



Spring Conference Success

More than 500 foster and adoptive parents, along with DCFS and private agency staff gathered in Springfield for the DCFS/ Illinois Foster Parent Association Spring Conference in March.

This year's conference theme was "Every Child Is a Success Story." DCFS executives and staff members, along with outside experts, helped provide a compelling slate of educational topics and speakers to educate and inspire the families that work with DCFS on behalf of children.

Participants could choose from 27 workshop topics addressing children's medical, social and emotional needs. In addition to the workshops, participants had opportunity to network and socialize during meals and the popular IFPA Scholarship Auction.

From the Director

Foster parents deserve to hear "thank you" more than during just one month out of the year. But since May is Foster Parent Appreciation Month, I will take this opportunity to share how grateful I am for the work you do.

The Child Welfare field is all about caring for children and working with families. It is not a business, despite some of the business-like discussions we sometimes must have. It is about the passion that foster parents, staff and agencies have for children. There is no greater way to make a difference than to be a foster parent. You care for children who, through no fault of their own, have no family to care for them.



*DCFS Director
Jess McDonald*

The passion that you bring does not go unnoticed. Judges and lawmakers listen to foster parents. Legislators make sure we are able to do the things we have to do to serve children and families better. When I think back over how far we have come, I know there have been hard discussions about tough issues. But we have come this far because we chose to work together.

Knowing that it is possible to work together as a team, you may wonder why it doesn't happen more often. It is hard because many times members of the team have legitimate differences of opinions. While not everyone works the same way, we can help each other get better. All of us must remember why we are here--to help children.

From the highest government office to the neighbor's living room, individuals have come to understand the importance of what we do. There is value in serving children. Therefore, there is great value in being a foster parent. Yours has become the most powerful voice. You are the people who live with and care for our foster children. We would be no place without you.

Thank you for agreeing to work with us. Thank you for opening up your hearts and your homes.



I hope May finds you feeling especially appreciated for your role as a foster parent. Ours is a tough job with challenges and rewards beyond what any licensing rep could accurately describe. So, I am all for dedicating a whole month to honor foster parents.

Along with the usual news on policy and parenting issues, this issue includes several features to highlight how special foster parents are.

If children have to be away from home, they need to believe that things can be better. Foster parents are silver-lined promises of hope on cloudy days.

Let's continue to encourage and inspire each other and the children we serve.

Warmest regards,

Vanessa James
Editor
Fostering Illinois

Former foster children share their appreciation for foster parents

"Foster parents are selfless and choose to do what others won't or can't—they help kids."

"I appreciate that my foster parent Neil Bosansko accepted me for where I was at. Adolescence isn't easy for the adolescent and I am sure it was not an easy stage for him either."

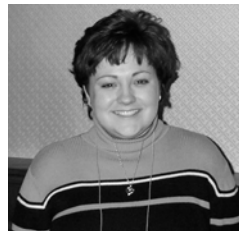
"Neil was special because he took me in and showed an interest in me. He did the best he could for me. Much of the good that happened to me happened because someone cared enough to care."

Luke McQuade

Luke went on to finish school with a Master's Degree in Social Work. He is a school counselor, working with at-risk youth and youth in special education. He and his wife Tonia have two daughters.

"I appreciate my parents (Dan and Karen Krankel) for giving me a chance to improve my life. They were willing to take the time with me that was needed for my recovery."

Kim Tucker



Kim came to the Krankel home at 15 and dependent on drugs and alcohol. The Krankels stuck with her through treatment. Now, 15 years later, the Krankels are still "Mom and Dad" and grandparents to the three children of Kim and her husband.

"I read my case records and wept. I began to get a greater appreciation for what my foster parents had done."

"As a child, I never understood the sacrifice my foster parents were making for me. Years later as an adult, I had to go back and visit some of those families. I wanted to let them know that I was sorry I didn't appreciate it as a kid."

Jeff Letsz

Jeff and his siblings became wards of the state when he was seven. Before twelve he had been placed in an orphanage and three foster homes. After life as a runaway and high school drop out, he found salvation through religion and a strong mentor. His new family inspired him to graduate, marry and start a successful financial firm.



Foster parents answer: **What could a child do to make me feel appreciated?**



"They could go on and have a productive life...AND call often!"

Laverne Bailey, Tinley Park

"They could tell me how supportive I am and how much they love me for caring for their everyday needs"

Jerri Thurman-Hall, Chicago



"When our three- and four-year-old adopted daughters hold our faces in their little hands and say 'I love you' we know they appreciate us.

Karen Poteel and Jesse Brewer, Pana

The Sunshine In My Life®

By Ana Bertha Gonzalez, DCFS Cook Central

Like the rainbow that shines across the sky,
Each time I look into your eyes,
I see a little flower that is in bloom.

Your gentle smile upon my face,
Greets me every time I enter the door or anyplace.

You never ask or wonder where I have been,
All you know is that I am here for you,
And I say, "I love you too!"

You drive me crazy, at times, with all the wonders of your mind,
But that is because you are smart, and oh so kind.

Your curiosity is far beyond my imagination
And I have no doubt that one day you will be President of this great nation.

You are the sunshine that entered my life,
And forever I will be at your side,
To comfort you and give you safety,
To make you feel snug, happy and secure.

To make your mind grow and your fears disappear,
To walk and guide you through life,
To make you shine.

I give these things to you each day,
And remember, your mommy loves you each and every way!

To Belong

(song from Camp To Belong)

To belong to a loving family,
Who's proud for me to be just me,
Enveloping me with friendship,
Making my heart and soul complete.

To have someone to talk to,
To know that someone cares,
When I need someone to hear me,
It's nice to know that someone's there.

To be me, full of laughter,
To be me, full of joy,
To belong, is what I'm after.
To belong, the wish of every girl and boy.

© 1995 written by Lynn Price and Terry Price

Camp to Belong is a national, non-profit, volunteer organization dedicated to reuniting siblings placed in different foster homes for events of fun, emotional empowerment, sibling connection and a sense of belonging.

A recording of this song is available on CD with other songs expressing the feelings of children in foster care. Proceeds go to support activities and educate the public on the importance of sibling bonds and inspiring foster children to succeed.

Camp to Belong
10035 Keenan Street
Highlands Ranch, CO 80126
303/791-0915
www.kacweb.com/ctb

Extended School Year May Be Right For Your Child

As the regular school year winds down, take time to think about other educational options. The term “extended school year” services means educational programming beyond the traditional 180-day school year for eligible students with disabilities stated in the special education law IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). The purpose for the extended school year is to maintain skills or prevent or avoid substantial loss of skills learned already.



Who must be considered for ESY-Extended School Year Services?

Every student with a disability under the law must be considered for ESY services. The determination if a child is eligible is made at the annual IEP (Individual Education Plan) meeting.

What criteria should be used in making an ESY eligibility determination?

One thing to look at is the amount of regression a student experiences as a result of being out of school or necessary services during the summer months. Other factors to consider are:

- the nature and severity of the student’s disability
- the ability of the child’s parents to provide educational structure in the home behavioral and physical impairments
- the ability of the student to interact with regular peers
- the student’s vocational needs
- the availability of alternative resources
- “emerging skills” such as when a student is on the brink of learning to read

Children are not required to fail to be eligible for the Extended School Year services. A variety of support services are available for the child. The team will determine what specific services need to be provided at the annual IEP meeting.

Foster parents should first work with their caseworkers to evaluate the child’s educational needs. If additional support is required educational advocates are available through the DCFS region. Private agency foster parents can contact their agency’s educational liaison for help in advocating for their child. Adoptive parents can also utilize the education advisors.

What foster parents need to know about Failure-to-thrive

Failure-to-thrive is an allegation of child abuse that DCFS Child Protection Investigation Unit (CPI) will investigate in its role to keep children safe. Foster parents may be called upon to deal with the effects of a child who has not received adequate care to enable them to grow and develop as expected. Medical experts from LaRabida Children's Hospital offer this advice and information on "failure-to-thrive".

The term *failure-to-thrive* describes a child who falls behind what is expected for their age, due to genetic, physical, psychological or social factors. It is usually noticed by failure to gain height and weight. The causes of failure-to-thrive are many, and may include:

- Physical causes such as chromosomal abnormalities, defects in major organ systems, abnormalities of the endocrine system, or damage to the brain or central nervous system.
- Psychological and social causes such as emotional deprivation as a result of parental withdrawal, rejection, or hostility.
- Economic factors that affect nutrition, living conditions, and parental attitudes.
- Environmental factors such as exposure to infections, parasites, or toxins.

Sometimes the cause is undetermined. Risk factors for failure-to-thrive are related to the above causes and may include underlying undiagnosed diseases, poverty, negative emotional environments, and crowded or unsanitary living conditions. The problem is serious and can lead to disability or even death due to malnutrition.

"It can be dangerous to wait for a child 'to grow out of it,'" said La Rabida physician, Dr. Dilek Bishku. "For a child to reach their full potential they need to be assessed as early as possible. In the case of a failure-to-thrive patient, early detection will help to prevent long-term effects."

Signs and Symptoms

Some of the signs of failure-to-thrive include failure to gain height and weight, slow development of physical skills such as rolling over, sitting, standing, and walking, delayed mental and social skills, and delayed development of secondary sexual characteristics in adolescents.

Treatment

The treatment depends on the cause of delay in development. Delayed growth due to nutritional factors can be resolved by a well-balanced diet and education of the parents. If psychosocial factors are involved, treatment should include improving the family dynamics and living conditions. Parental attitudes and behavior may contribute to a child's problems and need to be examined. At La Rabida, home-based interventions have often been very effective and are designed to promote maternal competence, facilitate optimal infant development and enhance the caregiver-infant relationship. In addition, weekly therapy sessions, including nutritional guidance in a feeding clinic are offered.

If the period of failure-to-thrive has been short, and the cause is determined and can be corrected, normal growth and development will resume. If it is prolonged, the effects may be long lasting, and can result in developmental delays, overall achievement issues, and general health problems.

Foster parents with failure -to-thrive concerns for children in their care should contact the child's caseworker who will make a referral to the DCFS regional nurse.

Statewide Bulletin

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council works with DCFS to ensure Department policies reflect the interests of foster children and their foster parents. Following is an update on recent activities.

Director's Address to the Council

Director Jess McDonald addressed the Council and foster parents during an Open Forum before the start of the DCFS/IFPA Spring Foster and Adoptive Parent Conference. He spoke on a range of topics from the state budget to DCFS program changes to agency performance standards, along with answering specific foster parent questions.

Budget tight but manageable

Despite budget cuts and the charge to reduce headcount, the Director assured the Council that direct service to families would not be sacrificed.

Foster Parent Support Specialists Settled

Director McDonald reported that the Foster Parent Support Specialist program would remain in place to serve DCFS families. However, in some areas, their current role might change to better utilize the resource. After much input from the SWFCAC, the matter of license supervision for Foster Parent Support Specialists was also settled. Those support specialists with licenses supervised by DCFS will not have to transfer to private agencies. Instead, they will have their licenses supervised by a DCFS region outside of the one where they reside. This measure was taken to avoid possible conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict.

Efforts to Improve Education

The Director spoke of a focus to improve academic performance by minimizing the number of moves between schools while a child is in care. Since turning attention to the problem, the number of school moves has decreased by half among DCFS-supervised cases. Now the Department will be working with private agencies to provide more educational stability.

The Department will also launch an initiative to promote literacy among the children in care and their families. The NIU Educational Access Unit will develop the program with input from the Council.

The next meeting of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council will be on Friday, May 31 in Bloomington.

For details about the meeting or if you have questions about the activities of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council, please contact Chairperson, Pat Cooper at 847/698-3668.



Speak Up On New Administrative Case Review Surveys

At the beginning of this year, the Administrative Case Review (ACR) unit began distributing consumer surveys. To provide quality service, all parties attending an ACR are asked to complete a survey when the ACR is over. While the survey process will be done quarterly, consumer surveys will be available in all ACR locations year-round. Participants may feel free at any time to request a survey from their respective reviewer or the ACR personnel.

All survey results are confidential. Each Regional Administrator has agreed to have collection boxes strategically placed within ACR locations. Upon analysis of the information collected, a statewide report will be shared with the Department.

As mandated by law, the purpose of an ACR is to assist the Department in assuring that foster care plans are family-focused and move children toward a life-long relationship that ensures their safety and provides for their well being in a professional, respectful and supportive manner.



Attention Private Agency Directors: You can receive Fostering Illinois for your staff

If you would like to receive copies of Fostering Illinois to distribute to staff (not to families), please provide the information requested below. If you already receive Fostering Illinois at your agency/office, please take this opportunity to ensure that we have the most up-to-date mailing information.

Agency name _____
Director name _____
Mail to name (if different) _____
Office name/department _____
Mailing address _____
Phone number _____
Fax number _____
DCFS Region _____
Number of issues needed for staff distribution _____
Authorized signature _____

Please FAX this form to Vanessa James, Editor at 773/548-6022. If your agency has multiple sites, photocopy this form and fill it out for each site.

If you have questions, call 773/548-3888 or send an email to foster@chicagonet.net.

NOTE: Individual families receive Fostering Illinois automatically from the DCFS licensing information database. As long as a family maintains a foster care license, they will receive Fostering Illinois. Licensed foster parents not receiving Fostering Illinois, should first contact their licensing representative who can confirm that DCFS has correct mailing information.

Forever Families



Handling Search and Reunion After Adoption

Some adopted individuals feel a strong need to have more information about their family of origin and may decide to search for them. The decision to search is a complicated one and the search itself can be a roller coaster of feelings, fears and hopes. Adopted individuals and birth family members whose adoption was handled by DCFS can request search and reunion services from Midwest Adoption Center (MAC). MAC delivers this service at no charge for the first search, along with providing non-identifying information to families throughout the state.

When parties to an adoption have an interest in seeking information about each other after the adoption, Midwest can play a valuable and objective role in determining how to proceed. Below are two examples of how adoptive families decided they wanted to handle a search and reunion situation.



Gretchen Schulert of the Midwest Adoption Center described the search and reunion services available to provide information about birth families. MAC can be reached at 847/298-9096

After years apart, a brother and sister meet again

An adoptive mother initiated the call to MAC on behalf of her 10 year old adopted son. He had strong memories of a sister that he had been with briefly in a foster care placement five years earlier. Since then, the young boy had gone half his life without seeing his birth sister who had been adopted by another family.

Midwest was able to locate the other family – just as they were preparing to move out of state. The MAC worker talked with the other adoptive family by phone about options for future contact and what that might mean for the children. Within a few weeks, both families decided to sign consents so they could have direct contact with each other. Soon after, they made plans to have a visit before the sister's move.

Adoptive family gets help to prepare for a visit with birth mother

A birth mother contacted Midwest to contact the family that had adopted her three children through DCFS. MAC, not the mother, contacted the adoptive parents. As a first step to help the adoptive parents decide how to proceed, MAC provided the family with the complete, non-identifying information from the children's case files.

The adoptive family reviewed the information and decided to begin communications with letters to the birth mother sent through MAC. After a few months the adoptive family felt comfortable with signing a consent to release their name and address to the birth mother. The adoptive parents made plans to take the children for a visit to the birth mother. They felt it important that the children learn more about their family of origin and see what life is like for their mother.

Internet Resources for Adoptive Families

AdoptNet and the Adoption Roadmap www.adoptnet.org

The National Adoption Center's Learning Center is home of the Adoption RoadMap. The overall goal of the NAC's Adoption RoadMap - Family Preparation Course is to prepare adults for the adoption process and for parenting adopted children, especially children with special needs, through a convenient online study method called distance learning. Additionally, the site provides on-line discussions, informational resources and a newsletter for adoptive families.

Families can visit the website or contact the National Adoption Center at (800) TO-ADOPT. Mail can be sent to 1500 Walnut Street, Suite 701, Philadelphia, Pa 19102.

The Right Word Says A Lot. Keep Adoption Talk Positive.

Positive Language	Negative Language
Birth Parent	Real Parents; Natural Parents
Birth Child	Own Child
My Child	Adopted Child; Own Child
Born to Unmarried Parents	Illegitimate
Terminate Parental Rights	Give Up
Make an Adoption Plan	Give Away
To Parent	To Keep
Waiting Child	Adoptable Child; Available Child
Biological Father	Begetter
Making Contact with	Reunion
Parent	Adoptive Parent
Adoption Triad	Adoption Triangle
Permission to Sign a Release	Disclosure
Search	Track Down
Child Placed for Adoption	An Unwanted Child
Court Terminated	Child Taken Away
Child with Special Needs	Handicapped Child
Was Adopted	Is Adopted

Reprinted from National Adoption Center website materials

NACAC is coming to Chicago

DCFS will co-sponsor the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) 2002 Annual Conference. The conference titled "Winds of Change: New directions for families and children" will be held in Chicago on August 1 through 4 at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare.

DCFS will provide 500 scholarships for foster or adoptive parents and DCFS or private agency staff. **The DCFS Training Registration Unit is taking registrations now on a first come, first served basis. Registrations requesting DCFS funding must be received by 5:00 p.m. on June 15.** Please see the attached flyer for registration details, or for further information, contact Jean Maher in the DCFS Division of Training at 217-785-5689. Separate registration arrangements will be coordinated by Gwenn Eyer for the following groups: The Illinois NACAC Conference Steering Committee; Illinois Adoption Advisory Council members; Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council members; and board members of IFPA and COAC.

The NACAC conference program will include Judge Bill Byers speaking on the impact of the Adoption and Safe Families Act; adult adoptees and graduates of foster care describing their experiences; and Dr. Joseph Crumbley, speaking on "Shared Expectations: Normalizing the Adoption Experience.

In addition to the all-conference sessions, there will be seven workshop periods during which families can choose from more than 100 topics. This year's NACAC conference promises to be an opportunity for learning and for building stronger bonds within and among adoptive families.

Encouraging Older Youth to Read for School and Pleasure

The Division of Education and Transition Services (DETS) announced two new programs to make it easier for youth in care to learn at school and at home. The DETS Business Office in Peoria will administer the Book Reimbursement program, which is available to pay for required textbooks for students attending universities including: University of Illinois Champaign, Illinois State University, Northern Illinois University, Northeastern Illinois University, Governor's State University and Western Illinois University. Students must take to the bookstore a class schedule, student ID, DCFS medical card (if under 21) and a letter from DETS. The bookstore will then forward the bill to the DETS Business Office for payment back to the university. Students attending colleges and universities not listed above will continue to be reimbursed directly for their book expenses.

Also to encourage learning among all youth, DETS has launched a "Book of the Month Club." The DETS division is hoping that all staff and caregivers will inspire a young person to join the club and read a new book each month. Caseworkers will forward the names of youth who read 12 books to DETS. Those children will receive a certificate for their accomplishment. Questions about these programs can be directed to the DETS Business Office at 309/671-4725.

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: *What is the funniest thing that has happened to you since become a foster parent?*

"Along with foster and adoptive children, I had two birth daughters born naturally and by Cesarean. When my daughter was playing dolls with a friend, I overheard her explaining that you can have babies many different ways. "Like my mommy who had some out of her bottom and some out of her stomach and some out of her agency."

*Pat Dvorak,
East Peoria*

After noticing a stray backpack, missing food and an unfamiliar pair of sneakers, I confronted my boys. They introduced me to a school friend from a troubled home situation. Their explanation was, "He followed us home, Mom. Can we keep him?" The funniest part is that we did.

*Lavern Bailey,
Tinley Park*

I invited the adoptive family for the newborn I was fostering over for a home-cooked meal and visit with their child. The father told me that he had been upset and nervous about the idea of temporary foster care. He said he expected me to open the door "in a spaghetti-stained t-shirt with a cigarette hanging from my mouth and cribs of crying babies lined up against the wall." Boy, was he surprised by what a real foster home is like.

*Rosie Biegler
Peoria*

The new question is: *How do you help your foster or adoptive children avoid or handle uncomfortable questions and comments about their background at school?*

You can contact me by e-mail at foster@chicagonet.net or by phone at 773/548-3888 or by mail at Fostering Illinois, James R. Thompson Center, 6th floor, Chicago IL 60601. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Vanessa James, Editor

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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.

Fostering Illinois is published six times a year, bi-monthly, and mailed to licensed foster parents, unlicensed relatives caring for children under DCFS care, all DCFS staff and private agency staff as ordered.

Material may not be reprinted in whole, in part or in any form whatsoever without permission from the Editor or DCFS.

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?

Donte and Marcus [C5762-63]

These two young men are cheerful and friendly, and they like to engage in conversation. Donte, who's almost ten, has a great sense of humor. He likes to sit quietly and read. When he isn't reading, he's probably playing video games, riding his bike, or playing basketball. Marcus, 9, loves to draw and color. He also enjoys listening to music, singing, and reading stories from the Bible.

The children's foster parent said that Donte likes to help out at home. Their worker said that Marcus is a lovable child who shows concern for others.

David [C6954] 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.

Vicky [C7019] Vicky likes to give – she really enjoys helping others. This exuberant 11-year-old also likes to play on her swing, roller skate, take long walks, shop for clothes, and blow bubbles. And she loves to give and receive hugs. Her favorite foods are pizza and hamburgers.

Her teacher and worker said she is loving and caring and can form attachments to others.

David [C6400] This charming young man loves company! David enjoys playing with other children, going to the playground, and playing house. He also likes animals, especially horses, and he really appreciates good food. He is nine years old.

His foster parent said that when David knows he is loved, he is a "joy to be around." His worker said he can be very affectionate.

Lanell [C5108] She's a natural athlete! Lanell excels at basketball and softball, and she loves sports. This 14-year-old also enjoys popular music, drawing, decorating her room, and participating in the Girl Scouts and church-related activities. Lanell would like to have a pet.

Her worker said that Lanell is engaging, friendly, and popular with her classmates. Her teacher said she is cooperative, pleasant, and affectionate.

Walter and LeAsha [C6428-29]

These two charming kids will make your family complete! Walter is a friendly, happy boy who likes to draw, ride his bike, and play football. He is nine years old. LeAsha, 11, enjoys playing house, playing with her Barbie dolls, and dressing up. Both of them enjoy going to church and singing in the choir.

Walter's teacher said he is sweet and polite, and his worker described him as a "caring and loving boy." Their foster parent said LeAsha can be very cooperative and both kids are well mannered, helpful, protective of each other, and "very lovable."

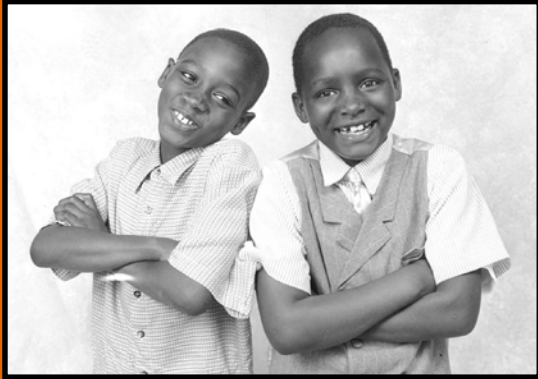
If you are interested in adopting learning about these or other children waiting to be adopted, please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390 (within Illinois) or 1-312-346-1516 (outside Illinois), or see the AICI web site - www.adoptinfo-il.org.

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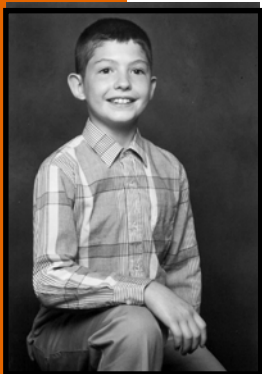
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DO YOU KNOW A FAMILY FOR ME?

*Enclosed in this issue -
NACAC Conference
Registration Form and State
Fair Ticket Order Form.*



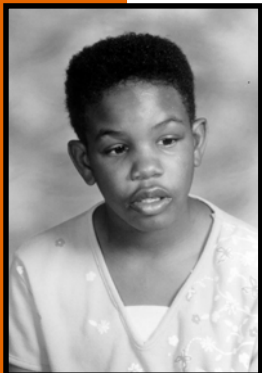
Donte & Marcus (C5762-63)



David J (C6954)

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Vicky (C67019)



David M (C6400)



Lanell (C5108)



Walter & LeAsha
(C6428-29)

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