



FOSTERING

Linking Families Together for

ILLINOIS

Children's Futures

DCFS Changes Requirements for Adoption and Guardianship Subsidies

Day care payments for children under three also available

The Department of Children and Family Services recently announced significant changes to subsidy eligibility guidelines for children who are eligible for adoption assistance and for subsidized guardianship. In addition, the Department is now making child care available for eligible children moving to adoption or subsidized guardianship. The changes became effective on July 1, 2001. They are not retroactive and apply only to children who meet the requirements on or after that date.

Lower Age for Adoption Subsidy Eligibility

The former policy for determining a child's eligibility for adoption assistance included a requirement that stated, unless otherwise eligible, the child had to be three years of age or older. With the new policy, children age one and older who are wards of the state and who are adopted will qualify for adoption assistance, regardless of disability or relation to a sibling group. All other eligibility criteria remain unchanged. Now, the following criteria will determine if a DCFS ward is eligible for an adoption subsidy. If the child:

- is one year of age or older;
- has an irreversible or non-correctable physical, mental or emotional disability;
- has a physical, mental or emotional disability correctable through surgery, treatment or other specialized services;
- is a member of a sibling group being adopted together where at least one child meets one of three above criteria; or
- is a child being adopted by adoptive parents who have previously adopted, with adoption assistance, another child born of the same mother or father.

Lower Time in Care Requirement for Subsidized Guardianship

Former DCFS policy to determine if a child is eligible for subsidized guardianship included a requirement that the child must have been in the legal custody of the state for two or more years immediately prior to establishing subsidized guardianship. With the new change, children need only be in the legal custody of the state for at least one year immediately prior to establishing subsidized guardianship. All other eligibility criteria remain unchanged. Now the primary eligibility criteria for subsidized guardianship are:

- he or she has been in foster care for at least one year immediately prior to the legal transfer of guardianship; and
- he or she has been in your home for at least one year immediately prior to the legal transfer of guardianship; and
- he or she is not in the cost-neutrality group; and
- for licensed, unrelated caregivers, a child must be over the age of twelve or is a member of a sibling group, or has been granted an age waiver; or
- in the case of sibling groups, only one sibling needs to meet all the subsidized guardianship requirements.

Continued on page 10.

Back to School

Submitted by the Education Access Project

Summer is over and a new school year is here. Some advance planning will help make it successful for everyone involved.



Before school starts

Foster parents and caseworkers should:

- Review school records.
- Discuss any education concerns with each other.
- Talk about school to the children – adjust their schedules as needed.
- Get immunizations and school physicals.
- Make certain children are registered in school.
- Request and READ the school's handbook.
- Make certain children have necessary school supplies.
- Determine transportation.
- Arrange before and after school care, if needed.

When classes begin

Making the transition to a new school year can be stressful for everyone. It takes time and effort to get used to new teachers and new classmates. To help things go smoothly, foster parents and caseworkers should:

- Meet the new teachers.
- Share information about who is to be contacted in certain circumstances and how communication will be handled during the year.
- If needed, arrange for a school meeting to address any issues or concerns.
- Discuss with children the classroom rules as well as the school district discipline procedures.
- Develop household rules that reinforce positive classroom behavior.
- Set up a homework schedule.
- Sign up students for extracurricular activities.

Throughout the school year

Foster parents and caseworkers need to have ongoing contact with the school throughout the school year. Some ways to stay in contact include:

- Attending parent-teacher conferences and school functions.
- Cheering for your children in academic and extracurricular activities.
- Monitoring homework.
- Touching base with schoolteachers often.
- Reviewing progress reports.
- Expressing your concerns before the problem becomes a crisis.
- Saying thank you when things go right.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

SCHOOL EXPENSES:

- All schools provide free lunches and textbooks to foster children.
- Schools have individual policies regarding waivers for other school fees.
- School clothes are covered by monthly foster care payment.
- Private agencies have individual policies regarding routine school supplies. DCFS foster parents receive \$50.00 during the month of July on the August check for these.
- Transportation is free for students living more than 1½ miles from school, one mile from public transportation or for children receiving special education services and needing transportation.
- DCFS will pay for tutoring after all other options are exhausted.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

School districts are required to provide students with copies of school discipline policies and provide copies of discipline procedures upon request. Make sure you have copies and review the procedures with the children in your home.

Any time a child is suspended more than twice in a semester the caseworker and foster parent should meet with the school and develop or revise a behavior plan for the student.

For a student who faces expulsion, the foster parent should contact the caseworker immediately. Through the DCFS Guardian's office, each child will be ensured legal representation.

If any child is not enrolled in school, or for assistance regarding suspensions and expulsions, contact the Education Advisor in your area.



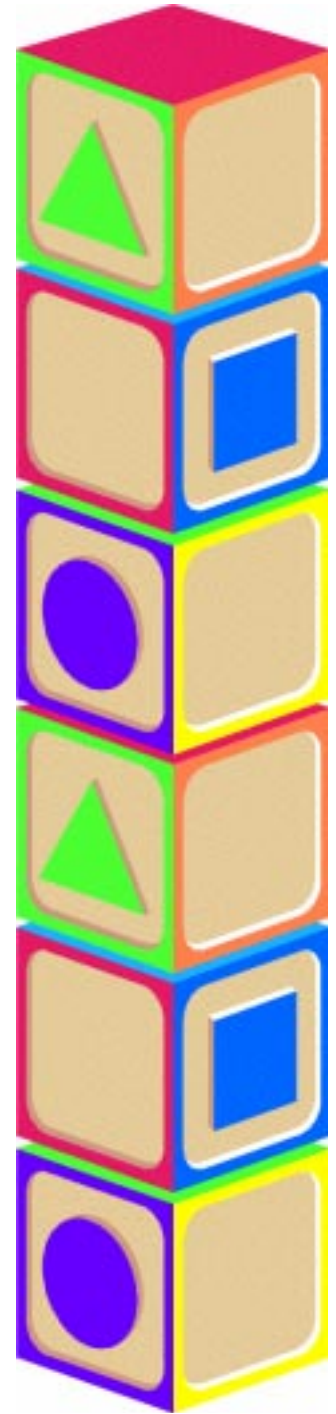
IF YOU NEED HELP

All foster parents may attend Educational Advocacy training. These training schedules vary by region. See the education schedule printed in the regional section of *Fostering Illinois* for upcoming classes.

Educational issues can be confusing and we all need help from time to time. Caseworkers and foster parents working together as a TEAM most often successfully advocate for the children in their care. If you need assistance in advocating for services or dealing with other school-related issues, contact the DCFS Education Advisor in your area. Foster parents with private agencies should contact the Education Liaison for your agency. The DCFS Education Advisors can also provide support for adoptive families. To find the education advisor for your area, call the DCFS Division of Education and Transition Services at 312/814-4144.

Helping Children Learn is as easy as... **A-B-C**

- A**ttend parent-teacher conferences and other school events.
- B**uild in time to talk *and* listen to your child everyday.
- C**ommunicate clearly the dangers of drugs and alcohol.
- D**on't let your child settle for doing less than his or her best.
- E**stablish a daily family routine that includes scheduled homework time.
- F**ind out the names of your child's teachers and principal -- and meet with them early in the school year.
- G**et active in your child's school. Volunteer to help in the classroom, serve on a committee or go on a field trip.
- H**elp your child stay on track with homework daily.
- I**nvolve your child in after-school activities.
- J**oin the PTA or another home-school organization.
- K**eep good books, magazines and newspapers in your home.
- L**imit your child's TV viewing to no more than two hours a day.
- M**ake sure your child goes to school every day.
- N**otice when your child does something well and praise his or her efforts.
- O**rganize other parents and community members to address problems at your child's school.
- P**ay attention to the progress your child is making in school.
- Q**uestion the learning standards at your child's school. Every child has a right to a high quality education.
- R**ead to your child every day and let your child read to you, too.
- S**upport school efforts to develop and maintain rules for student discipline.
- T**ell your child stories about your family and your culture.
- U**nderstand what skills your child should be learning at each grade level.
- V**isit the library regularly with your child.
- W**rite a note or call a teacher when something goes especially well. Don't forget to encourage your children for their efforts.
- eX**pect and encourage your child to take tough academic courses.
- Y**ou are a role model for your child-be sure to set a good example.
- Z**ero in on museums, free concerts and other community events to reinforce your child's learning.



Source: *The Family Connection of St. Joseph County Inc for Indiana Center for Family School & Community Partnerships*

Updates to the Levels of Care Evaluations

On February 15, 2001, the Department of Children and Family Services implemented a revised process for determining when a child qualifies for specialized/treatment foster care. This article provides an update to the Levels of Care (LOC) article that was published in the March 2001 issue of *Fostering Illinois*.

In addition to revising and standardizing the LOC forms, the Department had every child in specialized/treatment foster care re-reviewed on the new LOC forms between February and June of 2001. As of July 1, 2001, all LOC referral packets will be reviewed only by the DCFS LOC Reviewers. Private agency staff will no longer conduct their own LOC reviews. The DCFS Reviewers will use a manual to assist them with the scoring to help ensure that reviews are done objectively throughout the state.

Listed below are some updates to the LOC process that foster parents should be aware of:

LOC Referrals and Reviews

- ❑ The Caregiver Report is one of the forms that make up the LOC referral packet. This form should be completed by the foster parent during an in person interview with the caseworker. In addition, the foster parent can write a paragraph explaining the child's special needs if they desire.
- ❑ If a foster parent is caring for a child that they believe has special needs that exceed those of a typical foster child, they can request that the caseworker submit a LOC referral packet.

LOC Re-reviews and Appeals

- ❑ Foster parents will have the right to ask for a re-review if they are not satisfied with the results of the LOC review. Every time a LOC review is completed, the foster parent and the caseworker, will be sent the completed Level of Care Assessment Form (CFS 418) and a cover letter. The cover letter states the results of the review and explains the process for requesting a re-review if the foster parent/caseworker is not satisfied with the results of the LOC.

The request for a re-review must be made in writing to the address that is listed in the cover letter. If the foster parent has additional information about the child's special needs, it should be submitted along with their request for a re-review.

- ❑ After a re-review has been requested in writing, a new LOC review will be completed. The new CFS 418 will be mailed to the foster parent and caseworker, along with a cover letter. The cover letter states the results of the re-review and the process for requesting an appeal if the foster parent is still not satisfied with the results of the re-review.
- ❑ If a foster parent requests an initial LOC review in writing and the caseworker does not submit the LOC referral packet within two months of the written request, the foster parent can appeal the LOC effective date. In this situation, the foster parent can go straight to appeals and bypass the re-review process.

LOC and Board Payments

- ❑ The Department will no longer be using individualized contracts for DCFS foster parents who are caring for a specialized/treatment level child. Instead of the contract, the foster parent will sign an agreement that provides an outline of the expectations and basic information about the LOC review process.
- ❑ When it is determined that a child no longer meets the criteria for specialized/treatment foster care and is ready to be stepped down, the foster care monthly payment will remain at the higher level for two months following the LOC review. Starting on the third month, the foster care monthly payment will be stepped down to the appropriate level.

From the Files

Prevent Child Abuse Illinois to Host Statewide Conference

Prevent Child Abuse Illinois will hold its Annual Statewide Conference on October 10-11th at the Springfield Hilton in Springfield, Illinois. This year's conference theme is "Harvest of Hope: Reaping Benefits for Illinois Children." There are 50 conference slots available through DCFS for foster parents.

If you are interested in receiving registration information regarding the foster parent slots that are available through DCFS for the 2001 Prevent Child Abuse Illinois Conference, please contact Mary Salisbury at 217/522-1129.

Raising Children Who Refuse to be Raised by Dr. Dave Ziegler

In his new book, *Raising Children Who Refuse to be Raised*, psychologist Dave Ziegler offers insight gained over 30 years working with difficult children and 16 years spent as a foster parent to hundreds of severely disturbed children. With empathy and humor, he delivers more than 300 pages of valuable information in a style as accessible to parents as to professionals. Unlike books that address individual categories of special needs children, Ziegler's is a handbook for parents (and the therapists who coach them) of children with multiple problems.

Tell It Like It Is!

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



Readers respond to the question: *When you are ready to throw in the towel, what makes you stick with foster parenting?*

We have had 89 children in our home at different times. For us it has always been seeing beyond their anger and finding the child inside. If you accept these children as part of your family you will find all kinds of rewards.

*Mike and Barb Morse of Quincy, Illinois
DCFS Central Region*

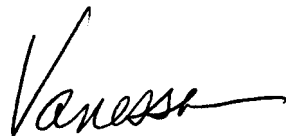
One night as I was going upstairs to bed I noticed a piece of paper with two fruit juicer candies along with the message "Thank you for letting me have a chance." It was left there by our 11-year-old foster son.

On days when I think of throwing in the towel, I wait until my kids are asleep at night. Then I stand in their doorway and watch the peaceful look on their faces. I think of the message left by our son on the steps and I try to feel what they must be feeling in their everyday lives. I realize that sometimes when they act the worst is when they need us the most. I know then that throwing in the towel is not an option for me. I crawl into bed and pray to wake up with enough energy and patience to get through another day.

*Julie Rowland of Albany, Illinois
Catholic Charities*

The new question is: *How do you handle it when children leave your home to return to birth parents or move to a new placement?*

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



Vanessa James, Editor

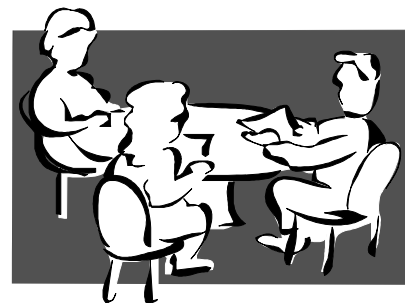
Fostering Best Practice

In 1998, DCFS began developing the Best Practice Model to ensure consistent quality for serving children in Illinois. This project was initiated by Director Jess McDonald, and has had input from staff from a broad cross-section of divisions and programs. As foster parents hear more about the Department's Best Practice initiative, many ask this important question: *How will Best Practice bring about improvements for the children in my care?*

Best Practice will establish guidelines for providing consistent care and services from the time a child first becomes involved with DCFS until permanency is achieved for the child. Best Practice is taking what we know works best for serving children and families – through research, expert experience, national accreditation standards and law – and applying it consistently throughout the state.

Best Practice will affect children in several ways:

- ◆ Caseworkers will do **concurrent planning on all cases** – even with intact families. This means caseworkers will actively work toward one permanency plan while – at the same time – prepare an alternative plan in the event the preferred plan cannot be achieved.
- ◆ The goal of Best Practice is to achieve **permanency for each child within the timeframes of the Adoption and Safe Family Act**. There will be careful matching of the child and foster parent in the initial placement – with the foster parent receiving as much information as possible about the child at the time of placement.
- ◆ All cases will have **Child & Family Teams that will hold family meetings to plan for the child**. Foster parents will be encouraged to be involved in the family meetings to provide information and input into planning for the child, as well as support for the natural family in working toward the permanency goal.
- ◆ Best Practice applies the Family-to-Family model of providing family foster care. Under this model, foster parents engage in **shared parenting activities** such as attending school staffings and medical appointments with the biological families to help the parents understand how they can parent successfully. The model is neighborhood based, family-focused and culturally appropriate.
- ◆ Regional Behavioral/Mental Health Screening Teams will provide **screening, consultation and referral services for treatment of all children entering DCFS custody**.



Best Practice has been holding a series of meetings with a group of foster parents to provide them with information about Best Practice, and hear their concerns regarding Best Practice and fostering in general. Best Practice continues to seek opportunities to communicate with foster parents about Best Practice. In future issues of *Fostering Illinois* there will be a Question & Answer section. We welcome your questions; please e-mail them to the Best Practices' mailbox at bpractic@idcfs.state.il.us or call Joyce Bryan at 217/747-7610 or write to AMF/SACWIS Project, 406 E. Monroe, Springfield, IL 62701.

Statewide Council Honors Outgoing Members



*Idalyia Jones,
Cook North Region*

The end of the fiscal year in June also marked the end of terms for six members of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council. Statewide representatives leaving the Council after faithfully fulfilling their terms are Idalyia Jones, Pam O'Grady, Elizabeth Richmond, Joyce Loy, Geraldine Wilson and Judie Fairchild.

These volunteers gave of their time, expertise and experience in fostering for many years of service. Their colleagues wish them well and will carry on the tradition of strong leadership that they leave behind.



*Judie Fairchild,
Southern Region*



*Pam O'Grady,
Cook North Region*



*Elizabeth Richmond,
Downstate representative for
CWAC*



*Joyce Loy, Central Region
and outgoing chairperson*



*Geraldine Wilson,
Outgoing president of the
Cook County Foster Parent
Advisory Committee*

New Chair for Statewide Council

Patricia Cooper, a foster and adoptive parent from Rosemont, was elected as Chair for the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council, effective July 1. Pat most recently served as vice chair. Pat brings 26 years of fostering experience to the position. She has also adopted nine children. Much of her time is spent advocating for the rights of children through her commitments to the Statewide Council, Illinois Council on Adoptable Children, the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council and many other organizations.

Joyce Loy, the outgoing chair, will continue to serve on the Statewide Council in a one-year consultative role.



If you have questions about the activities of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council, please contact Ray Gates at 217/524-2422 or rgates@idcfs.state.il.us.



The Best Gift is a Simple, Sincere *Thank You*

To the Families We Serve:

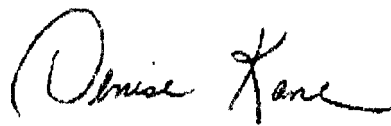
As the Ethics Officer for the Department of Children and Family Services, I often receive inquiries from workers on what to do when a family they are serving presents them with a gift. This brings up a challenging ethical question.

The gift may seem small or of nominal value, but it is a significant symbol of a family's appreciation. Child welfare professionals are always touched by these acts of kindness and affirmation. We do not want to appear ungracious or embarrass the parent by refusing the gift. Public servants, particularly in this field, must value civility and graciousness.

While there is inherent nobility in serving our public, at times, we all need positive affirmations to spur us on in this line of work. When staff ask me, "What am I to say to the family in these moments?" I describe my response. Always express sincere gratitude, whether the giver is a birth parent, extended family member or a foster/adoptive parent. Let the giver know that serving them has value in itself. The honor lies not in the gift, but in doing the job well.

While staff must decline to accept the gift, families should know that long after material gifts fade, the memory of their regard will stay. A good name is a legacy that lasts forever. Our work together as child welfare professionals and as parents can produce good in this world.

Warm Regards,



Denise Kane
DCFS Inspector General
Ethics Officer

Subsidy Requirements

(continued from page 1)

Payments for non-Therapeutic Day Care

Previous DCFS policy allowed children who are eligible for adoption assistance or subsidized guardianship to receive therapeutic day care as part of the subsidy agreement, providing the child meets specific eligibility criteria. Under the new change certain children may be eligible for day care payments, even if they do not qualify for therapeutic day care. Effective July 1, 2001, subsidy-eligible children under the age of three years old may qualify for day care if the adoptive parent or guardian is employed or in an education-related program. Children under the age of three who are currently receiving Adoption Assistance or placed in Subsidized Guardianship may qualify for day care services. This day care payment cannot be used in addition to therapeutic day care. Payment for day care services will end on the child's third birthday.



Reasons to Love Teenagers

- They rarely vomit on your shoulder.
- They can teach you to speak knowledgeably about Top 40 songs, movie stars, clothing styles and facial jewelry.
- They can help you program your VCR, reset your digital clocks and find that missing file on your computer.
- They never keep you up all night with gas pains, and hardly ever run into the street.
- They might help with dinner if you have a cast iron stomach.
- They seldom hit each other with Tonka trucks, and prefer spending their time on the telephone discussing "like what he said and like what she said" and "like what are we going to wear?"
- They can bring new jokes into your family. (Be careful where you share these jokes!)
- They can read their own bedtime stories, get their own drinks of water and hardly ever have accidents.
- They can laugh with you until you are both in tears.
- They can burst your buttons with pride when they make it through treatment, do well on a project you helped them with or tell people that you are the one who made the difference.
- They will remember you forever.
- Can you see yourself listening supporting, validating, standing by a 15-year old? Can you commiserate over bad hair, erupting pimples, broken dates and sarcastic parents? Can you help a kid figure out how to make it at school, develop friendships, handle disappointment and find a job?
- Teens are often awkward, angry, hurt and depressed with lots of reasons for being that way. They want to be accepted, successful, attractive, admired, loving and loved. Just like we do.
- They need someone to help them learn how to grow up. Could you be that one?

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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?

Yafa [C4114]

If Yafa, 9, is watching a Scooby-Doo cartoon, he's sure to be in a good mood. He also enjoys playing basketball, riding his bike and playing video games. His favorite pets are dogs. His foster parents said "he loves to help others and is a true gentleman." His teacher said he listens well.

Kentrell and Mikel [C6885-86]

These adorable little boys are eager for a loving home! Kentrell is an active four-year-old who plays well with other children. He loves attention and expresses his feelings well. Mikel, 3, is quiet until he becomes familiar with his surroundings. His favorite toys are race cars. The boys' foster parent said that they are both likable children.

Andrew [C3666]

Andrew is a terrific athlete! This twelve-year-old especially enjoys playing basketball with other children his age. He also likes playing with Pokemon cards and video games and participating in church-related activities. His foster parent and teacher said that Andrew cares about his appearance and works at being stylish and well groomed. They described him as a "happy and energetic" young man.

William [C6870]

This sweet little guy loves to smile and have someone read to him. William, 3, warms up to people quickl, and he loves watching Barney videos and playing with Barney toys. William's worker said he has a lot of love to give and he's always smiling.

Eunice, Eddie and Jeaniece [C6882-84]

This is a trio of loving children with a close bond. Eunice, 12, likes to sing and dance and she takes a great deal of pride in her appearance. Eddie is an active eleven-year-old who likes playing with his remote-controlled toys, coloring, reading, and wrestling. Jeaniece, 10, likes to color, play with her dolls, and play dress-up. She enjoys school and often works independently in class. Their worker said that Eunice is generous and self-sufficient and has good self-esteem. Eddie is active and energetic, and Jeaniece is loving and affectionate.

Dominique [C4623]

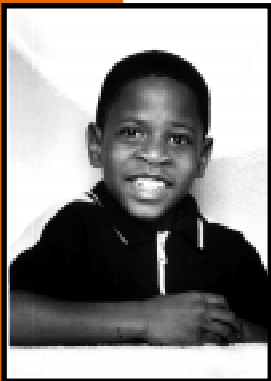
Ten-year-old Dominique is a talented dancer and she loves to skate and jump rope. Her worker said that she is loving and affectionate. Her foster parent and teacher said she is a caring and soft-spoken little girl.

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.

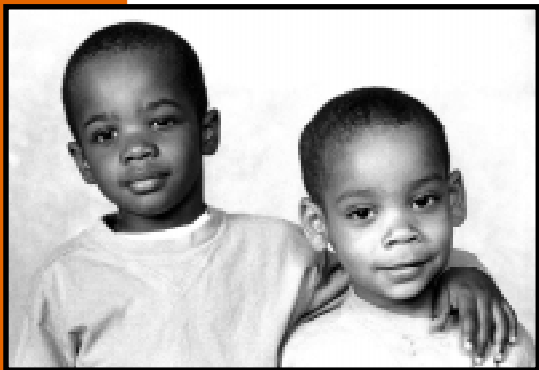
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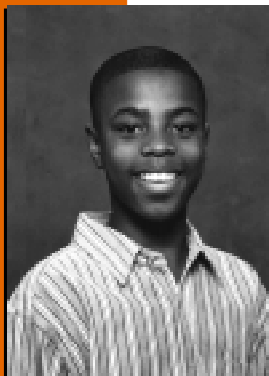
DO YOU KNOW A FAMILY FOR ME?



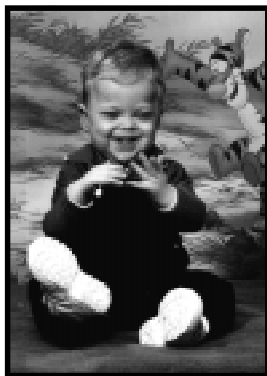
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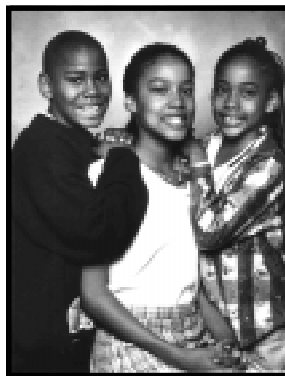
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Dominique(C4623)

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