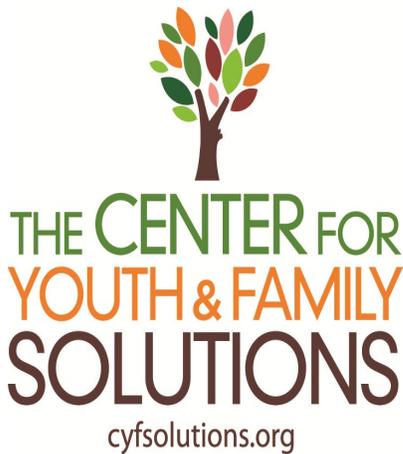


# The Foster Caregiver Connection

## The Foster Caregiver Connection

### Working to meet the challenge...



According to statistics provided by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, as of August 31, 2013 there were 14,838 children and youth in licensed foster care, relative foster care, or institutional group homes in the state of Illinois. The Center for Youth and Family Solutions provides services to 871 foster children and their families. We currently have 365 licensed foster homes, 278 licensed relative foster homes, with 128 of these homes qualified as specialized to provide placement and support to children under the specialized foster care contract.

Starting with the numbers helps to identify the need. The need for more qualified, strong, and creative foster caregivers is shared across the United States—Illinois is no exception. The numbers help to identify the need, but it's the foster caregivers who provide the stories...stories of courage, compassion, despair, and encouragement. The Center for Youth and Family Solutions is very blessed

with several exceptional foster homes—represented by adults who are dedicated to improving the lives of children and their families, making a difference in everyone's future by helping prepare children and youth to become healthy, capable adults.

This is not a task everyone is equipped to tackle. In meeting the challenge of being an effective foster caregiver we often find ourselves needing some new skills, and seeking training which provides understanding in areas which are new to us. We do this because we see the "BIG PICTURE", committed to meeting the child's needs, being his or her number one advocate and cheerleader—something all children need.

So...in spite of state budget crunches which ultimately affect all of us, or new, unexpected behavior which caught us—foster caregiver, case-worker, therapist, birth parent, supervisor—completely off-guard, or the constant, relentless juggling of multiple appointments with school, agency, family and/or sib-

ling visits, DCFS meetings, trainings, Cub Scouts, soccer, piano lessons, or other extra-curricular activities, we help our foster children and youth by loving them, accepting them, encouraging them, praising them, reminding them they are SOMEBODY and have a purpose in their life that no one else can do. That they have talents, skills, and strengths yet to be discovered, and each is a gift to our own journeys.

So...I'm collecting stories that inspire, make us stop and think of how we too might leave this world as a "better place" because we took the risk of becoming a foster caregiver, and accepted the challenges that are an expected part of that role. We do what we do because these children and their families need us, and we know we have, can, and will make a difference with every child who looks for "family" in our homes. Do you know someone who has thought about becoming a foster caregiver? Please encourage them to call your local office—for the sake of our foster children and their families. With thanks.

#### Inside this issue:

Calendar 2

From a Foster Caregiver in LaSalle 2

Mary Kay's Corner 3

From a Foster Caregiver Couple in Peoria 4



## We can do this...

"A few years ago during my son's high school graduation I realized that very soon we would be empty nesters. Panic hit me as I struggled with the idea of my home without kids. After all, I loved raising my 3 sons and had received great joy throughout the years. At that moment I knew we weren't done. We took time researching what that meant and ultimately decided to become foster parents. Being a foster parent is very fulfilling. It challenges me in ways I would have never imagined. I have made friendships and connections that will last a lifetime. The training allows me to grow and improve and I love being part of a team. I encourage anyone with love in your heart and a desire to learn and grow to foster parent. Go team!"

... from an amazing foster caregiver in Danville



**Bloomington**

**Saturday, October 26, noon to 4 pm**, Halloween Bash at IWU

**Sunday, October 27, 1-3 pm**, Zootacular at Miller Park Zoo.

**Saturday, December 7, 10 am to 2 pm**, Becoming a "Love & Logic" Parent Training.

**Friday, December 13**, Foster Family Christmas Party at St. Patrick's in Merna, IL.

**Champaign**

**Tuesday, October 8, 5:30 pm**, Foster Care/Adoption Informational Meeting.

**Monday, October 14, 5:30 to 7:30 pm**, Foster Caregiver Advisory Board.

**Tuesday, November 5, 5:30 pm**. Foster Care/Adoption Informational Meeting.

**Monday, November 11, 5:30 to 7:30 pm**. Foster Caregiver Support Group.

**Monday, December 9, 9 am to 5 pm**. CPR Training.

**Danville**

**Monday, October 21, 5:30 to 7:30 pm**, Foster Caregiver Support Group.

**Tuesday, November 5, 9 am to 5 pm**, CPR Training.

**Monday, November 18, 5:30 to 7:30 pm**, Foster Caregiver Support Group.

**Monday, December 16, 5:30 to 7:30 pm**, Foster Caregiver Support Group.

**LaSalle**

**Monday, October 7, 14, 21, 28, November 4, 11, 5:30 to 8:30 pm**, Sessions 3 thru 8, Updated Parenting Skills Training

**Tuesday, October 8, 5:30 pm**, Foster Care/Adoption Informational Meeting.

**Tuesday, November 12, 5:30 pm**, Foster Care/Adoption Informational Meeting.

**Wednesday, December 18, 6 to 8 pm**, Foster Care Christmas Party, LaSalle Housing Authority Bldg., 2222 N. Tonti St., LaSalle.

**Macomb**

**Saturday, October 12**, pick-up for Krispy Kreme Donut Sales Fundraiser.

**Friday, November 15** — Mobile Food Pantry.

***Heartfelt words from a foster caregiver in LaSalle... "We are foster caregivers because there are so many children in the world who are less fortunate, who need a temporary home with love and support in many areas. Although it can be scary, we want to help these kids that otherwise would never be loved. It doesn't make us special with the outside world, but to the little boy who cries and drools and seizes and doesn't walk or talk or see—we're mom and dad."***

# The Calendar

**Peoria**

**Thursday, October 3, 10, 17, 5:30 to 8:30 pm**, Updated Parenting Skills Training, Sessions 6 thru 8.

**Tuesday, October 8, 5:30 pm**, Foster Care/Adoption Informational Meeting.

**Tuesday, November 12, 5:30 pm**, Foster Care/Adoption Informational Meeting.

**Tuesday, October 15, 6 to 8 pm**, Foster Caregiver Support Group. Speaker Sharon Morton from CAC on the role of the CAC, and how the foster caregiver can help with this process.

**Tuesday, November 19, 6 to 8 pm**, Foster Caregiver Support Group. Speaker Lynda Sharp-Lower from Easter Seals, on Autism, diagnosis, facts, and hope for the child and family.

**Every first Thursday of the month, 6 to 8 pm**, Specialized Foster Caregiver Support Group. Call Shannon Doubet at 309.323.6542 to register.

**Saturday, December 7, 1 to 3 pm**, Foster Home Christmas Party at Second Chance Church, Peoria.

**Tuesday, December 10, 5:30 pm**, Foster Care/Adoption Informational Meeting.

**Rock Island**

**Tuesday, October 7, 5:30 pm**, Foster Care/Adoption Informational Meeting.

**Saturday, October 27**, Boo at the Zoo, Niabi Zoo, near Coal Valley.

**Saturday, November 2**, Foster Care Night at I Wireless, QC Mallards Hockey.

**Tuesday, November 12, 5:30 pm**, Foster Care/Adoption Informational Meeting.

**Tuesday, December 10, 5:30 pm**, Foster Care/Adoption Informational Meeting.

**Springfield**

**Wednesday, October 2 and November 6, 5:30 to 7:30 pm**, Foster Caregiver Advisory Board (FCAB), at the office.

**Wednesday, October 16 and November 20, 5:30 to 7:30 pm**, Foster Caregiver Support Group at the office.

**Sunday, December 15, 1—3 pm**, Foster Care Christmas Party, at the Abraham Lincoln Unitarian Universalists Congregation in Springfield.





## Mary Kay's Corner

### Important Phone Numbers

#### Child Abuse Hotline

800.252.2873

#### Missing Child Helpline

866.503.0184

#### Advocacy Office

800.232.3798/217.524.2029

#### Foster Parent Hotline

800.624.KIDS/800.624.5437

#### Adoption Hotline

800.572.2390

#### Inspector General

800.722.9124

#### Daycare Information

877.746.0829/312.328.2779

#### Youth Hotline

800.232.3798

With the beginning of fall, comes a very busy time for CYFS Foster Care team. While we work hard all during the year to support and empower our foster parents, we dedicate the fall as a time of reflection and planning to ensure we are providing our CYFS foster parents with the tools and support needed to take care of the children that come into our care. We set aside time at our staff meetings, Foster Parent Support Groups and Foster Caregiver Advisory Boards to assess what is going well and what needs to some improvement. This information is then pulled together by our Foster Licensing team, reviewed to ensure it follows the Foster Parent Law and put into an Implementation Plan for the upcoming year.

As you may recall, the Foster Parent Law is an official public policy, established by the Illinois General Assembly to recognize the integral role of foster caregivers on the child welfare team. The Foster Parent Law requires agencies such as The Center for Youth and Family Solutions to develop and annually review an Implementation Plan of the Foster Parent Law. Last year was the first year for the Foster Parent Implementation Plan for CYFS. We were very impressed with our foster parents who stepped up to help design our Implementation Plan. Through feedback and discussion with our foster parents, we were able to put together a plan that incorporated foster parent needs, rights and responsibilities with our child welfare practices so the children we collectively serve can have the best possible foster care experience.

Moving into our second year with the Foster Parent Implementation Plan, we have already begun to visit with our Foster Caregiver Advisory Boards and any foster parent who wishes to participate in the planning. In reviewing the current plan we discovered we have made some great strides this past year. For example, in some of our offices foster parents expressed a need for more information about how The Center for Youth and Family Solutions Foster Care program functions. To assist with that need, our Assistant Directors of Child Welfare and myself along with Foster Care and Licensing Supervisors attended Foster Caregiver Advisory Board meeting or Foster Parent Support Groups to discuss the roles of the respective child welfare staff and how they assist foster parent in providing care. This created some wonderful discussion about service delivery and ways to build a stronger team of foster care staff and foster parents.

Another need expressed in every site was the need for more training on foster care related issues. To that end our licensing team has structured support groups to help foster parent network and our parent educators have been working to ensure specific training such as Love and Logic and the Parent Skills Training has been offered. The response from foster parents has been awesome. Not only have they been able to learn more about issues related to fostering, they have also been able to meet others who foster and forge new and very helpful relationships.

As we worked with foster families around the region, it became clear each site has its own unique "identity". While everyone on the fostering team must abide by the State of Illinois practice and procedures for providing foster care, we noticed the needs or ideas of the foster parents did vary from site to site. Rather than providing a cookie cutter approach to assisting our foster parents, we engaged foster parents from each site, listened to what their ideas were on how they wanted to develop *their* fostering network both within the agency and within the community then, together design a plan. For example, our Peoria foster parents wanted to work on getting the word out about the need for more foster parents in the Peoria area. The Peoria Foster Caregiver's Advisory board along with our foster care staff worked together to participate in an event at the Peoria Chief's baseball game. Brochures were passed out to people attending the game, giving them information on how to become a foster parent. In addition, many of our foster families and our staff enjoyed some good old summertime fun.

Our goal now is to take the information we learned from this past year and use it to guide us as we prepare for the upcoming year. We know our work is not a once and done experience. The relationships between our foster parents and our staff is ever changing and evolving to meet the challenges of providing foster care services. Please take some time to review the current 2013 Implementation Plan. Your licensing worker can provide you with a copy of it or you can find it at any of our offices or on our Foster Parent Resource page, using your secure login on our website, <http://cyfsolutions.org/services/foster-care/foster-parent-resources>. Provide any feedback to me at [mkcollins@cyfsolutions.org](mailto:mkcollins@cyfsolutions.org). Your feedback will be instrumental in designing our 2014 Foster Parent Implementation Plan. The 2014 Implementation Plan will be available in late October. We will post it on our website and Facebook for your approval.

Thank you for partnering with us to help the children we serve and thank you in advance for assisting in designing the 2014 Implementation Plan.



## The Center for Youth and Family Solutions

2610 W. Richwoods Blvd.  
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Branch offices in Bloomington, Champaign, Danville, Galesburg,  
LaSalle, Lincoln, Macomb, Rock Island, and Springfield

Phone: 309.323-6600  
Website: [www.cyfsolutions.org](http://www.cyfsolutions.org)

### Branch Offices

Bloomington—Morris	309.820.7616	Lincoln	217.732.3771
Champaign	217.352.5179	Macomb	309.883.1791
Danville	217.443.1772	Peoria	309.323-6600
Galesburg	309.342.1136	Rock Island	309.786.0770
LaSalle	815.223.4007	Springfield	217.528.3694

Achieving Solutions.  
Together.



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## Why we were foster caregivers...

***From a wonderful foster caregiver couple in Peoria, about why they were foster parents for decades, how they were changed...he said—"We enjoyed it!" And she said... "Being a foster parent made my life worth living. We are now grandparents to the children of our foster children and youth—not even sure just how many came into our home over the years, but many are still connected to us, and remember us throughout the year. For those thinking about becoming a foster caregiver, it takes a lot of patience and love. And it's good to remember you're not going to get a perfect child. No such thing. After all, nobody's perfect...also, today's children are different. But when we 'learn better', we 'do better'."***

