

Our Kids

2001 Vol. 6
Holiday Issue

For Southern Region Foster Parents

Foster Family Spotlight:

West City family makes life better for more than 50 foster children

Seventeen-year-old Neva Reed doesn't know where she would be without the foster care system.

"But I know it wouldn't be this decent. I probably wouldn't have such a good life," Reed said.

When she was just 5 years old, Reed entered the foster care system. Reed was placed in the West City home of Jim and Beth Reed who, back then in 1989, were first-time foster parents.

"We just fell in love with Neva. She felt like our own kid right away." In fact, Reed said, "Neva was so wonderful, we decided to adopt her."

Since that first experience, the Reed family has fostered more than 50 children, ranging in age from newborns up to age 18. Beth Reed said she made the decision to become a foster parent based on a childhood memory.

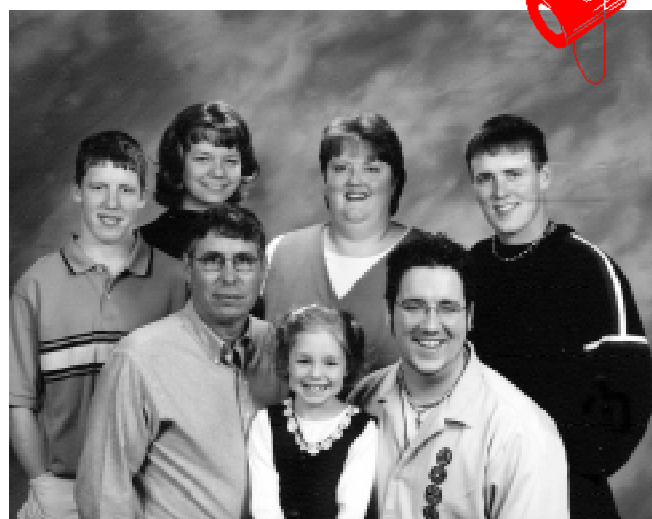
"When I was little, I met a girl at my grandmother's church. She was fidgety and always in trouble. I always wanted to go to her house after church but my grandmother wouldn't let me," Reed said.

Her grandmother told her that the little girl was in foster care because she didn't have anyone to take care of her. "I decided then that I wanted to become a foster parent," said Reed.

The Reeds, with their children, Nathan, Preston, Neva, Eli and Mikaila, had varied experiences in their many years of foster parenting.

Jim Reed said sometimes a child can come into the home and disrupt the entire family.

Beth Reed said every foster family experiences failure, "Or at least you feel like you've failed. Sometimes the placement is just not right. Then you feel like you've caused another disruptive loss in that child's life. You wonder, 'could I have tried harder?' But sometimes the needs of the child are so great that you just can't deal with it in your family."

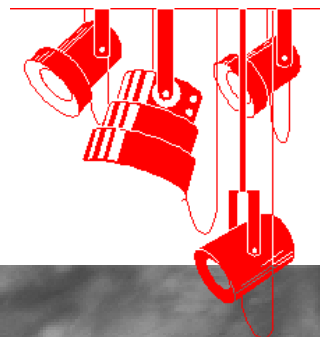


The Reed Family (l-r) Eli, Neva, Jim, Mikaila, Beth, Preston and Nathan.

Success for a foster family, Beth Reed said, is when the child is able to return to their own family. Most of the Reeds' foster kids have been able to return to their families or go to live with family members. Some have 'aged-out', that is they have reached the age where they no longer need foster care.

"We stay in touch with a lot of them. We'll hear from them on Mother's Day or Father's Day. They ask us our advice and then don't take it," she joked.

Continued on page 2.



Bowl-a-thon \$

The Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition, in conjunction with the Foster and Adoptive Care Alliance, recently hosted a bowl-a-thon fundraiser. The event was held at St. Clair Bowl in O'Fallon, Illinois. The event was a tremendous success with all funds being used for foster care projects. Thanks go to everyone who participated in this event. A special thanks is extended to the following businesses that generously supported this event.

- Bel-O Sales and Services, Inc. - Belleville
- Blimpies - Belleville
- Blue Bunny Ice Cream - Millstadt
- Bill's Towing - Washington Park
- Creative Travel - Granite City
- Erlinger Roofing - Belleville
- L & D Wilson Siding, Inc. - O'Fallon
- Mascoutah Heating and Cooling, Inc. - Mascoutah
- Quiznos - St. Clair Sq.
- Subway - Millstadt
- Washington Park Fire Department - Washington Park

Please patronize these businesses as a thank you for their support and generosity.

OUR KIDS

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Call with foster parent association news and schedules; local training; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and news articles and support all foster families can use.

Southern Region "Little Angels" Awarded for Helping Foster Children



Sara, Nicholas and Katherine Dietz, the children of foster parents Paul and Jean Dietz of Lebanon, Illinois were recently nominated for an "Angels in Action" award from Georgia Pacific Corporation's Angel Soft Division.

The three children, who are 9, 8 and 12 years old were nominated for the award by Norann Dillon, manager of the Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition's Kidstore for collecting and donating over 40 backpacks and duffel bags.

The bags were distributed to foster children as part of the Kidstore's back to school party at the St. Louis Zoo. Sara, Nicholas and Katherine worked with the O'Fallon Library to collect the bags.

Congratulations to Sara, Nicholas and Katherine for all their hard work.

DCFS Spring Conference Reimbursement Information

Each agency has its own policy for reimbursing travel and conference-related expenses. For families whose licenses are supervised by the DCFS Southern Region, the Regional Administrator must sign the registration form before it is submitted. Southern Region families should work with their caseworker to obtain the necessary approval signature.

West City family makes life better (con't.)

The Reeds said they feel their lives, and the lives of their children, have been enriched because of their foster parenting.

Jim Reed said fostering "has been a very rewarding experience. You have your share of heartaches. But there are also rewards. We had a girl once for just three days and she came back recently to thank us for what we had done for her."

To be a successful foster parent Beth Reed advises that, "You have to have a family that can handle change and be flexible. Most of all, you have to be considerate of the issues that brought the child into your home," she said.

By Rebecca Malkovich, News Editor
Reprinted with permission from the Benton Evening News

Bridging Families During the Holiday Season

The winter months bring festivities and joy along with a good measure of excitement and holiday cheer. However, this time of year also can intensify feelings of longing for children in the foster care system because it emphasizes the separation from their birth families. Often, these children create memories of idealized parents. It makes life a little more bearable for them to imagine that their birth families are exemplary and that life before foster care was happy. Although this often does not match their real experiences, this type of imagination is common and serves as a kind of emotional protection for them.

Sometimes, when they face the reality of their situation, children will exhibit sadness and significant emotional distress from being separated from their birth families during the holidays. Often, older children are more vulnerable to intense feelings of sadness and anger during the holiday season because they have more memories of the rituals and traditions of their birth families during the holidays. Also, these older children often functioned as "pseudo-parents" before the removal from their families and, as such, they tend to worry about their younger siblings and continue to feel responsible for them.

It is important to provide a healthy bridge for children who may be saddened during the time of year that brings so much joy to others. Failure to acknowledge the feelings may cause them to be more acute. It is often helpful to create a bridge that connects the birth family, either literally or figuratively, with the foster family to compensate for the feelings of separation that occurs during this time. Following are a few suggestions to bridge the gap:








1. Ask the child about different holiday dishes that their birth families enjoyed during the holidays. Ask them to help prepare them or share your excitement about preparing them.
2. Take a picture of the entire foster family, including foster and biological siblings as well as foster parents, and display this picture as part of the holiday decorations.
3. Help the children to create holiday cards for their foster and biological siblings and mail them.
4. Help the children create an ornament, which represents their birth family and display it with the other decorations.

There are numerous, creative ways to bridge the birth and foster families to create feelings of comfort and joy during the holiday season. The most important suggestion is to listen. Children often will let you know what they need if you listen closely enough. Although feelings of longing and sadness can surface during the holiday season, feelings of happiness and joy are contagious.

Submitted by Dr. Bernice Collins, Ph.D.

Shopping Mall Tips

-  Dress your child in bright colorful clothing.
-  Make a mental note of what your child is wearing.
-  Avoid clothing that advertises the child's name.
-  Carry a recent photo of your child noting the child's height, weight, and date of the photo.
-  In the event you become separated from your child, immediately seek assistance from the mall security and store personnel. Don't waste time searching alone.

Southern Region Training Calendar

FosterPRIDE In-Service Training

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pre-registration is required for all classes!
Call the number listed for your area.

East St. Louis
618-650-3213

Marion
618-536-7751

	Module		Module
ALTON - Holiday Inn		MARION - Comfort Suites	
January 8, 10 & 15 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30p.m.	5	November 5, 12 & 19 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.	6
February 5, 7 & 12 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30p.m.	6	ULLIN - Shawnee Community College	
FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS - Ramada Inn		November 19, 26 &	
January 22, 24 & 29 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30p.m.	5	December 3 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.	2

Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be licensed or re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

East St. Louis
618-650-3213

Marion
618-536-7751

BELLEVILLE	Catholic Social Service	CARBONDALE	Hampton Inn
November 3 & 10 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	December 13 & 20 (Thurs)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
EDWARDSVILLE	Comfort Inn	February 9 (Sat)	9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
December 5 & 12 (Wed)	6:30-9:30 p.m.	MARION	Comfort Inn
FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS	DCFS	December 4 & 11 (Tues)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
November 12 & 19 (Mon)	6:30-9:30 p.m.	MT. VERNON	Holiday Inn
December 8 & 15 (Sat)	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	November 12 & 19 (Mon)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
		January 19 (Sat)	9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
		OLNEY	Richland Memorial Hospital
		November 17 (Sat)	9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
		ULLIN	Shawnee College
		November 10 (Sat)	9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Cure the "Gimmies" During the Holidays

If your kids' wish lists just won't quit, here are helpful tips:

Start small. We can't simply say, "Okay, only one present this holiday," when they're used to lots more. Trim some each year.

Talk it up. Explain that Mom and Dad have done some thinking and have decided that this Christmas there is going to be less emphasis on stuff and more on having fun as a family.

Play together. What kids really want, deep down, is your undivided attention. Play cards with them, go sledding or bring out the checkers.

Top the list. Often there are one or two things kids have their hearts set on, and when they get those items, they feel satisfied. But if you just can't afford your child's ultimate dream gift, don't be afraid to say so.

Donate. Ask your kids to select a new toy for a needy child, maybe even to buy it with their own money. You might also request that generous relatives give a modest gift, plus a contribution to a worthy cause in your child's name.

Ban ads. Throw out toy catalogs before the kids see them. Restrict commercial TV, especially in December. Rent videos instead.

Do it yourself. Encourage kids to create presents for their family. They'll see that time can be more valuable than money.

Be kind. Make it a holiday tradition that each person in the family performs one act of kindness a week. Go over your good deeds at dinner.

Stand firm. Kids will always come home saying how much their friends got. Point out that everyone does the holidays differently and this is how your family does it. Don't allow others to dictate what you do.