DCFS offers college scholarships for youth formerly or currently in care

The DCFS Scholarship Program will award 53 academic scholarships for the upcoming school year. These are open to young people who are currently in or were in DCFS care, with four awards reserved for the children of veterans. Scholarship recipients receive up to five consecutive years of tuition and academic fee waivers to be used at participating Illinois state community colleges and universities, a monthly grant of $511 to offset other expenses and a medical card.

Applications are due March 31

The DCFS Scholarship Program is open to youth who have an open DCFS case, whose cases were closed through adoption or guardianship or who aged out of care at 18 or older. Youth at least 16 and not yet 21 on March 31 can apply.

The application process includes a form, SAT/ACT test reports, documentation of legal relationship with DCFS, three letters of recommendation from non-relatives and high school (college) transcripts or GED.

Applications are available:
• At any DCFS regional office
• On the department website at www.dcfs.illinois.gov (under DCFS Features: Form CFS 438)

Call 217.557.2689 or 312.814.5959 for more information.

2017 DCFS scholarship luncheon held at Alhambra Palace, Chicago. Read more about the recipients at www.dcfs.illinois.gov under DCFS Features.

YOUTH SPEAK UP FOR YOUTH IN CARE

The DCFS Youth Advisory Boards empower youth to have a leadership role as they advocate, educate and empower all youth in care.

All youth age 14 and older who are currently or were formerly in DCFS care are encouraged to join a regional board and contribute to the success of the statewide board. The regional boards meet monthly in locations across the state. Transportation can be arranged.

Caregivers interested in the opportunity for youth can call the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services at 312.814.5959 for details or the transition manager assigned in each DCFS Region.

DCFS TRANSITION MANAGERS

are available to work with youth and their caregivers on education, employment and independence programs.

COOK SOUTH
John Kasper: 773.371.6229
john.kasper@illinois.gov

COOK NORTH:
Luis Carrion: 312.328.2740
luis.carrion@illinois.gov

COOK CENTRAL
(open): 312.814.5959

SOUTHERN REGION
Donna Wilson: 618-993-7100
donna.wilson2@illinois.gov

NORTHERN REGION
Nutashia Baynes: 630-801-3446
nutashia.baynes@illinois.gov

CENTRAL REGION
Kim Johnson
kimberley.a.johnson@illinois.gov
Message from the DCFS Director

I am glad to have this link to foster parents where I can be open about my plans to lead the department and our agency partners in making this system better for children. I tell my staff that they should bring their values to the office. Here are my values, the moral imperatives, that guide me every day.

The first one is that every child who comes into this agency’s line of sight should be better off as a result.

Second, no child should grow up in foster care. Every child deserves a permanent home with a real family. A permanent, loving home is not just for the ones who are easy to place – it’s for every child.

My third imperative is that the “system” has to support the front-line investigators and caseworkers and remove barriers that get in the way. They have to be sure every parent gets that real second chance. Yet, at the same time, they have to make sure children are safe and have all they need to heal while they are with you.

Ultimately, all of these imperatives boil down to giving the kids who come to us the care and attention we would give our own kids.

This column opens what will be an ongoing conversation about caring for children and families since I returned to my Illinois roots in June. However, it is one that I had for the seven years I was commissioner for Georgia’s Department of Human Services, and during my years of public service before that. Most importantly, the same discussion played out every night that I went home from the office to be the caregiver for my granddaughter throughout her teenage years.

We cannot forget about what it means for a child to be pulled from her family. It is a traumatic experience that can be as enduring as the neglect or physical abuse that initially brought the child into our line of sight. What we can do is to keep that child at the forefront of the tough decisions that you and I have to make every day. We have to take in all the information that is available to us, sort it out and share it. Then we have to hold ourselves accountable for doing the right thing.

This is hard work, but we are stronger and smarter together. I am grateful to be working with you and thank you for all you do for the children at home with you.

B J Walker
Acting Director

DCFS Policy Updates

All DCFS policy guides, rules and procedures are available on the DCFS website at www.DCFS.illinois.gov in the About Us section. Here is a list of recent policy changes that may affect foster families.

For more information, link to the specific policy or contact the DCFS Office of Child and Family Policy at cfpolicy@idcf.state.il.us

Policy Guide 2017.11 Adoption Assistance

Policy Guide 2017.12 KinGAP Assistance

The policy guides describe procedures put in place to comply with the federal requirement that the same benefits available to youth in care also be available to those who achieved adoption or guardianship at age 16 or older. Changes include extending the subsidy beyond 18 if the child meets education/employment criteria.

New managed care plan for medical and mental health needs

The state announced a new contract to integrate behavioral and physical health services for current and former youth in DCFS care. IlliniHealth will manage care as part of a broad overhaul of the Medicaid program.

In the lead up to the shift in July, DCFS will be conducting forums to hear ideas and concerns about the transition. Several project teams are already working to prepare for a rollout that impacts nearly every unit of the department.

Caregivers will be informed of their role and the resources that will be available to assist them in meeting the health needs of the children in their home.
The start of a new year is always a special time to look at what we are doing and why we do it. One pillar of this newsletter is that it be written for caregivers and by a caregiver. That is why DCFS first approached me in 2000; it’s why I have served as the editor for nearly 18 years.

When I began this work, we shared our home with six teens in foster care, a toddler by birth and a baby on the way. Fast-forward to the present… After two reunifications, two adoptions and two moves to independence, those “kids” are adults and my youngest birth child is making plans to leave home for college this fall.

Foster care has changed our family in ways I never imagined. I have grown in patience and empathy. I have seen the changes that hope and perseverance can bring. In disappointments I have found hidden strength buried deep in my soul.

Still, because we live with children every day, the very things that make foster care special can sometimes begin to feel mundane or trivial. That’s when it’s important to return to why we do this. I was reminded of my privilege in two small words. The birth mother of the first little girl to join our family introduced me as her daughter’s “other mother.” My purpose was crystal clear – 15 years after she had returned home.

I hope that my experiences in foster care will continue to inform and inspire you. In 2018, I encourage you to consider signing up for the digital version of the newsletter. The plan is to bring you more information, more often. Thank you for reading Illinois Families Now and Forever® and for all you do for children.

Vanessa James
Editor, Illinois Families Now & Forever

**New courses coming for caregiver training**

The DCFS Office of Training recently developed an updated version of the Adoption Conversion Training Course for families adopting from the foster care system. It will be available for caregivers to take completely online, in addition to the in-class offering. The new curriculum includes more emphasis on the important interactions between the child, the birth family and the adoptive parents. The updated training is more interactive with videos and relevant scenarios. Several other courses are under review and scheduled to launch in 2018. Contact the licensing representative for details.

Visit the online Virtual Training Center (VTC) anytime at www.DCFStraining.org to get specifics on dates and locations for scheduled courses.

The Virtual Training Center (VTC) is your tool to:
- See training news and general information
- Check available trainings
- View/print your training transcript
- Register and take on-line courses or call the DCFS Office of Training at 877.800.3393 during business hours.

All nine modules of the PRIDE in-service courses are now available online. Select a course based on current needs and learn where and when it is convenient.

1. The Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk
2. Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs
3. Addressing Developmental Issues Related to Sexuality
4. Responding to the Signs and Symptoms of Sexual Abuse
5. Supporting Relationships Between Children and their Families
6. Working as a Professional Team Member
7. Promoting Children’s Personal and Cultural Identity
8. Promoting Permanency Outcomes
9. Managing the Fostering Experience

**SIGN UP FOR DIGITAL DELIVERY OF THIS NEWSLETTER**

PLUS GET FLASH UPDATES OF FRESH NEWS AS IT HAPPENS.

www.DCFS.illinois.gov and click “Loving Homes”
News from the advisory councils

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council and the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council ended 2017 with a joint meeting in Springfield. Neil Skene, the special assistant to the DCFS director, attended the meeting to share the vision for the agency. He also addressed the concerns and questions that council members had about the budget and services for families.

Council members participated in a brainstorm session with the technology team that is developing a new case management system, the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS). There will be an online feature so caregivers can access important information about the children in their homes.

Janet Ahern, the newly-appointed DCFS guardian, clarified the normalcy policy and the circumstances when foster parents have the lead on decision-making for the children in care and when the agency representative has to sign off.

Elizabeth Richmond is a foster and adoptive parent, PRIDE trainer and lead foster parent support specialist from Peoria. She received the Adoption Excellence Award from the federal Administration for Children and Families at a ceremony in Washington, DC. Catherine Smith, DCFS regional administrator, nominated Richmond as an individual who has demonstrated excellence in making contributions to providing permanency for children in foster care.

In addition to advocating for families as chair of the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council, the Richmonds completed three adoptions and have been a home base for 35 youth “officially” and many others.

Peoria mom gets national adoption award

Elizabeth Richmond

for Children and Families at a ceremony in Washington, DC. Catherine Smith, DCFS regional administrator, nominated Richmond as an individual who has demonstrated excellence in making contributions to providing permanency for children in foster care.

In addition to advocating for families as chair of the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council, the Richmonds completed three adoptions and have been a home base for 35 youth “officially” and many others.
Area Events

NAvy Pier Families posed for portraits during the Adoption Day celebration at the Chicago Children’s Museum.

Kroc Center More than 100 families served by the DCFS foster care programs in Cook County joined in a holiday celebration on December 9. DCFS staff volunteered as Santa’s helpers to distribute gifts so that every child received selections from their wish lists. Community volunteers provided food, crafts and music.

Our Kids

Area Events

Madison County Volunteers made the holidays special for families at a party hosted by Restore Network.

Attend council meetings in-person or via teleconference

The Southern Region Foster Care Advisory Council meets in-person and connects offices and individuals via phone. These meetings are open to all caregivers from the DCFS and private agency-supervised foster care programs. The advisory council is an important platform for caregivers to stay informed, have a say in new policies and procedures, and to discuss issues related to the foster care program.

Caregivers are invited to come to the DCFS office in Belleville, Cairo, Effingham, Marion, Mt. Vernon and Wood River. Participants at each site will be connected by teleconference. To participate by teleconference, dial 888.494.4032 with access code 188403034.

Meetings start in person at 6 p.m. and the call opens at 6:30 p.m.

Next Meeting: January 30
TOLL-FREE CENTRAL REGION FOSTER PARENT CUSTOMER SERVICE LINE: 866.368.5204

Available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., excluding state holidays. The line is equipped with voicemail. This line is designed for calls from foster families whose licenses are supervised by DCFS Central Region.

Agency-supervised homes should work directly with their licensing agency.

Area Events

PEORIA Superheroes

PEORIA Adoptive families celebrate National Adoption Day.

BLOOMINGTON AREA Staff brighten the holidays with food and festivities for families

Northern News

Foster family group meetings

DeKalb Area Friends of Fostering (DAFF)
Contact: Patty Ihm 815-751-4061
Meets 2nd Saturday, 7 p.m.

WAFFLE
[Will County Area Friends of Fostering Life Experience]
Contact: Donna Gregory at 630-297-1780
beegees5@sbcglobal.net
Meets 3rd Wednesday, 6 p.m.
SOS Village, 17545 Village Lane, Lockport, IL
Serves Will County families

Lake County Foster Parent Support Group (LAFS)
Contact: Megan 224-267-5949
Meets 2nd and 4th Wednesdays, 6:30 p.m.
1319 N. Hunt Club, Gurnee, IL

DuPage County Foster Parent Support Group
Contact Diana Blackburn 630-653-1986
dwblackburn@msn.com
Meets 4th Sunday, 3 p.m.
College Church, 332 E. Seminary Ave., Wheaton, IL
Open to all foster and adoptive families in Wheaton, Glen Ellyn and DuPage County

DCFS Regional Foster Parent Advisory Council
Contact: Donna Gregory
beegees5@sbcglobal.net
Meets 1st Thursday, 7 p.m.
Via conference call.
Toll-free: 515-604-9300 with code 778-456
Every day there are children waiting for a Forever Family. Here we introduce a few. You can get more details and see other profiles at www.DCFS.illinois.gov under “Loving Homes” or call 800-572-2390.

**Draven**, 15, is an intelligent young man with positive interests. He enjoys typical “guy stuff” such as playing sports and other physical activities. Draven also enjoys playing percussion instruments, camping, fishing and other outdoor activities. Learn more at online at www.DCFS.illinois.gov.

**Silena**, 13, is a considerate child who likes helping others. She enjoys singing, dancing and listening to music. She responds well when supervised by consistent, responsible adults. She loves playing interactive games on tablets and computers. Learn more online at www.DCFS.illinois.gov.

**Kayden**, 6, is very bright, likeable, funny and eager to explore new things, with high energy. He is very interested in super hero action figures such as Ant-Man, Spiderman and the Hulk. Kayden loves wearing costumes imitating his hero stories at bedtime. Learn more online at www.DCFS.illinois.gov.

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**Who do you call when...?**

**A child in your home is having a psychiatric crisis that may require hospitalization?**
Call the CARES line at 800-345-9049, open 24/7. If a child is a danger to himself or others, call 911 first.

**For information on becoming a foster parent or on adoption?**
Adoption Listing Service and Inquiry can connect you with a licensing agency at 800-572-2390.

**To get profiles of children waiting for adoptive homes.**
Call Adoption Listing Service and Inquiry at 800-572-2390 or go to www.DCFS.illinois.gov.

**You have questions about your board check?**
Call the DCFS Central Payment Unit at 800-525-0499 if your check comes from DCFS. If your check comes from a private agency, contact the agency.

**To report a child missing or when you have information about a youth who has run away?**
Call the Child Intake and Recovery Unit at 866-503-0184. Available 24 hours a day, every day. If you feel the child is in danger, call 911 first.

**After an adoption or guardianship is final but you have questions about the subsidy?**
Call the subsidy worker assigned to the case or the Adoption Support Line at 866-538-8892 or 312-808-5250.

**You feel you aren’t being treated fairly by DCFS or a private agency?**
Try to resolve the issue by going up the chain of command with the caseworker and supervisors, then call the Advocacy Office at 800-232-3798.

**You seek expense reimbursement for property damage or bodily harm caused by a child in foster care?**
Let your caseworker know you intend to submit a claim to the Foster Child Damage Reimbursement Program. Refer to DCFS form CFS851 or contact the office at 312-814-7294.

**Questions about your child’s medical card?**
Call 800-228-6533.

**To find a phone number for a caseworker?**
Call the main switchboard at 312-814-6800 or the State Operator at 312-793-3500.

**A child under DCFS care is detained by police or may be interviewed by police?**
Call the DCFS Guardianship Administrator Office at 312-814-8600 if between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. After hours, call 866-503-0184 to notify DCFS and discuss possible legal assistance.

**You are having family problems with an adopted child?**
Call the Adoption–guardianship Support And Preservation line (ASAP) at 866-538-8892 or 312-808-5250.

**You are having a hard time getting services at school?**
Most private agencies have an education liaison, and each DCFS region has education advisors who can help.

**You have an idea for the newsletter?**
Send email to DCFS.FamilyNews@illinois.gov or call DCFS Communications at 312-814-6847.
Inside this issue:

Pages 1  DCFS scholarship applications due March 31
Page 2  Message from the DCFS Director
         Policy updates
Page 3  Letter from the editor
Page 4  Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council and
         Illinois Adoption Advisory Council News
Page 5-6 Regional news
Page 7  “Family for Me” profiles of waiting children
         Who do you call?

Current and back issues of Illinois Families Now and Forever®
are available online in English and Spanish at www.DCFS.illinois.gov

Illinois Families Now and Forever®

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