

network news

Fall 2007

The Voice of the Network

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network news

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May Your Strength Give Us Strength The 2007 Permanency Conference

by Pam Wagner, Best Practice Division Manager, Diakon/FDR

“May your strength give us strength
May your faith give us faith
May your hope give us hope”
... (Bruce Springsteen)

I wish I could say I am an optimist, I can't. I wish I could say I'm always grateful, I'm not. Sometimes I take for granted the fact that I get to attend the Permanency Conference held every summer. I may even complain about how long I have to be away from my family or all the clothes I have to pack or the long drive. I can definitely suffer from “can't see the forest for the trees” syndrome on occasion.

Shortly after my arrival at this year's conference, I ran into a colleague who

was preparing for a presentation. She confided in me that she was anxious. Only being partially focused, still suffering from the “forest for the trees” syndrome, I answered, “Oh, don't worry, you're a great presenter.” She looked at me for a moment and then said she wasn't concerned about herself as a presenter, but whether she would leave her audience with something worthwhile. Whether after her presentation they would feel stronger and more hopeful than when they arrived.



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I thought about her comment most of that day, feeling that my response was inadequate and shallow. I realized she was right; the most important thing we give to each other in this network is strength and hope, especially when we come together. The few days we gather in July for the Permanency Conference provides us with these key essentials and even though there are many things to attend, workshops, a matching event, an award banquet, a picnic, and a children's program, the most crucial thing delivered is a time for renewing our spirit. Whether we are families or professionals, being together makes us stronger than being apart.



As the words strength and hope ran through my mind I thought about the Bruce Springsteen song "Into the Fire." Written in the aftermath of 9/11, it honors those who rushed into the towers to save lives while others were rushing out. While not many of us will ever be asked to give this ultimate sacrifice, we are given the opportunity to profoundly affect the lives of those we serve. Through our collective efforts we exchange strength, hope and faith with each other. How lucky we really are to have the opportunity to give of ourselves for the benefit of one another.



As the conference week continued, I observed this commitment in action. There were families supporting one another and professionals exchanging insights, visions and ideas. In the end, most of us left the conference a little stronger and more hopeful than when we arrived. For a short time, we weren't just seeing individual trees, but the whole beautiful forest. 🌲🌲🌲



Pictures of award winners featured on pages one and two. Listing of all award winners featured on page three.



Congratulations 2007 Permanency Conference Award Winners!

Permanent Family Recognitions

Melanie and Frank Belcher of Somerset County who were nominated by Carol Landman of Berks County Children and Youth Services and Lisa Richards and Kristen Walters from Children's Aid Home Programs Somerset County

Karen and Edward Klahr of Berks County who were nominated by Ruth George of Berks County Children and Youth Services.

John Hettinger of Lycoming County who was nominated by Chawn Gehr of KidsPeace Adoption Services in Williamsport

John and Joanne Johnson of Washington County who were nominated by Abby Cannon of Try Again Homes, Inc.

Marco and Michelle Munari of Bucks County who were nominated by Sandra Schreffler of KidsPeace in Reading

Edwin and Karen Dock of Snyder County who were nominated by Natalie Chesney of Snyder County Children and Youth Services.

Independent Living Professional Recognition

Cleopatra Anderson-Wright of Philadelphia Department of Human Service, Achieving Independence Center, Mobile Life Skills Program who was nominated by Stephen Eidson of the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program.

Permanency Teamwork Recognitions

Joanne Logan of the Penn State Cooperative Extension of Westmoreland County, **Sandy Straton** of Laurel Youth Services and **Annette Gross** of Wesley Spectrum Services who were nominated by Annette Gross of Wesley Spectrum Services.

Philanthropy Recognition

Joe Shearer who was nominated by Melissa Eller of Diakon/FDR.

Permanency Advocate Recognition

Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association who was nominated by Sandy Gallagher of the Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families.

Permanency Professional Recognition

Nancy Johnson of Lackawanna County Children and Youth Services who was nominated by Natalie Witt-Washine of Diakon/FDR. Additionally, Nancy was recognized by the Lackawanna County Commissioners on July 24, 2007 for her outstanding commitment and dedication in finding permanency for children.

County Collaborative Recognition

Judge **Carol L. VanHorn, Esquire** and **Cassandra Rahauer, Esquire** of the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas and **Brian Bornman, Esquire** and **Diane Heckman** of Franklin County Children and Youth Services who were nominated by Diane Heckman of Franklin County Children and Youth Services.

SWAN Advisory Committee Outstanding Service to Adoption Recognition

Kathy Boyd of Chester County Department of Children, Youth and Families who was nominated by Diane Horsey of Chester County Department of Children, Youth and Families.

Unsung Heroes Awards

Congratulations to Curtis Black, Nicole Weller, Laurie Boucher, Charlie Ruthrauff and Roseanne Desilver for being selected as the Unsung Heroes at this year's Permanency Conference.

statewidestraighttalk

From the
Department
of Public Welfare
by Lorrie Deck,
Director,
Statewide
Adoption and
Permanency
Network



Congratulations Pennsylvania! Since Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2000 Pennsylvania has seen a 48% decrease in the total number of children in foster care with a goal of adoption, with our biggest success seen in the overall reduction in the number of children of color with a goal of adoption. Our success has been due in part to a combination of changes in recruitment, policy, best practice and primarily, the hard work of the network.

Our efforts began in 2000 when SWAN launched our first media campaign. The television commercials, radio advertisements and print advertisements were designed to not only raise general awareness about children in foster care in need of adoptive families, but to highlight the need for African American adoptive families. As you may recall, the media campaign featured a teen-aged African American boy and his African American adoptive parents and was aired specifically on those stations identified by our media contractor as being the most popular with African American and faith-based communities. While we placed a large focus on the need for African American adoptive families because we had such a large population of African American children in need of adoptive homes, we also reached out to the Hispanic communities to recruit prospective adoptive families. In addition to the television commercials, SWAN developed print materials in both English and Spanish and a radio commercial in Spanish that was broadcast on Latino radio stations in the metro markets.

To enhance this adoptive family recruitment campaign, in FFY 2003, SWAN partnered with the Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association (PSFPA) to begin a statewide foster parent recruitment campaign. The foster family recruitment campaign consisted of a

television commercial, a radio commercial and print advertisements that again featured African American and Hispanic children.

These two campaigns continued through FFY 2005 and were a huge success, generating a 124% increase of approved adoptive African American families. In fact, the campaign generated such a large pool of waiting families, that for the first time, Pennsylvania had more waiting families than waiting children, a trend that continues to this day. Currently, Pennsylvania has more than 1,200 approved adoptive families waiting for a child and less than 900 children with a goal of adoption who do not yet have an identified adoptive family.

The media campaign was just the first step. Recruiting African American families willing to adopt children from foster care is not enough. In order to be successful, you must face the fact that children of color are disproportionately over-represented in the foster care system. In order to bring this crisis to the forefront, we began to do something very simple...we talked about it. Beginning in 2001, during SWAN quarterly and statewide meetings we provided updated statistics about the number of African American children waiting in foster care for an adoptive family and highlighted how long some of those children were waiting compared to their Caucasian counterparts. For instance, in FFY 2000, not only were 65% of the children available for adoption from the Pennsylvania foster care system African American, they were also waiting as much as *five years* longer than their white counterparts for an adoptive family.

During subsequent SWAN quarterly meetings and conferences, we continued to focus on the need for workers to do all that they could to help move African American children more quickly through the system.

Keynote speakers, trainings and workshops focused the Network's attention on this crisis. This openness, this ability to speak about the issue at hand, allowed us to really look at our own values and how they compared or contrasted with best practice.

In 2003, the Office of Children, Youth and Families issued new policies and procedures regarding Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC) and Kinship Care as permanent placement options for children in the foster care system. The use of these permanency options when reunification is no longer possible and adoption has been ruled out by the court, is supported as an option for children to maintain ties with their birth family while promoting their safety, well being and permanency.

Also in 2003, SWAN expanded the population of children served by the SWAN program. Since January 2003, SWAN serves all children in the custody of their county agency, not just those children in custody with a court-ordered goal of adoption. By allowing services to begin *prior* to the goal of adoption being established by the court, critical services, such as child profiles, child preparation for permanency, family profiles and child specific recruitment can begin earlier in the lifetime of a case so that hopefully, once termination of parental rights occurs the county agency has already identified a prospective adoptive family for the child.

One of the unforeseen benefits of providing adoption services to children who do not yet have a court ordered goal of adoption quickly became evident...permanent families were located earlier in the case. By performing child profiles prior to the goal of adoption, workers were able to identify relatives and other significant individuals or families who were previously unknown to

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them but who were often willing to either adopt the child or become a permanent legal custodian or kinship care provider.

Additionally, while our adoption finalizations have remained fairly consistent, we have seen an increase in the number of children discharged to permanent legal custodianship and to kinship care providers, children who prior to these policies, would have most likely remained in foster care.

To support our new policies and to enhance our recruitment efforts, particularly for African American children, in 2006 SWAN designed and launched a new media campaign designed to recruit Resource Families (foster and adoptive families). The campaign, designed to be reflective of the children in care in need of foster and adoptive homes, consists of three new television commercials, one featuring an African American sibling group, one featuring a 13-year-old Caucasian girl and the one featuring a nine-year-old African American boy.

To support the new media campaign, in 2006 SWAN launched the Pennsylvania Heart Gallery. The Pennsylvania Heart Gallery is an awareness exhibit that features professional portraits and personal stories of Pennsylvania's waiting children. The children featured in the exhibit were from 17 different Pennsylvania counties. The exhibit traveled across the Commonwealth throughout the year, visiting some of the largest populated areas. 52 children were featured with 32 (62%) of those children representing a minority race or ethnic background. At the completion of the first year of travel for the exhibit, 23 of the 52 children featured had been placed with a permanent family. Of the 23 children placed, 14 (61%) were of a minority race or ethnic background. In May of 2007, we began the second year of the Heart Gallery. The Heart Gallery currently features 50 children, most of them older children of color, who all need adoptive families. *As of August 1, 28 (56%) of the children featured have found adoptive families.*

In addition to the new television commercials and the Heart Gallery,

in FFY 2006, SWAN partnered with Three Rivers Adoption Council (TRAC) to manage the SWAN *Older Child Recruitment Initiative*. The SWAN Older Child Recruitment Initiative is funded with a \$150,000 grant from SWAN and has one goal ...to increase the number of adoption finalizations for children between the ages of 10 and 18. In just one year, TRAC recruited 400 families for this population of youth, 178 (45%) of whom were of a minority race, and completed 33 family profiles on the families recruited, 10 (30%) of whom are of a minority race. Through this initiative, in one year's time, TRAC matched 17 older youth with permanent families, 13 (76%) of whom were of a minority race.

At the completion of FFY 2000, there were 4,123 African American children available for adoption and by the completion of FFY 2006, there were 1,585, representing a 62% decrease in the number of African American children in need of adoptive families. While other minorities comprise a small percentage of the total number of children available for adoption, the number of Hispanic children with a goal of adoption also decreased, from 455 in FFY 2000 to 348 in FFY 2006, representing a 24% decrease. Comparatively speaking, we have seen a 20% overall decrease in the number of Caucasian children with a goal of adoption, from 2,042 in FFY 2000 to 1,642 in FFY 2006.

We know our recruitment methods are paying off in other ways as well. Although the overall number of minority children available for adoption has continued to decrease, the number of children of color who are finalized from the Pennsylvania foster care system each year represents approximately 50% of all adoption finalizations. This achievement is largely due to the very hard work that all members of our Network do on a daily basis to find permanent homes for all of Pennsylvania's waiting children. 

theideaexchange

Pennsylvania's Waiting Children

by Denise Maxwell,
Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange
Coordinator, Diakon/FDR



Meet Nicholas

Nicholas is a 13 year old, outgoing young man who has a lot of energy and enjoys participating in a variety of activities. He enjoys going to church and would like a family who will allow him to participate in church services on a regular basis. He likes listening to gospel music and enjoys singing.

Nicholas would like to learn more about his Hispanic heritage and wants a family who will help him to explore the Hispanic culture. Nicholas likes to play sports and enjoys being outdoors. He will do well in a family where he is the youngest child. Nicholas needs a family with patience who will give him guidance, structure and support.

All families will be considered for Nicholas. He is legally free for adoption. Families who are interested in making Nicholas part of their family may contact the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange at 1-800-227-0225. When contacting the exchange, please refer to Nicholas's PAE identification number, C6707946.

31st Annual *Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association (PSFPA)* Conference

by *Kathy Ramper, Executive Director, PSFPA*

The 31st annual Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association Conference, “Creating Connections,” was held on October 18-20, 2007, at the Holiday Inn-Harrisburg/Hershey, in Grantville, Pennsylvania. The conference focused on how to better serve Pennsylvania’s foster children through the improved array of services now available to children and their resource families.

The topics that this year’s speakers highlighted included education, cultural diversity, mental health, advocacy and support and legal issues. Resource families (foster, adoptive and kinship), health professionals and public and private agency professionals who provide permanency services attended the conference to learn and share information about current best practices in working with our children.

The conference opened with a luncheon on Thursday, October 18. The keynote speaker this year was Karen Vadino, a nationally known motivational speaker, humorist, trainer and consultant who shared her unique and humorous approach to life.

Twenty-two separate workshops in eight different topic areas were presented Thursday afternoon through Saturday morning. Continuing education credits and 11 hours of training were available to those who attended workshops.

On Thursday evening, the annual dinner and benefit auction for the PSFPA Scholarship Fund was held. The auction raised \$5,886.00 and along with the money from our raffle, donations and resource store, over \$10,000.00 in scholarship money was raised.

On Friday evening, the annual awards banquet was held and PSFPA honored a few of the individuals who have done so much to help improve the lives of our families and children. Congratulations to all of the award winners!

On Saturday morning, the conference closed with the reflections, poetry, poignancy and humor of Judy Damiano and Pam Wagner to celebrate the crucial role of foster and adoptive parents in the lives of our

Foster Parents of the Year
Allen and Jean Grabowski
Paul and Tammy Clinger

Agency of the Year
Lancaster County Children
and Youth Agency

Foster Parent Association of the Year
Lebanon Foster Parent Association

Caseworker of the Year
Rochelle Livingston

Community Partnership
WMGH/WLSH

Executive Director’s Award
Becky Krentz

President’s Award
Lorrie Deck

children. Pam and Judi, both long-time professionals in the adoption field, shared stories from their years of experience, families they’ve known, as well as their own personal journeys. They spoke about adjusting expectations, celebrating the small things, the necessity of humor for survival and honoring yourselves as you do this most critical work. In short, they spoke about the complex roles, challenges and joys that families face everyday.

Thank you to all who helped make this year’s conference a great success. 🌱

by Darla L. Henry, Family Design Resources, Inc.,
Co-director and SWAN Specialist: Best Practice, Training and Policy

“If children live with security, they learn to have faith.”

Recently I saw a commercial for ibelong.com, an approach to get people to join a credit union—tapping into our human need to belong, to be a part of something more; a way to connect all our parts to being a whole of something. It is a good metaphor for the purpose of our work with the children and youth who are entrusted to our care when their families are unable to adequately parent them. Our efforts are intended to provide them with the emotional or relational belongingness that they seek.

Once in care, children are frequently asked to transfer that belongingness/love to strangers. It is the heart of our work in making their connections to others. If you are that stranger, how will you work with the child/youth to actualize these connections into long lasting familial relationships? If they are not to return home, what safety and well-being work is required to assure the opportunity for belongingness? Do we identify a “permanent resource” and then “hope” it works?

The foster care system was once again the object of “bad press” when a recent longitudinal study by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative reported that children are better off in their own homes rather than in foster care. Wow! What a negation of all the efforts and commitment we make to assure safety and well-being for abused and neglected children. While the study results highlighted known challenges in the system, is the implication here that foster care is bad for children? No, it is more the reality that a once caring idea of the 1940’s, for children who could

not remain with unsafe families, was never used as it was meant to be used. Foster care was designed to “foster” the growth of children in families, on an interim or temporary basis, until these children could be returned to their families. Over the years, this well-intended practice has been adapted to be all things to all children who have come into the system. Foster families were never intended to be a permanent place for children to belong and be loved in life-long relationships.

Adoption of children living in the system came into practice in the early 80’s becoming the process by which children became legal members of new families. As knowledge and skills have grown and developed over the past 25 years, much has been learned about the process of “adoption” and the value it provides for children towards their well-being and permanency relationships. Kinship families are more valued and viewed as integral towards providing permanency for many children. Prior relationships which youth have formed have become recognized as potential resources for permanent relationships. We are making the connections...are children feeling they belong?

Are we losing emphasis on the value of adoption as the preferred permanency plan? For many youth unable to return home, adoption offers a lifetime commitment plus the sense of belonging and security that they need to develop faith in self and others to live successful adult lives. While adoption may be challenging for some youth, due to painful attachment experiences, “the desire for family is hard-wired in us”

(Casey Initiative). The increase in the number of adoptions of young adults in their 20’s who have chosen to be adopted gives credence to this.

Youth testifying before a congressional subcommittee, in July, on aging out of the system, said the following about family:

“We must provide youth with the lifelong support a family grants their own...”

“If I had experienced some form of permanency in my life before I left care, I know my transition would have been easier.”

“Permanency is having someone there to help you when you need it, not by appointment when you need to talk to someone.”

“Permanency is having someone to lean on for support when obstacles come your way.”

“I want people to call family...”

“Your parents are there for you to make sure you have food...”

“Your parents were always there to forgive you...”

“For many of us in foster care, we spent our childhood quietly crying for family.”

“I would encourage more adoptions—establishing permanency for us.”

Our work to assure security for the children and youth entrusted to our care begins with the philosophy that “every child deserves a family” and “all children are adoptable.” We have listened to the voices of our children and we are creating connections for them. We honor their past families and important

Who Are Pennsylvania's Approved Adoptive Families ? How Can We Access Them?

by Jane Johnson, Division Manager, Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange, Diakon/FDR

Pennsylvania has a wealth of adoptive families who are available to our waiting children. These families come from all regions of the state; are primarily couples, are well represented by families of a minority race or ethnicity and are willing to accept our diverse group of children.

The need for adoptive families has been addressed nationally and locally in many ways. Pennsylvania has chosen the unique method of creating a network of agencies to study and approve families. But does it work? The number of registered adoptive families (1,250) with Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange (PAE) is significantly more than the number of registered waiting children (296) with PAE.

Statistics from June 2007 provide proof that Pennsylvania has done an amazing job of finding and training families to accept our children. In June, there were 1,250 families from 140 agencies studied, approved and waiting for children. These families reflect a wide range of child characteristics which the families are approved and willing to accept.

Some statistics about these families are:

- 21 percent are of a minority race or ethnicity;
- 60 percent will accept children over the age of 9 years;
- 60 percent will accept children 0 – 4 years;
- 53 percent will accept children with multiple placement histories;
- 63 percent will accept children with an abuse history;
- 55 percent will accept children with emotional disability;

- 25 percent will accept children with a runaway history;
- 71 families will accept children with 4 and more siblings; and
- Families come from 66 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties.

PAE's job is to track these families and match children with them. This can be done in multiple ways. When information on a waiting child is received he/she is matched with the top 10 families, matching demographic and characteristics of the child with those the family is willing and approved to accept. Workers for children have multiple options when requesting matches, they can:

- Request more than the 10 initial automated matches;
- Request additional matches if the initial 10 matches do not produce a resource family for the child;
- Request customized matches based on the needs and desires of the child; and/or

Pennsylvania has so many diverse and well trained families that we are the *envy* of many states. We have been told many times by other states that they review Pennsylvania family profiles and quickly make decisions to place children with the families we have trained; with the very families who have told us that they are willing to accept placement of one of *our kids*. Yet, 296 Pennsylvania children continue to wait. PAE is a rich resource for our children and should be utilized to its fullest. Contact PAE at 800-227-0225 to assist in your search for a family for any child with a goal of adoption who does not have a resource. ☘

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relationships and integrate their pasts by answering their questions so that they can move on to their futures.

Children and youth actualize when they feel secure and belongingness to family. We must continue to actualize our practice skills by prioritizing decisions and activities around the love and security that children seek; by preparing and

supporting our families towards their readiness and actualization to parent these children so that placement decisions are not "hoped for" placements. Children will then have hope for their future having integrated their family experiences. They are not required to let go of those they love; there may be physical absences but they continue

to embrace the love for their family in their hearts. As we recognize and support their pain and hurt, and help them secure the whole of themselves by rebuilding the pieces of their families, they find emotional permanence to a family to whom they can say, i belong. ☘

Washington County: Partnerships for Older Youth

by Leanna Roupe, IL Caseworker, Try-Again Homes, Inc

Try-Again Homes, Inc. and Washington County Children and Youth Services (CYS) are partnering to help give older youth a better chance for success. The two agencies work closely together and are really listening to youth about their needs and ideas that we have for improving programs and services.

One example is the Independent Living (IL) Banquet. The annual Washington County Independent Living Banquet was a success this year with 50 youth attending along with Commissioner Diana Irey, Independent Living Project Specialist Stephen Eidson, Washington County Children and Youth Services Administrator, Jeff Felton; Supervisors and Caseworkers and Try-Again Homes, Inc. Administrator, Scott Hilliard, Director of Operations, Kim Gavran; IL staff members Crystal Rivera and Leanna Roupe; and other agency staff members. A total of 18 IL participants received a gift for graduating from high school or obtaining their GED. Of those 18 graduates, 15 are continuing their education to colleges such as Robert Morris University, Community College of Allegheny County, Penn Commercial Business and Technical School, and Wyoming Technical Institute. IL participants at the banquet were also honored for completing their first year of college, graduating from college, obtaining their permits and licenses, moving into their first apartment and purchasing their first cars. The evening of celebration was not only

spent honoring participants, but also as a chance to let the youth share experiences with each other and get to know one another. Youth helped the IL staff plan the event and acted as hosts and spoke about their experiences throughout the evening.

In addition, Jeff Felton, the CYS Administrator, recently asked IL youth to interview candidates for the IL supervisor's position, which became open when Bernie Tychinski retired. That same week, he and his staff also held a focus group with IL youth to discuss services and ideas that youth have for improvements and expansion of program initiatives.

Because of the close ties that county commissioners, CYS and Try-Again Homes have established and because we are looking closely at ways to help youth succeed, this year the county began offering a stipend to youth who are in college. This stipend, approximately \$300 per month, helps youth in college with daily living expenses and allows them to concentrate on their academic studies without the worry of working extra hours. The agencies understand the need to work collaboratively and allow creativity in their work for successful programming for the youth we serve.

We continue to be proud of what is happening in Washington County and wanted to share that news with the SWAN Network! 🍷🥂



*Diane Irey, Washington County Commissioner
and Stephen Eidson, IL Specialist, CWTP*

2007 Annual Independent Living Youth Retreat

“Our Stories, Our Lives, Our Future”

by Justin Lee, Independent Living Specialist, CWTP

The 2007 Annual Independent Living (IL) Youth Retreat was held on Penn State Mont Alto’s campus during the week of June 25th. This week long retreat brought 16-21 year old current and former substitute care youth together from all over the Commonwealth for a week of learning and fun. Youth participated in classroom discussions, activity sessions, an off-campus trip, a banquet, a dance, activity presentations and a variety of other leadership opportunities such as co-facilitation of classroom sessions and participating in focus groups.

The IL Youth Retreat Steering Committee, which is comprised of IL youth and staff from across the Commonwealth, developed the Youth Retreat theme, “Our Stories, Our Lives, Our Future.” This theme served as the foundation for the classroom discussions throughout the week. Youth created storyboards about their lives, shared their stories and discussed their future goals and dreams. Classroom sessions were facilitated by one trained adult facilitator and one trained youth co-facilitator. Youth co-facilitators were chosen to serve after participating in a competitive application process. Throughout the week, these youth leaders assisted in classrooms, served as positive role models and helped set an overall positive tone for all retreat participants.

Activity sessions ran the gamut from “At the Hop” 50’s style dancing, to hip-hop dance, to DJ, to art, fun furniture and many others. Youth were able to learn new skills, create and finish projects and present to the entire retreat what they had learned during the week. These activity presentations showcased the talents and passions possessed by the youth. Two youth, Rahfeese from York County and Kenyada from Philadelphia County, recorded an original song based on the theme of this

year’s youth retreat titled “The Struggle.” “The Struggle” was a mix of hip-hop and spoken word. It was performed live by Rahfeese to an excited crowd of retreat participants.

Focus groups were conducted with approximately forty youth during the off-campus trip to Caledonia State Park. Youth co-facilitators moderated the focus groups in order to gather input from youth about their experiences in the substitute care system. This input will be shared with the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) workgroup on the state level preparing for the next round of CFSR scheduled for 2008 in Pennsylvania.

Two excellent guest speakers entertained and motivated the youth during the week. The first guest speaker, Eric Anderson, shared his talents for illusions and magic with the youth as well as his story of growing up in foster care and overcoming adversity in his life. The banquet guest speaker, Carlos Ojeda Jr., spoke to the youth about his life story and let the youth know that “life is not about the breath you take, but the moments that take your breath away.” Mr. Ojeda Jr.’s message was about the importance of education, believing in oneself, permanent connections and working to accomplish your goals and dreams.

Overall, the 2007 Annual IL Youth Retreat was an outstanding success. Youth left with a feeling of accomplishment, belonging and purpose. Motivated to share our stories, our lives and our future, IL youth were able to experience life on a college campus while building skills that will last a lifetime. ✪✪



Legal Service Initiative Paralegal Corner

by Natalie Witt,
Division Manager, LSI, Diakon/FDR

Welcome to the Paralegal Corner, where the Legal Service Initiative (LSI) paralegals respond to issues presented by our readers. This new addition to the Network News will cover a range of issues from a paralegal's perspective. If you have an issue or topic that you would like the paralegals to address, please e-mail your question to Natalie Witt at nwitt@diakon-swan.org.

This issue's focus is on diligent searches, which are a critical first step in the adoption process that should be completed when a child first comes into the custody of children and youth services. The focus of diligent searches has changed over the past few years. We now no longer solely search for the "missing father." We have to think about any possible permanent connection for each child. By doing searches at the beginning of

the child's case, you may be able to identify a permanent home for the child early on and reduce the amount of time he or she spends in care. How wonderful would that be!

We have received many questions about diligent searches, many focusing on actual procedures such as: where to begin, specific road blocks and when to stop searching. Due to the specific nature of each question and the differences from county to county, we thought it would be easier to offer some general tips and suggestions for handling your search requests. We will, however, answer your questions individually, if we have not already done so.

Let me begin by referring all of you to the LSI Diligent Search (DS) Packet. If you are not aware of this packet, it can be found on the LSI page, Diligent Search link, on the Diakon-SWAN Web site at www.diakon-swan.org. The packet was created by the LSI paralegals to assist agency workers with their diligent search requests. In preparing the packet, the paralegals considered all levels of skill so they could make the packet more user-friendly. They spent a great deal of time trying to capture the diversity within the represented counties in Pennsylvania. The packet illustrates each county's unique efforts and procedures for searching, as well as sample procedures, forms, letters and much, much more.

The LSI paralegals have prepared their top 10 search tips to assist you with your searches. This list was compiled and updated to reflect common concerns noted when searching.

1. First and foremost, please check with your individual county for their rules and/or search requirements. Each county has different requirements for completing a search. Some courts require a certain number of avenues be exhausted before publishing and even name specific sites that must be contacted. You need to be sure you are complying with your own county's requirements.
2. Read the case file thoroughly. Do not rely on the information provided to you from a previous worker. It's very easy to overlook the smallest piece of information that could lead you to a permanent connection. Talk with the children identified in the file, especially the older children. Ask them questions – where they lived, who they know, schools they attended, etc. No question is a silly question, especially to a child.
3. A checklist is provided in the DS Packet. Make a copy of this sheet and attach it to the inside of your file. Be sure to record everything you do on this sheet. This will help you complete your search affidavit.

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(continued from page 11)

4. Talk with your supervisor and determine the time frame you have to work with. If you are pressed for time, start with state agencies (ex. DPW, Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) first. Federal offices tend not to be as expedient in their turnaround time. Also, state agencies are required by law to update their information more frequently than federal offices.
5. When calling any agency office, be sure to get the name of the person you spoke with. Make friends with this person. Be sure to record their name on the checklist in your file. When doing a different search, you will be able to reference this person, and this contact may also be helpful for future searches.
6. Web sites. Be careful when doing Web site searches. Be aware that some Web sites require you to create an account before accessing information, and others may require a fee for information. Some sample sites that paralegals have found helpful include: www.ancestor.com, www.zabasearch.com, and www.google.com. Please see the DS Packet for additional sites, including telephone directories. Accurint.com (www accurint.com) is a wonderful resource, however you must meet some specific requirements (i.e. be a government agency), and fees are required.
7. Do not limit your search requests. For example, when calling the DMV, do not limit your search solely to current drivers' licenses. Also ask about surrendered licenses and Identification cards. Be creative in your searches. Please see the DMV section of the DS Packet for more information.
8. Check with shelters in your surrounding area. Speak with the coordinator in charge. They are not permitted to tell you if a particular individual is there, but will leave a message for that person.
9. Some of our leading resources include: DPW, DMV, United States Postal Service, telephone directories, inmate locators, and online search engines. Some of the paralegals have found success contacting local area churches, real estate agencies (landlords) and schools. Again, due to confidentiality constraints, you will need to identify yourself and the purpose of your call. Information may be limited. Please visit our DS Packet before contacting a specific agency to see if you will need to meet certain requirements.
10. Finally, you will need to prepare a notarized affidavit for the court outlining everything you did in an effort to locate the individual. An example of an affidavit is provided in the DS packet. Good record keeping throughout your search will prove helpful when completing this document. The more information you record during your conversations the easier this step will be.

LSI staff is available to answer additional questions you may have about your search and are also available to provide trainings to your agency workers. Counties have used LSI staff for new hire trainings, as well as for refresher courses for the more seasoned workers. You do not have to be an LSI county to be eligible to receive this training.

If you are interested in a diligent search training, please contact Natalie Witt at 888-793-2512 ext. 6449 or by e-mail at nwitt@diakon-swan.org.

Please note that the LSI program does not provide legal opinions or advice. Our materials and responses are provided for informational purposes only. No effort or intention is made to solicit and or provide legal services of any kind. The information provided should not be construed as legal advice. ✂

Southwest Regional Training Day

by Belinda Muschar, SWAN Southwest Regional Technical Assistant

I am in awe as I contemplate the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN), a network that I have had the opportunity to be a part of over the last five years. SWAN is a network full of participants, both public and private, willing to move beyond silos and “turf issues” to create a system aimed at bettering the lives of some of Pennsylvania’s most vulnerable children and youth as well as supporting their families who work endlessly to “heal the hurts.”

In addition to fostering supportive professional relationships within SWAN, ours is a network that recognizes the importance of building relationships with other systems that touch “our” kids and families. It was in this spirit that the Southwest Region and Post-Permanency Technical Assistants recently joined forces for a day long regional meeting.

Wesley Spectrum Services hosted the event on June 15. Doug Muetzel, CEO of Wesley Spectrum Services, offered very poignant opening remarks about the work that lies ahead of all who work on behalf of healing wounded children, working with their families and the collaboration necessary to achieve good outcomes.

A regional resource fair turned out to be a fantastic opportunity for affiliates, counties, other provider agencies and SWAN programs to network and learn more about what each has to offer. Twenty-three agencies and programs participated by setting up resource tables. Participants continued networking

and building connections over a picnic lunch made possible by food contributions from meeting participants, the SWAN Prime Contractor, and by volunteer efforts of the Wesley Spectrum staff.

Cindy Laufman Walker and Scot Hines, Post-Permanency Technical Assistants, conducted a training entitled, “To Perm and Beyond” during the afternoon. Their training helped participants learn more about post-permanency support services through SWAN and included a question and feedback opportunity. The day ended with an exercise on compassion anxiety and a reminder of the importance of self-care while working in a caring profession.

The success of any regional meeting depends on the commitment of all who participate. This event was made possible by the volunteer efforts of the Southwest Regional Meeting Planning Committee comprised of Sam Gonzales and Jill Shaffer (Pressley Ridge), Russ McCurdy (The Adoption Connection, Inc.), Kira Sisk (Try-Again Homes, Inc.) and Annette Gross and Merri Bindas (Wesley Spectrum Services). Planning began at the Winter Statewide meeting and continued until the event. 🌱

Pennsylvania’s Waiting Children

by Denise Maxwell,
Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange
Coordinator, Diakon/FDR



Meet Jillian

Jillian is a 14 year old, sweet young lady who is anxious to find a home. She loves being active and has a lot of different interests. Her favorite hobby is horses. She loves horses, knows how to ride and helps take care of the horses in her current home. Jillian loves all kinds of animals and would like a family who has cats and dogs.

Jillian works very hard at her school work. She says she really wants to learn and tries her very best. She does not like math or English, but she does like reading. Jillian also likes to cook, especially desserts and she likes to shop, especially for earrings. Jillian enjoys building puzzles, coloring, drawing and watch television.

Jillian said it is very important to her that her family goes to church and believes in God.

All families will be considered for Jillian. She is legally free for adoption. Families who are interested in making Jillian part of their family may contact the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange at 1-800-227-0225. When contacting the exchange, please refer to Jillian’s PAE identification number, C4808179.

Pennsylvania's Waiting Children

by Denise Maxwell,
Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange
Coordinator, Diakon/FDR



In Joshua's Words:

My name is Josh. I am almost 17 years old. Some of my interests are drawing. I also like computers, as well as playing board games. I am a quiet person when I first meet a person but after that I talk a lot. Usually I am an outgoing person. When I'm in school, I'm not an "A" student but I do my best anyway. I will eat anything but peppers. Most people would say that I am a very thoughtful and kind person, and I am. If I had 3 wishes they would be:

1. There were no disease
2. Peace everywhere
3. To be the richest man ever so I could send money to places like Africa so they can set up hospitals.

When I grow up I want to be a cosmetologist, nurse, graphic arts designer, clothes designer or an actor. For a family, I would like a mother and a father and younger siblings. For further information about me, please contact my Child Specific Recruiter, Karen Knodel, MSW, at Bethanna, 215-335-6500 x193 or email her at kknodel@bethanna.org.

Adoption... A Good Thing

by Karen Oldham, Director, SWAN Helpline 1-800-585-7926

I walked into the pet store the other day expecting to purchase a few chew toys for my dogs and to admire the latest puppies for sale in the window. Puppies restore my belief in goodness and simplicity. They fill my soul with happiness. On this day, I walked out of the store with more than I expected; I walked out with two new puppies, a huge bundle of soul filled happiness. I also left with the memory of the conversation I had with the young clerk in the store. We seemed to connect instinctively. He, an adopted child, and me, an adoptive parent. Somehow we seemed to sense the need to share our life stories over the paperwork of a few puppy purchases. The conversation renewed my belief in the goodness and greatness of adoption and the simple barometer needed to measure its success.

This young man, still struggling to overcome the scars of his life, was able to articulate the need of every child to have someone who "gets it" and who will stand by them no matter what, on whatever level is needed, whenever they need it. That is the simple beauty of adoption. It has its roots in the virtue to help others and its success in unyielding commitment. It is about developing families who can commit on a profound level. With that as our barometer, adoption successes are everywhere.

Adoption successes occur every time some one is there at a time when no one would be otherwise. Adoption is about having someone. Someone to attend your graduation. Someone to honor your birthday. Someone to help bail you out of the messes you create in your life. Someone to hold you accountable when you need it. Someone to care enough no matter what happens. Someone to mourn for you for what did happen. Someone to defend you to the world. Someone to help you find yourself in the midst of chaos. Someone to care when you may not care about yourself. Simply, someone to adopt you and commit to you even if you can't commit to yourself or anyone at that moment.

I adopted those puppies that day. I committed to them no matter what. The clerk in the store renewed my faith in the success born out of a simple commitment. Without it, there is little hope. With it is the potential for bundles of soul filled happiness, goodness and hope. Adoption, it is a good thing! 🐾

Mentoring for Independent Living and Former Foster Youth Who Want to Attend College

by Steve Eidson, Independent Living Specialist, CWTP

People in the child welfare field know of talented youth who are or have been a part of the foster care system. Many of these youth would do really well at a college, university or other post-secondary program and often the costs to attend one of these post-secondary options can be covered by grants, scholarships and college work-study programs. In a recent story in the *Bucks County Courier Times*, the efforts of Bucks County Children and Youth Services (CYS) Independent Living (IL) Program to promote higher education was highlighted.

Current and former foster care children rarely apply for scholarships or other types of financial aid, and many shy away from even going to college because they think they can't afford it, despite the efforts of substitute care providers and IL coordinators.

Bucks County CYS IL program is trying to change that. The agency has started a mentoring program aimed at helping some

of the 400 children in Bucks County's foster care system get into college.

The agency has hired a retired dean from Kutztown University to mentor youth who are considering post-secondary choices. Last year he helped nearly 90 youth.

Nicole Bachman, the IL coordinator from Bucks County CYS, stated that she hopes to sign up new mentors soon. Individuals must be trained and screened before they are matched with youth.

If you live in the Bucks County area and would like to help older youth in care or those who've recently left care reach their post-secondary dreams, please contact Nicole Bachman at nbachman@co.bucks.pa.us or go to the Bucks County Courier Times website to read the article that profiled the mentoring program. ✂

Pennsylvania's Waiting Children

by Denise Maxwell,
Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange
Coordinator, Diakon/FDR



Meet Steven

Steven is a 13 year old, energetic young man who enjoys a variety of activities including playing with matchbox cars, board and card games, being outside and watching television. Steven's favorite television show is Walker, Texas Ranger and some of his favorite movies include Jurassic Park, Godzilla and War of the Worlds. His favorite foods are pizza, spaghetti and chicken chow mien.

Steven is currently residing in a residential treatment facility. He has adjusted well to the structure of his current placement and continues to improve both socially and behaviorally. Steven interacts well with peers and recognizes his behavioral concerns and continues to work on improving his level of compliance and respect at his placement facility.

Steven's favorite subjects in school are reading and computers. He aspires to one day become a firefighter, policeman, a member of the armed forces or a construction worker.

Steven is interested in an active family who will love and accept him for who he is. Steven would thrive in a therapeutic home that could provide him with individual attention and guidance.

All families will be considered for Steven. He is legally free for adoption. For more information on Steven, contact the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange at 800-227-0225. When contacting the exchange, please refer to Steven's PAE identification number, C4309954.

Adoption Night at Williams Grove Speedway: 410 Racers Step Up to Help Kids Find Adoptive Homes

by Elisa Esh, Director, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care

On Friday, July 6, 2007, as part of the Mitch Smith Memorial Speed Week race, Williams Grove Speedway observed adoption night to raise awareness of the need for the more than 1,300 Pennsylvania children searching for a family to call their own. Sprint cars displayed photographs of more than 60 children searching for families as well as Diakon Adoption and Foster Care contact information.

To share information about the adoption process, an adoption fair was held for all race fans to promote the need for families to adopt children. Diakon Adoption and Foster Care, who partnered with Dauphin and Montgomery County Children and Youth agencies, Project STAR, Bethanna, AdoptionLinks and Northwestern Human Services, were thrilled with the event's success.

The adoption fair was crowded all night and many matches were made between families ready to adopt and children available for adoption. Diakon and private provider informational tables were busy all evening and had some very serious inquiries as to the adoption process. We are grateful to drivers such as Greg Hodnett, Doug Esh and many others who went out of their way to do publicity for children in need of adoptive families.

Adoption fair attendees also visited the Pennsylvania Heart Gallery exhibit which is comprised of professional photographs featuring the faces of Pennsylvania children waiting for a family.

The 63 children from various counties in Pennsylvania who appeared on the wings of the sprint cars and the more than 50 adoptive families present, attended a hospitality event prior to the race. Upon arriving, each of the children were given a gift that was generously purchased by sponsors of the event. Gifts included bikes, Gameboys, DVD players and gift cards for stores of their choice.

The outpouring of generosity from the racing community was amazing. These kids are searching for something so basic that most of us take for granted—a family. It was heartwarming to see them enjoy this evening and all that it had to offer them. Our hope is that the best gift some of these children received at this event was a forever family.

Currently more than 3,400 special needs children wait to be adopted in Pennsylvania. Of those, more than 1,300 children with a goal of adoption do not have a permanent family identified. The majority of the children range in ages from 10-18; most have special needs, which can include medical, emotional or physical disabilities. Single or two-parent families can adopt, regardless of race or age. If you think you can open your heart and your home to a child in need or just want more information, please contact Elisa Esh, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care, at 800-723-7038 or visit www.diakon.org or www.adoptpakids.org. ☺



From left to right- Jon Douglas, Project Star, Stephanie McCarl and Jennifer Bircher, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care, Greg Hodnett, winning driver, Elisa Esh and Angie Vicchiotti, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care

November is Adoption Month

What are your agency's plans for National Adoption Month? National Adoption Day (NAD) is Saturday, Nov. 17th. NAD is designed to raise awareness about the 114,000 children in foster care who are in need of adoptive homes. In 2006, for the first time ever, judges, attorneys, adoption professionals, child welfare agencies and advocates in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, helped to finalize the adoptions of more than 3,300 children from foster care. That year, 250 events were held throughout the country to finalize adoptions and to celebrate all families who adopt.

Visit www.nationaladoptionday.org for more information on what you can do in your area to support this national effort.

Another great resource is the 2007 National Adoption Month Web site. Visit www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/nam for recruitment resources for professionals and adoption information for parents.

RapLinks – A New Program at AdoptionLinks

by Kathleen Swain, LSW, Assistant Director, AdoptionLinks

Through a generous grant from the Margaret McCormick Charitable Foundation, AdoptionLinks is able to start a much-needed new program for Kinship Care. We are calling the new program "RAPLinks," which stands for "Relatives as Parents." The program's mission is to provide support to families in the community where an adult is caring for a relative's minor children without the support of a children and youth agency. There is no charge for the services provided by AdoptionLinks.

Our goal through RAPLinks is to provide assistance to these families

to create the highest level of stability and permanency needed to meet the children's and family's needs. This may mean assisting the family to seek other supportive services, help get the child an Individual Education Plan (IEP), set up respite care, create a plan to care for the children during a period of increased need, such as an illness of an elder caregiver, and so on. One unique aspect is our partnership with the Cardoza Society, who will be providing free or low cost legal services to families who needs assistance, is to create "a legal relationship" between themselves and the child, through guardianship or adoption. We are truly excited

about this new program, and hope that once we establish the program we will be able to demonstrate to additional funders the needs and benefits of the program.

We are looking forward to helping families across the Central Pennsylvania area. If you know one of the over 7,000 kinship families in this area who need supportive services, please contact us, we are ready to help! Contact Rachel or Kathleen at 717-233-1681.

Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology

Practical Education for Youth

Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology offers hands-on, technical education to its students. Youth leaving the child welfare system or youth from disadvantaged backgrounds receive special financial aid consideration and can usually attend the college free of charge. The college continually strives to provide under-privileged individuals with opportunities and to create an environment in which individual differences are valued and nurtured.

Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology, located in Lancaster, is a two-year technical college that provides an education in 17 programs. It is owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and is fully accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools.

The mission of Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology is to offer a two-year technical education to academically qualified students of Pennsylvania. The college serves financially disadvantaged and non-scholarship students as well as orphans. Stevens, a residential college, prepares students for skilled employment and full, effective lives as

citizens of the community, the commonwealth, and the nation. Stevens is committed to lifelong learning, community outreach and economic development by contributing to the technical workforce of Pennsylvania.

Of special note to the child welfare and SWAN systems, approximately 40 percent of students pay no tuition through its Legacy Award program and receive room and board without cost. Many students receive full grants based on financial need. All Pennsylvania residents must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) each year and apply for Pell Grant and Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) grants for Legacy Award consideration.

For additional information or to arrange a campus visit, contact the Admissions Office at 800-842-3832 or visit their Web site at www.stevenscollege.edu.

Montgomery County's 3rd Annual Matching Event

Montgomery County Children and Youth will hold their 3rd Annual Matching Event on Wednesday, November 14, 2007 from 4:30 P.M. to 7:00 P.M. at the Montgomery County Human Services Center located at 1430 DeKalb Street, Norristown, PA.

Last year's event was a huge success! There were 15 interviews held and at least 7 matches made. This year Montgomery County welcomes the Heart Gallery and additional live music. Contact Pamela Hartman at 610-278-5829 for additional information or to reserve a table.

Governor Newsletter

The Rendell Administration is committed to creating a first-rate public education system, protecting our most vulnerable citizens and continuing economic investment to support our communities and businesses. To find out more about Governor Rendell's initiatives and to sign up for his weekly newsletter, visit his Web site at:

www.governor.state.pa.us.

Savethedate

2008

SWAN/IL Winter Statewide Meeting

January 29 – 30, 2008

Penn Stater Conference Center in State College, Pa.

SWAN/IL Summer Statewide Meeting

July 8 – 9, 2008

Lancaster Host Resort and Conference Center, Lancaster, Pa.

16th Annual Permanency Conference

July 9 – 11, 2008

Lancaster Host Resort and Conference Center, Lancaster, Pa.