Foster Family Focus

Newsletter for LCFS Foster Families | Fall 2026

LCFS OF ILLINOIS

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Falling Into Connection



Dear Foster Parents,

As the leaves begin to change and we settle into the rhythm of fall, we want to thank you for the care, commitment, and stability you provide to youth every day.

Fall is a season of transition. Children are adjusting to new school schedules, changing routines, cooler weather, and the anticipation of upcoming holidays. For children who have experienced trauma, transitions can bring both excitement and uncertainty. Consistent routines, clear expectations, and supportive relationships help children feel safe and secure during times of change.

Just as the season encourages growth and preparation, this newsletter is filled with resources to help foster families navigate the months ahead. Inside, you'll find information about educational success, safe sleep practices, fire safety, seasonal well-being, training opportunities, and ways to connect with fellow foster parents.

We hope these resources strengthen and support your family throughout the months ahead.

Thank you for all you do to help children grow, heal, and thrive.

Warm Regards,

Michelle Bay

Foster Parent Quality Coordinator

Know Your Support Team

Who to Contact and When

Sometimes the hardest part of asking for help is knowing who to ask. Your LCFS team is here to support you every step of the way.

Family Resource Engagement Specialist (FRES)
Connects families to:

- ✓ Resources
- ✓ Foster parent engagement opportunities
- ✓ Trainings and events
- ✓ Support groups
- ✓ Additional family supports

Licensing Representative
Assists with:

- ✓ Licensing requirements
- ✓ Foster home renewals
- ✓ Household changes and updates
- ✓ Policy and procedure questions
- ✓ Home safety and compliance requirements

Caseworker & Supervisor
Your primary partners for:

- ✓ Case plans and service coordination
- ✓ Family connections and visitation
- ✓ Educational needs and advocacy
- ✓ Placement-related concerns
- ✓ Child well-being and permanency planning

Turning Over New Leaves at School

Back-to-School Transitions & New Routines

The return to school often brings schedule changes that can be difficult for children adjusting to new expectations and environments. The beginning of the school year offers an opportunity to establish healthy routines and create a strong foundation for success.

Tips for a Smooth Transition:

- ✓ Establish consistent morning and bedtime routines.
- ✓ Use calendars or visual schedules to help children anticipate upcoming activities.
- ✓ Communicate with teachers and school staff.
- ✓ Celebrate small accomplishments and progress.
- ✓ Allow time for children to adjust to new routines.

School & Educational Resources

Ask your caseworker for regional support and educational resources available.

Remember: Behavior is communication. Children may need additional support and reassurance as they navigate changes.

Before & After School Care Resource

Did you know? Through YouthCare, each foster child has access to a free YMCA membership and, at participating YMCA locations, before and after school programs.

To learn more, call YouthCare Member Services at 844-289-2264.

Share a Concern

LCFS is participating in the Council on Accreditation process. As part of this, employees, consumers of our services, foster parents, community partners, and other stakeholders have an opportunity to report a concern directly to the Council on Accreditation. Scan the QR code or visit: coa.formassembly.com/232264

- Enter Yes when asked whether the organization is accredited or going through accreditation
- Enter Lutheran Child and Family Services as the organization.
- Select the City associated with your experience with LCFS

*This form allows individuals to indicate whether they wish to remain anonymous

Quality Starts With Little Things

A Back-to-School Message from Quality Assurance Manager Cynthia Stockard



A successful school year is about more than grades. For youth in care, educational stability, consistent routines, supportive adults, and strong communication can make a tremendous difference.

As we begin another school year, QA encourages foster parents to be an active part of the youth's educational team.

This Quarter, Check These Five Things

1. Is the youth enrolled and attending school consistently?
2. Does the school have the information needed to support the youth?
3. Are educational, medical, IEP, or 504 needs being addressed?
4. Does the caseworker know about significant school concerns?
5. Does the youth have a consistent adult advocating for educational success?

QA Quick Tip

Don't wait for report cards to discover a youth is struggling. Changes in attendance, missing assignments, repeated calls from school, behavior concerns, or sudden changes in attitude may be early indicators that additional support is needed.

QA Question of the Quarter

"What does this youth need from us to have a successful school year?"

Program Stakeholder Survey

LCFS values ongoing feedback from the people connected to our organization. You are invited to share feedback about your experience with LCFS and our programs. Share concerns, positive experiences, recommendations, and other feedback to help us improve. Scan the QR code or visit: surveymonkey.com/r/BPStakeholder

Safe Sleep Spotlight

Safe sleep practices remain one of the most important ways to protect infants and reduce sleep-related deaths.

The ABCs of Safe Sleep

A = Alone Babies should sleep alone in their own safe sleep space and never sleep in a bed, couch, or chair with adults, children, or pets.

B = Back Always place babies on their backs for naps and nighttime sleep.

C = Crib Babies should sleep in a safety-approved crib with a firm mattress and tightly fitted sheet.

Additional Safe Sleep Reminders:

- ✓ Keep the crib clear. No blankets, stuffed animals, crib bumpers, or other loose items should be placed in the crib.
- ✓ Do not allow infants to sleep on couches, adult beds, swings, bouncy seats, or other soft surfaces.
- ✓ Prevent exposure to smoke.
- ✓ Dress babies lightly for sleep to avoid overheating.

Keeping Families Safe Indoors & Out

As temperatures cool and outdoor gatherings become more common, it's important to review fire safety procedures with everyone in your household.

Home Fire Safety Checklist

- ✓ Test smoke alarms monthly.
- ✓ Replace batteries as needed.
- ✓ Review emergency escape routes.
- ✓ Teach children how to call 911 in an emergency.
- ✓ Keep exits clear and accessible.
- ✓ Ensure fire extinguishers are accessible and work.
- ✓ Practice family fire drills regularly.

Fire Pit & Outdoor Burning Safety

- Follow local ordinances regarding open burning.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Closely supervise children around fire pits.
- Keep a hose, bucket of water, or fire extinguisher nearby.
- Never use gasoline or other accelerants.
- Fully extinguish fires before leaving the area.

A little prevention can help keep your family safe throughout the season.

Turning Toward the Holidays

The holidays bring opportunities for celebration and connection, but they can also be emotionally challenging for children in foster care.

Children May Experience

- Grief and loss
- Anxiety about family visits
- Changes in routine
- Difficult memories associated with holidays

Ways to Help

- ✓ Discuss holiday plans in advance.
- ✓ Maintain routines whenever possible.
- ✓ Encourage children to share traditions that are meaningful to them.
- ✓ Prepare children ahead of family visits and special events.
- ✓ Offer patience and understanding when emotions are heightened.

Caregiver Self-Care

Caring for yourself helps you better care for others.

- Connect with supportive friends and family.
- Attend support groups.
- Schedule breaks and respite when available.
- Practice healthy stress-management strategies.

"Children may not remember every holiday tradition, but they will remember feeling safe, included, and cared for."

Fostering Forward Mentor Program: A Northern Region Pilot

Are you a Northern Region foster parent interested in connecting with another foster parent for guidance, encouragement, and support?

LCFS is excited to introduce the Fostering Forward Mentor Pilot Program, which connects foster parents with experienced peers who can offer insight, share experiences, and help navigate the foster care journey.

Whether you are new to fostering or simply looking to strengthen your support network, a mentor can provide valuable perspective and encouragement.

Interested in Being Connected with a Mentor?

Are you a Northern Region foster parent interested in connecting with another foster parent for guidance, encouragement, and support? Contact Central Intake Coordinator Alexa Pennell at alexa_pennell@lcfs.org

Foster Parent Support Groups

In Collaboration with Be Strong Families

Foster parenting is rewarding, but it can also come with unique challenges. Support groups provide a welcoming space to connect, learn, and grow alongside others who understand.

- ✓ Connect with fellow foster parents
- ✓ Share experiences and practical advice
- ✓ Learn new parenting strategies
- ✓ Build a network of support

https://www.bestrongfamilies.org/idcfs-foster-parent

Your Voice Matters

Foster Parent Advocacy Council

The Foster Parent Advocacy Council gives foster parents an opportunity to share ideas, participate in solutions and strengthen the foster parent experience.

Interested in participating? Contact Michelle Bay at michelle_bay@lcfs.org

Upcoming 2026 Board Payments

October 16 **November 17** **December 16**

Questions? Send an email to Finance_Team@lcfs.org or call 708-771-7180 option 3.

Fostering Our Future Training Calendar

Fall & Winter 2026

Human Trafficking: September 29, 5:30 PM-7:00 PM on Teams, presented by The Power Project

Conflict Resolution: October 27, 5:30 PM-7:00 PM on Teams, presented by Andrienne Horton-Smith

LCFS Programs: November 17: 5:30 PM-6:30 PM on Teams, presented by Michelle Bay

Educational Advocacy: December 8, 5:30 PM-6:30 PM on Teams, presented by DCFS Staff

Scan the QR Code provided to register for upcoming trainings.

Every training is another opportunity to help children turn over new leaves and discover new possibilities.

Always Ready Families Program

The Always Ready Families Program (ARFP) provides foster families with an opportunity to support children and youth experiencing an urgent placement need.

Interested in Learning More? Learn about:

- ✓ Program expectations
- ✓ Available supports and resources
- ✓ Participation requirements

Scan the QR code to attend an upcoming information session or contact Michelle Bay to schedule a one-on-one meeting to learn more. michelle_bay@lcfs.org

2026 Implementation Plan

The 2026 Implementation Plan is now available for review. This important document outlines your rights and responsibilities and provides key information to support you. We encourage everyone to familiarize themselves with the plan and its expectations.

Scan the QR code provided to access and review the 2026 Implementation Plan.