

Dear Parent:

Welcome to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Parent Partners Council, a committee for birth parents who are served by DCFS and private child welfare agencies.

As a parent, you know your child needs to be safe; you know what your child needs to be secure. However, one day it was determined that your child was not safe living with you. On that day, you faced a decision to work toward a safer and more secure future for your family.

Every day, caseworkers make decisions about the welfare of children and the needs of families. Children should be with their family, but even more important, children need to be safe. The work of child welfare is to help families care for their children; help families make sure their children are safe and secure.

Parents are not alone. Both the state and the federal government tell child welfare workers that they must help parents in their journey to provide safe homes for their children. Indeed, federal law speaks to the importance of reuniting children with their "Safe Families". This law tells the child welfare agency caring for your child that they must work with you to help you and your child reunite as soon as possible. If your child remains at home, your agency must work with you to make sure your home is safe and nurturing for your child.

Your journey is difficult; it is hard work. Sometimes you work with others who judge, make decisions and take action on your behalf. However, in order to make the best decisions, caseworkers need to understand you, your child, your family and the people in your life. DCFS needs your help to teach us what we need to do to assist you in your journey.

DCFS is introducing the *Parent Partners Council*, an advisory committee of and for families created through birth and who are served by DCFS and private Illinois child welfare agencies. Please join with us as we strive to build stronger families. Welcome.

Velma Williams, Deputy Director
Division of Clinical Services and Professional Development

What is the Parent Partners Council?

The Parent Partners Council is an official council DCFS created to advise the Department on issues affecting families we are working with. Parents participate in discussions, reviews and comments about agency policies, procedures, programs and practices for families who are served by the child welfare system.

The goal of the Parent Partners Council is to provide families with a voice in the policies, programs and services provided to them. The Parent Partners Council is one way parents can assist DCFS to see, hear and understand the needs of families as they journey toward reunification or work to stay together.

Parent Partners members discuss areas of concern or interest. Council members may discuss and make recommendations for the Department. DCFS staff may also ask members for comments on issues and to provide opinions and suggestions about child welfare programs.

Who may participate on the Parent Partners Council?

Parents of families DCFS and private agencies serve are the most important members of the Council. A parent who is receiving DCFS services now or received service in the past may participate. The experience of these family experts is needed to shape the thinking and direct the planning of DCFS. Other Council members include caseworkers, managers and program staff.

How often does the Parent Partners Council meet?

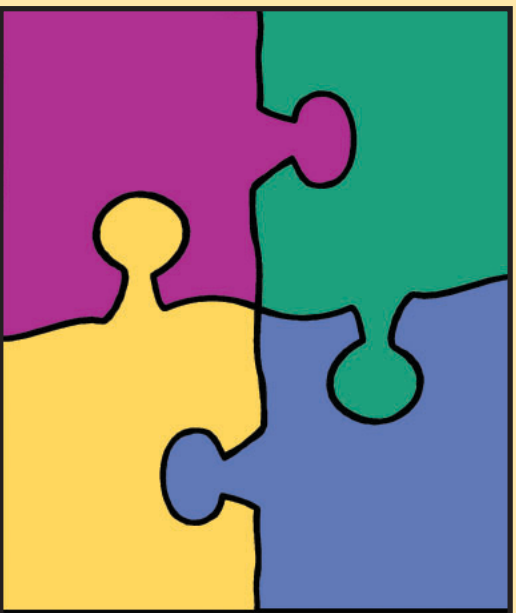
The Cook County Chapter of this council meets monthly in the Chicagoland area. The meetings will begin with a free light meal. Parents are reimbursed for childcare, transportation, and parking costs to attend these meetings. A DCFS manager facilitates the meetings, but parent members are encouraged to take leadership roles and set their agendas. Each representative will receive notice of all meetings scheduled, agendas and other materials as needed. Questions about the Cook Chapter should be directed to Donnella Bishop-Ward at 312-328-2828. Those wishing to volunteer for a chapter outside of Cook, please call Ray Gates at 217-524-2422.

Is the Parent Partners Council the only way a parent can be involved?

No, The Parent Partners Council will host two Partnering With Parents information fairs for parents each year. One will be in Chicago and one will be in a downstate city. In the future, Parent Partners councils will be sponsored in each of the DCFS regions so families will not be required to travel far to participate.

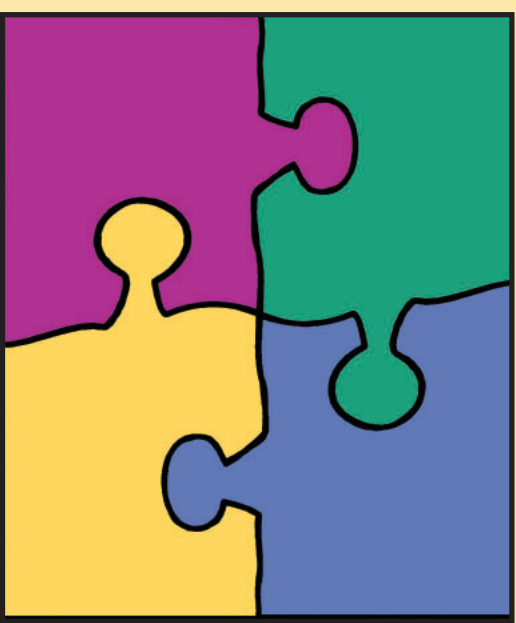
Thank you for helping us serve you and your children.

PARTNERING



WITH PARENTS

PARTNERING



WITH PARENTS

**The DCFS Parent Partners Council
Works with Parents to Build Strong Families**



Bryan Samuels, Director
www.state.il.us/dcls



Rod R. Blagojevich
Governor