

CYFS

Foster Caregiver Adoptive Parent Connection

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THE CENTER FOR
YOUTH & FAMILY
SOLUTIONS
cypsolutions.org



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Open the windows and let the breezes wander through your home – dig in some dirt and plan where to plant this year’s tomatoes and sunflowers – wash the windows and replace or wash the mini-blinds and/or curtains. Welcome spring with joy and wonder – and all those things we do to transition from winter to spring can be done as “family”, providing more skills, understanding, competence, connection, and memories. Passing on this wisdom, leaving warm memories, enjoying nature close-up...as a family.

We are promoting awareness...caring for each other and ourselves, finding miracles no matter which direction we look, seeing first-hand how a seed buried in the dirt will eventually grow out of the dark and into the light. How amazing is that? The season of spring speaks of beginnings, birth, growing...leading to maturity as the year continues, with all that comes in time. These experiences might become shared conversations during family visits, sharing what the child has discovered in digging, planning, planting, weeding, watering, or seeing the house brighten up with shiny windows and

clean curtains, sparkling floors and increasing light as the daylight hours extend day by day until June...all miracles.

Tackling these chores together provides an opportunity to experience teamwork, and pride in one’s work and achievements. Maybe we set a goal before we begin, such as once our chores are completed, we’re going to the park for a picnic and basketball. Reinforcing “good things often result from cooperation...” Plus, here’s one more time we can demonstrate that we need each other. Maybe we don’t have to finish everything in one day. Maybe we can assign tasks to 2 or 3 days... we consider how to best set up our children and adolescents to win, to succeed. Nature is therapeutic for all of us. Like music. Or art. Or? Being in touch with nature helps our children and ourselves to be more in touch with our hearts. And that time is always well-spent, especially for the children and youth in our care who need this healing, encouraging touch that reminds each one they are worthy, they are amazing, they are loved. Happy Spring! Grow joy!

by Carol Bennett-Barker



Cory showing off the donated goods collected in December 2021.

An amazing young man named Cory

In child welfare we celebrate all successes, from the smallest personal victories of our clients to the coup de gras of returning a child home safely or finding permanency with their foster parent. We often hear about the struggles our older youth have in navigating the child welfare system, the extra hardships they face and the barriers to becoming independent adults upon leaving foster care.

Today is a day in which we can shine the spotlight on a youth, Cory Powell, who transitioned to the community upon turning 21 and has found success as an independent adult, while also giving back to youth in like circumstances from when he was in care.

Cory turned 21 last spring and has since continued in the Youth in College Program which is providing him with the opportunity to earn an Associates Degree in Automotive Technology. He is expected to graduate with this and additional certifications next spring. When Cory was in care he started his own business which analyzes market trends to identify highly sought after products and would buy and resell these as a verified seller on different online marketplaces. Cory has grown his business and now utilizes computer bots and employs two other individuals who shop different brick and mortar stores in anticipation of certain items increasing in value. In building and maintaining this successful business Cory was able to give back to CYFS

and donated over \$2,500 worth of goods to our youth at Christmas time with the intention of providing presents that a teen might better enjoy and use.

When asked to reflect on what he felt made the greatest impact on him in finding success both in care and upon transitioning out of care he stated, “My grandparents encouraged me to stay on the right track and treated me like I was their own kid. They didn’t make me feel like they were going to change their minds about me living there. But even with that it took my caseworker(s) staying on me and teaching me how to use the system to my advantage so I could make the best of my circumstances. Just because you are in foster care doesn’t mean you belong to the state but if you play by their rules and put in just a little bit of effort, they will pay your way so you can become better and do better”.

It is with the unwavering belief, encouragement and support Cory’s foster parents showed him on a daily basis that has allowed for him to achieve the level of success he has today. Cory stands firm in his belief that a better life, one filled with the love and security shown to him by his grandparents, can continue to be his everyday reality as he navigates early adulthood and strives to become a contributing positive member of his community.

by Brianna Simonson



We are quickly approaching graduation season, and would like to congratulate all of our graduates. We are so proud of our young folks from Pre-K through college, who have worked hard to advance to their next adventure. Please take some time to celebrate them and their outstanding achievements. Well done!

There are DCFS funds available to assist with high school graduation expenses such as cap and gown, class ring, and school yearbook. Talk with your family worker to access this assistance.

Academic success does not always come easy. Please talk to your team if your student is struggling in any aspect of their school environment. We are here to help you support them—from requesting evaluations to ensure appropriate supports are in place to attending meetings with you to help advocate for their needs, and

everything in between. Let us know how we can help ensure academic progress for our young folks.

by Jess Bennett
Educational and Life
Skills Coordinator





CALLING *all* LICENSED CYFS FOSTER PARENTS!

Take a Leap

**AND JOIN OUR
TRANSITIONAL TEAM**

CYFS has a new **Transitional Foster Care** program focusing on youth in care who need an immediate but temporary place to call home

What Makes This Program Different?

- Temporary placement (no longer than 60 days) while a more permanent plan is put in place Youth in Care ages 8-17
- Youth in care who either are coming out of a Residential program or have no other option but a public shelter
- Foster parent monthly stipend for assisting these youth
- Commitment from CYFS to provide intensive assistance to foster parents

To learn more about this program

Contact your licensing worker or **Director of Licensing and Adoption** Mary Kay Collins at mkcollins@cyfsolutions.org



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New

Everyone has a role to play in giving a youth a fresh start!

BEGINNINGS

Because every child deserves another chance to heal from childhood trauma.

Foster Parents Help with New Beginnings

Children and Youth at CYFS sometimes need to move from their current placement. Maybe it is to step down from residential or to move from one foster home to another. These are tender times for our youth. Moving to a new place can be scary and a trigger of some of their past traumas. In the past the experience was called a “replacement” however as we looked at that, we felt it was not as positive and strength based as we wanted it to be for our youth. It implies something is broken or needs to be fixed and that is not the case. Sometimes youth just need a second chance, a **New Beginning!**

To help make the experience more comfortable for the kids, we are asking our foster parents to create a **Foster Parent Profile**. This is a combination of photos and information about your family, kind of like a scrapbook. Think of how helpful it would be for a youth to be able to see you and your family before they come into your home. Your licensing worker has a template you can follow if you need help, or you can just get your creative juices flowing and design your own. Either way, we hope to have your profile very soon so we can begin helping the kids we place in your home with their New Beginning. Here are some things to get you started:

Meet Our Family.

These pages are designed to introduce the child in foster care to the rest of your family. In this space you may want to post pictures of the family, their first name, role (mom, brother, grandma, pet) and note some interesting facts about them (Grandma Mary likes to make banana bread and give hugs). Think of things that might be of interest to the child or youth.

Our House.

Take a picture of your house outside and in. Maybe start with what the house looks like from the street as this will be the first way the child will see your house. Then show some rooms you feel would be of interest to the child. One for sure is the bedroom that will be where the child sleeps. Also, spaces used for fun – family room, kitchen, or backyard.

Family Traditions.

Through pictures and words, this is a place where you can share family traditions. Consider special meals, how you celebrate birthdays, activities you do in the fall, winter, spring and summer. Make sure you include words that invite the child or youth to share in your special family time. Example: Every Friday night we get together with our cousins and make pizza. You'll love to make pizza with us because we laugh and have fun. What's your favorite pizza?

Important Places

Here is where you let the child know about the places they may visit when they are with you. These can be pictures of parks, churches, grandma's house, YMCA, grocery stores, friend's house. This will help the child feel more familiar with these places. You can write the name of the place and what you do at each location.

House Rules

This place gives you a chance to write down some basic house rules. You will want to make sure the child will see that in your home the rules are there to keep kids safe, loved and happy. There will be plenty of time to explain ALL of the rules. For now, just mention those that will help the child feel at ease. Also write the rules in such a way that they

show positive outcomes. For example, Rule#1 – Be kind to each other. Rule #2 Only one person in the bathroom at a time. Rule #3 Use your words.

Our Promise to you

This is a very special place for you to let the child know you will take very good care of them while they are with you. Only make promises you can keep. This is very important to building trust and helping the child feel secure in your home. Example: For as long as you need to be with us, we promise to help you when you need us, listen to you when you want to talk, and be the best “little while” family you can have.

What else do you want to know?

Invite the child or youth to write down or have their caseworker write down other things they want to know about you.

Invite the child or youth to write down things they think you should know about them.

The second half of the profile is for the caseworker. Here is where you can simply help them get to know more about you and your strengths, concerns, expectations and so on.

Answer the following questions.

1. What made you consider becoming a foster parent? How long have you been fostering?
2. What strengths do you bring to the table? Discuss skills, areas, special trainings that you feel help you be an exceptional foster parent.
3. What are some things you will need the CYFS staff to help you with? Special behaviors of the children, specifics like daycare, helping with family visits and so on.
4. How will we know when you need help? Are there specific things we can do when you are stressed, frustrated or unhappy about something that is happening?
5. What do you do to take care of yourself? How can we help you with self-care?

Have fun! Enjoy! We are looking forward to your family profile!

by Mary Kay Collins,
Director of Licensing
and Adoptions

Support Groups AND TRAININGS

by Mindy McBride,
CYFS Recruitment
and Retention

The next three dates and topics for the Foster Caregiver Training and Support Groups are as follows:

TUESDAY, APRIL 19TH Supporting Reunification: Working with Biological Parents

TUESDAY, MAY 17TH Human Trafficking

TUESDAY, JUNE 21ST Supporting LGBTQ+ and Culturally Diverse Youth

Each topic is offered at two different sessions, from 12:30pm-2:30pm and 6:30pm-8:30pm. Foster caregivers will receive an invitation with a Zoom link to each session.

Updated Parenting Skills Training

The next groups are forming for Updated Parenting Skills Training, a positive parenting curriculum with a trauma focus, will begin the week of **APRIL 25**. There are **9** different groups. Each group has a maximum enrollment of 10, and will meet for **7 CONSECUTIVE WEEKS** at the assigned day and time to cover all 9 sessions.

If you are interested in taking the class (all groups receive the training virtually), please register through your licensing worker.

by Carol Bennett-Barker,
Training





A Brief Update on the Bills We Are Following

by Emilyne Slagle,
CYFS Assistant Director of
Community Engagement

SB3720- DCFS-BIAS-FREE CHILD REMOVAL

Creates the Bias-Free Child Removal Pilot Program Act. Provides that subject to appropriation, the Department of Children and Family Services shall establish a 3-year Bias-Free Child Removal Pilot Program no later than July 1, 2023

- Passed the Senate
- Passed the Human Services Committee in the House
- It will go to the house floor for a vote.

SB3925- HUMAN SERVICE PRO LOAN PROGRAM

Creates the Human Service Professional Loan Repayment Program Act. Creates the Human Service Professional Loan Repayment Program

- Passed the Senate
- Passed the House's Appropriations Human Services Committee
- On the calendar for a second reading in the House.

SB3490- COMMISSION ON LGBTQ AGING

Amends the Illinois Act on the Aging. Creates the Illinois Commission on LGBTQ Aging to investigate,

analyze, and study the health, housing, financial, psychosocial, home-and-community-based services, assisted living, and long-term care needs of LGBTQ older adults and their caregivers.

- Passed the Senate
- Passed the Human Services Committee in the House
- Has been placed on the calendar for a 3rd reading in the House.

SB3617- MENTAL HEALTH-VARIOUS

Creates the Ensuring a More Qualified, Competent, and Diverse Community Behavioral Health Workforce Act

- Passed the Senate
- Passed the House's Appropriations Human Service Committee
- House Floor Amendment # 1 Adopted
- House Floor amendment #2 referred to Rules Committee.
- House Floor amendment number #3 referred to the Appropriations- Human Services committee

Breakfast – Brunch Lunch – Supper could be Strata

13 x 9 pan, sprayed with spray oil on
bottom and sides
12 slices of wheat bread
10 eggs
1 c. milk
½ green pepper, diced
½ medium onion, diced
1 lb. diced ham
2 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
¼ tsp. garlic powder
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. pepper
1 tsp. seasoned salt
½ red pepper, diced
½ cup chopped fresh asparagus
(optional)
3 cups shredded Mexican cheese

Place 6 slices of bread on bottom of prepared pan. Whisk together all ingredients, leaving the diced ham until last, and only adding 2 cups of the shredded cheese to the filling. When well-mixed, add the ham. Pour half of the mixture on the first layer of bread slices, spread evenly. Add another layer of 6 slices of bread. Pour the remaining mixture on top. Add extra milk if needed, soaking all of the bread. Spread the remaining cup of shredded cheese (or more) across the top. Cover with foil and bake at 375 degrees for 1 hr. 10 minutes or less. Allow the strata to “rest” for 10 minutes before serving with fresh fruit on the side. (Strawberries and bananas are perfect!) Store leftovers in air-tight containers in the refrigerator for no more than 3 days.





Get Connected with CYFS

Investigation by Amanda Troyer

What do you think of when you hear that word? Some of you have experienced what it is like to have an investigation against you. Many can agree it does not have a good ring to it and it certainly does not feel good. It can be scary and intimidating. We try hard to make it less scary and to reassure and put you to ease. Unfortunately, there are many policies guiding investigations which we must follow. Sometimes we are even required to move a child. But if we can stop that from happening, if there are no safety concerns, we certainly do so. As a licensing worker, I have observed a wide array of emotions experienced by foster parents during investigations, including feeling hurt, sad, surprised, confused, angry, frustrated, devastated, heartbroken, feeling like a failure, or believing people are looking at them like they are a criminal. Sometimes they cannot believe anyone would call the hotline and report them for abuse, an ultimate act of betrayal. It is safe to say investigations are challenging to endure when you're the one being investigated.

As a licensing worker, I can empathize with these feelings and let you know you're likely justified in feeling this way. And no one can take away another person's feelings. I can reassure you often we licensing workers hate the investigations we get called to do even more than you do. They can devastate us just as much as you because we believe in you. Investigations are a lot of paperwork for workers and when they are truly for false allegations, they can be frustrating. Investigations serve a purpose though and are justified and appreciated when true abuse is happening to a child. So, it's important to ensure every child is being treated well and the only way to do that is to take the allegations seriously. The people who work at the hotline do not know you. They must take what they receive and act accordingly just in case real abuse is occurring. So how can we minimize

the anxiety that comes with being told there is an investigation against your home? First, realize we are with you and will advocate for you when there are no safety concerns. And then...

If you truly did not do anything, you are probably going to be okay. I like to tell my foster parents to think of it this way... investigations do not always have to be about someone being guilty but rather proving someone's innocence instead. Perhaps a bio parent called the hotline on you, or a child said you did something which you did not do... okay that does not have to equal the end of the world. The investigator's job is to prove why the abuse/neglect did or did NOT occur. They do not have to be the enemy. Remain calm, professional, sincere, and genuine. It is okay to express emotions as long as you remain in control of those emotions.

When there is an investigator coming to your home, we also must initiate an investigation. We, however, are not trying to prove if you abused or neglected a child. Instead, we are trying to determine if a licensing standard was violated. It is important to know we are asked to come unannounced in most every situation. It can be awkward and uncomfortable to arrive unannounced as we never want to surprise anyone. Due to DCFS policies and procedures though, we are required to go without announcing our arrival. Please be patient with us. We're trying to advocate for you and listen to how you perceived whatever the situation was. Sometimes allegations can be corrected on site. Sometimes we offer training. And yet many times, we don't think less of you as a foster parent. So if you ever have an investigation against you (and we hope you don't have to experience that) try not to panic. We'll help you through the process.

~Amanda



National Child Abuse Prevention Month

Thriving Children and Families:
Prevention With Purpose

www.childwelfare.gov/preventionmonth



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April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month

The Numbers, the Need by Jessee Towery, Assistant Controller and Sharon Brooks, Licensing Manger

As of March 31, 2022, The Center for Youth and Family Services provided care for **1115** children and youth, with the assistance of **632** licensed foster homes and **204** unlicensed foster homes with placements.



Branch Offices

Bloomington-Center	309.829.6307	Lincoln	217.732.3771
Bloomington-Morris	309.820.7616	Macomb	309.833.1791
Champaign	217.352.5179	Peoria	309.323.6600
Danville	217.443.1772	Rock Island	309.786.0770
Galesburg	309.342.1136	Springfield	217.528.3694
LaSalle	815.223.4007		