the home studies that are conducted during the licensing process. The home study provides information about the family, and contains recommendations about the types of children that the family can parent. This home study is used to assist child placement workers trying to find a match for a child in need of a placement.

Previously in an effort to protect the confidential information, families were often told they could not see the report on their home. However, according to DCFS Rule 431, Subsection 431.50, “persons served by the Department shall have full access to all records that contain their personal information, unless Rule 431 prohibits access.” Since foster and “adopt only”-licensed families are considered “persons served by the Department” they may access any records containing their personal information. An exception is the personal references obtained during the licensing process, which are under a written assurance of confidentiality.

For adoptive families there is an additional level of reporting to the Court that does remain confidential. When the family files a petition for adoption with the Court, the judge orders the Department to conduct an investigation. The investigation focuses on the adoptive parents and their interaction with the child whom they have petitioned to adopt. The worker then prepares a written report of investigation, frequently referred to as an “adoption home study”, and submits the report to the judge. The adoptive parents are not entitled to inspect or get a copy of this report of investigation without an order from the judge. The judge will tell the adoptive parents about any information in the report that is adverse to them or to the child they have petitioned to adopt.

Private agency and DCFS-supervised families that would like to see a copy of the home study conducted as part of the licensing process should contact their licensing representative.

## Tax Help for Foster and Adoptive Families



The new year means its time to get ready for the old tradition of taxes. DCFS is again working with the Center for Law and Human Services’ Tax Counseling Project to provide families timely information as they prepare their returns. This month, the Center will mail the *Tax Booklet for Foster and Adoptive Families* to help families secure all the federal and state tax benefits for which they might be eligible.

The booklet answers a wide range of questions that a foster or adoptive parent or legal guardian needs to know at tax time. The Tax Counseling Project also tracks changes to the tax laws that could be pertinent to these families. Some changes to look for include:

- Substantial increases to dollar and income limits for parents claiming the adoption tax credit and employer-assisted adoption income exclusion. (*Effective tax year 2002*)
- Revised rules that decrease the residency requirements of a foster child who may be a qualifying child for Earned Income Tax Credit. (*Effective tax year 2002*)
- Other family-friendly changes include increases and modifications to the Child Tax Credit, increased Dependent Care Credit, and various provisions to reduce the marriage penalty.

In addition to the booklet, the Center also provides tax preparation services for adoptive and guardianship families, based on income level. For more information, please call the Tax Counseling project at 312/252-0280.



# Forever Families

## ***A Fostering Illinois Special Feature For Adoptive Parents and Children***

### **Adoption Advisory Council Advocates For Illinois Adoptive Families**

Last year, Director McDonald established the Adoption Advisory Council to advocate for Illinois adoptive families and ensure that DCFS policies and practices result in more adoptions for children while supporting adoptive families.

The members of the Council are adoptive parents, professionals in child welfare and adult adoptees. They represent the interests of families throughout the state. In only a few months, the Adoption Advisory Council has tackled issues ranging from legislation that affects adoptive families to recruiting more adoptive families.

The Council has established several committees to address specific issues and make recommendations. The standing committees are:

- Public Relations
- Parent Support Groups
- Respite
- Residential Treatment Center
- Evaluation
- Public Policy
- Clearinghouse



*Jim Jones and Elizabeth Richmond serve as co-chairs of the council.*

### **Save the Date for NACAC Conference August 1-4 in Chicago.**

The 2002 annual conference for the North American Council on Adoptable Children is coming to Illinois this year. The conference will be at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare on August 1-4.

The planning committee is developing a slate of speakers and topics that is pertinent to Illinois adoptive families. In addition to the education for adults, the conference can be a family event. Organizers are putting together activities for children who attend with their parents. Registration materials will be available in June. Keep an eye out for more details in *Fostering Illinois*.

Council members were appointed by Director Jess McDonald and volunteer their service. Membership as of October follows:

- |                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| James and Sharon Ami      | Vance Johnson                 |
| Dr. Felicia Blasingame    | James Jones (co-chair)        |
| Tammy Bridges             | Barbara Jones-Green           |
| Diana Chaytor             | Norm and Gigi Lambert         |
| Patricia Cooper           | Susanne Loss                  |
| Art and Zelma Davis       | Dave Matthews                 |
| Ronald and Claudia Davis  | Elizabeth Richmond (co-chair) |
| Mary Debose               | Billy and Cecilia Ruffin      |
| Manny and Diane Dominguez | Gretchen Schultert            |
| Gwenn Eyer                | Joyce Scott                   |
| Joann Flaherty            | Terry Solomon                 |
| Brian and Rosemary Hall   | Cleo Terry                    |
| Tammy Hay                 | Carol Winn                    |
| Jeanne Howard             |                               |

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# Survey Shows...Despite the Challenges Adoptive Families Make It Work

A recent study of families receiving Adoption Assistance in Illinois illustrates what adoptive parents have known all along — is that most children fare well after adoption.

Over 1,300 parents with children age six and older completed a lengthy survey developed by the Center for Adoption Studies at Illinois State University. The survey asked about many aspects of children's adjustment. Parents reported on home, school and community functioning, as well as health and mental health.

Survey results include:

- 92 percent of children were in excellent or good health
- 83 percent of parents reported feeling very close to their child
- 72 percent of parents stated adoption affected their family positively or very positively
- 91 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with their adoption experience
- 60 percent rated their children as not at all or a little difficult to raise



This is not to say that families didn't face challenges. Children had frequently experienced significant maltreatment earlier in life. For example, 63 percent had experienced serious neglect and 60 percent had prenatal alcohol or drug exposure. Given their difficult early lives, it isn't surprising that children faced later struggles. Just over half had significant behavior problems, 47 percent had learning disabilities, 40 percent were in special education and 35 percent had emotional disturbances. Fifty-three percent of children had seen a counselor or therapist after adoption for emotional and behavioral problems. One in four children were rated as having fair or poor mental health.

A small percent of parents faced major struggles with children with very serious behavioral and emotional problems. Parents of these children were most likely to be dissatisfied with the adoption and to rate the child as difficult to raise. Perhaps the best news is that the majority of parents (76 percent) would definitely adopt their child again, knowing what they know now. An additional 17 percent would probably adopt the child again.

For a full copy of the research results, please contact Judy Pence, DCFS Division of Foster Care and Permanency Services, at 217/524-2422. Interested families should request the Illinois Study of Adopted Youth.

## Federal Child and Family Services Reviews (con't. from page 1)

When the review occurs in 2003, only 50 randomly selected cases from the whole state will be reviewed. Before the review, however, Illinois is preparing by training all of the DCFS regions and private agencies on the review procedures. The four DCFS regions and all private agencies will do "practice" runs coordinated by the DCFS Quality Assurance Team and the Foster Care Utilization Review Program (FCURP), respectively. If a foster family gets the call that their foster child's case has been drawn, the review teams are hoping for a positive and prompt response. Parents, foster parents, children and other key individuals will need to be interviewed in a window of only two days. The entire review process, which includes case record reviews and interviews, is done in five days for the private agencies and two weeks for DCFS regions. Then the teams have to analyze the results and report the findings to the private agencies and DCFS. The Department is committed to meeting and surpassing the federal benchmark to receive "substantially achieved" ratings on all of the outcomes in 90 percent of the cases reviewed.

After the first state review, the bar will be raised to require "substantially achieved" ratings on 95 percent of cases. Failure to comply could result in a reduction of the state's administrative costs. Accordingly, the Department continues to set a standard of excellence that will carry over through the federal review.

## Tell it Like It Is

Fostering Illinois wants to hear the "real deal" on fostering from those who know best – you!



Below, readers respond to the question: *How do you handle it when children leave your home to return to birth parents or move to a new placement?*

I remember that my goal was to help the parent and the children. When I got my children, I fell in love with them. But, I still tried to bond with the mother.

*Lorraine Green*  
Chicago  
Lutheran Family Services

Do all you can while they are in the house because you don't know what impact you will have down the road. That makes it easier to let go.

*Idalyia Jones*  
Dolton

The longest I usually keep kids is three months. I remember that I am loving someone that couldn't be loved at that moment. I have been to a child's wedding and got to meet the adoptive mom and the birth mom. It was the first wedding where I saw three mommas sitting in the front pew.

*Nancy Griffin*  
Chicago  
DCFS Cook South Region

You have to remember why you become a foster parent and know the difference between permanent and temporary.

*Sari Rowitz*  
DCFS Cook North Resource Manager and foster parent

The new question is: *What is the funniest thing that has happened to you since becoming a foster parent.*

Editor's note: I knew years of therapy had paid off when I corrected my whining 10-year-old son for interrupting me to tattle on his sister. He quickly regrouped and in his most professional manner said, "Excuse me, I have an issue I would like to address with you."

You can contact me by e-mail at [foster@chicagonet.net](mailto:foster@chicagonet.net), or by phone at 773/548-3888 or by mail at Fostering Illinois, James R. Thomson Center, 6<sup>th</sup> floor, Chicago, IL 60601. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Vanessa James, Editor

## **Fostering ILLINOIS**

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**Purpose:** To help busy families handle fostering children more effectively. To bring them the best information from the most knowledgeable sources. To promote statewide teamwork in finding permanency for children.

**Address Changes:** Foster parents must notify their agency, who will notify DCFS. Agencies should change addresses of office locations or request staff copies through the Editor.

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Opinions expressed by experts writing articles are no substitute for professional answers or opinions about a family's or child's specific situation.

Consult a competent professional for answers to your specific questions.

# **Do You Know A Family For Me?**

### **Terran [5735]**

Terran, 15, is playful and almost always smiling. He loves pets, especially dogs, as well as video games, photography and outdoor activities. His foster parent said that Terran is very respectful and helpful.

### **Joshua [4979]**

This active eleven-year-old is lovable and creative. Joshua enjoys gymnastics and swimming, and his favorite pets are dogs and cats. He likes going to church and to Sunday school. His worker said that Joshua has a positive attitude toward school and is a hard worker.

### **LaSandra [6392]**

She's a loving child who gets along well with adults. LaSandra, 9, enjoys listening to music and is an excellent dancer. She also likes riding her bike and playing games. She is in the third grade.

LaSandra's foster parent and teacher said that she has a good imagination, is loving and caring, and usually gets along with other children. She is also a hard worker.

### **David [6954]**

He's a sweet, loving boy eager for a loving home. David, 11, is very active and loves riding his bike, playing video games, and working on the computer. His worker said that David is a sweet boy who tries his best to be good. His foster parent and teacher said he is affectionate and friendly.

### **Sheena [6082]**

Sheena, 14, loves all kinds of sports, but especially track. She is a delightful young woman who is eager to become part of a permanent family. Her foster parent said that she is cooperative. Her teacher said Sheena works hard to improve her skills.

### **Joseph [6965]**

Joseph, 9, loves to give and receive hugs. He also enjoys looking at picture books and watching children's TV programs. His worker said that he is very lovable. His foster parent and teacher report that he is eager to learn.

***If you are interested in adopting any of these children or learning about other children waiting to be adopted, please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390 (within Illinois) or 1-312-346-1516 (outside Illinois) or see the AICI web site —www.adoptinfo-il.org.***

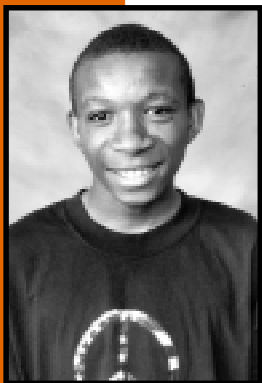
***“If you help others, you will be helped.  
Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps in 100  
years, but you will be helped. Nature  
must pay off the debt.”***

***—Gurdjieff***

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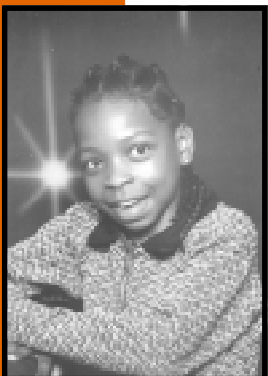
**DO YOU KNOW A FAMILY FOR ME?**



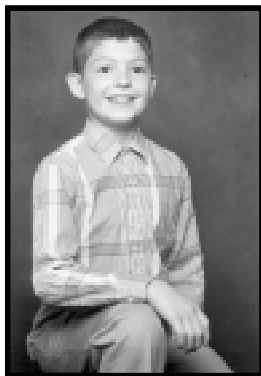
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Joshua (C4979)



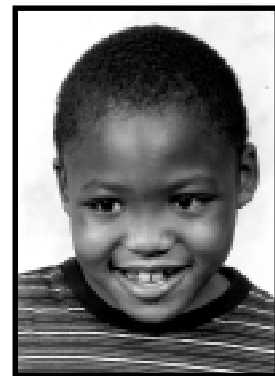
LaSandra (C6392)



David (C6954)



Sheena (C6082)



Joseph (C6965)

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Forever Families: Adoption Feature

**Call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois 800/572-2390.**