

# network news

Fall 2008/Winter 2009

The Voice of the Network

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### network news

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## Nowhere Else in the Country

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

It ended on July 11 at noon. Everyone poured out into the warm Lancaster summer as the 2008 Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network and Independent Living (SWAN/IL) Conference became a memory.

We made hurried good-byes and promised to return next year. The overall consensus was that our conference had been an enjoyable, worthwhile event. Attendees heard the closing keynote speaker, Shane Salter, talk about the importance of permanency and the work we do. We witnessed a very special program put on by the children and youth who attended the conference. It was a great reminder to everyone why we do this work.

In terms of attendance and activities, the conference was a complete success. Over

the course of two and half days, 657 people attended, including more than 80 families who attended the matching event, a record number. This was topped off by 37 workshops. Hundreds of people attended the SWAN/IL awards banquet on Wednesday night and who could forget the picnic on Thursday with Skeeta the Clown and John Cassidy, "Guinness Book of World Records" balloon artist.

But even with all of this, it was a remark made by Dr. Foster Cline, the opening keynote speaker that made an impact with many of us. While Steve Eidson drove Dr. Cline to the airport, they discussed the conference. Dr. Cline expressed how extraordinary it had been and said "nowhere else in the country" has he ever seen anything like this conference. He said, "This just doesn't exist! Having all

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the different groups come together for the sake of the children, putting aside their differences and learning from each other!" For him our Pennsylvania conference was a moving experience.

I heard recently that miracles do exist; we just don't recognize them for what they are. Maybe because we are too close, or maybe because they happen gradually over time and we are looking for a flash of light or a trumpet blowing to signify the event. I think sometimes

it takes someone from the outside to point to something extraordinary and say, "Hey, do you realize how unique this is?" Dr. Cline did that. He helped us realize how miraculous it is that this conference exists. How counties, private providers, independent living coordinators, state workers, legal professionals, mental health workers and most importantly children and families come together in one place. The fact that all of these people not only have the chance to rub shoulders

in workshops and learn from each other, but that they "break bread" together and become friends, makes the differences disappear.

Usually when the conference ends I'm hurrying to get my bags into the car and head home. I'm tired and more than ready to see my family, but not this year. This year I paused to reflect on all that had happened in Lancaster and realized I had witnessed a "flash of light." 🌟



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

# Congratulations 2008 Permanency Conference Award Winners!

## Permanent Family Recognitions

*Derett and Carol Jepsen* of Lehigh County who were nominated by Jeneen Overberger of Bucks County Children and Youth Agency.

*Brenda Ellerbee* of Philadelphia County who was nominated by Evelyn Barnes of Tabor Children's Services.

*Dr. Reginald and Rev. Regina Kirkland* of York County who were nominated by Karen Mumma of Bethanna Christian Services.

*Gerald and Debra Weinhold* of Lancaster County who were nominated by Lynette Nisly of Bethanna Christian Services.

*Curtis Fowler* of Allegheny County who was nominated by Kimberly Niblick of Bucks County Children and Youth Agency.

## Independent Living Professional Recognition

*Cindy L. Barr* of Somerset County Independent Living Program who was nominated by Steve Eidson of the University of Pittsburgh's Independent Living Project.

## Permanency Teamwork Recognition

*Jon Douglas* of The Children's Institute, Project STAR, *Jennifer McClure* of Washington County Children and Youth Agency, *Lee Maley* of Adelphoi Village and *Jay Stumper* of Allegheny County Children and Youth Agency who were nominated by Laura Hutchinson of The Children's Institute, Project STAR.

## Philanthropy Recognition

*A Woman's Purse*, United Way of Adams County who was nominated by Leasia Ayers-Caswell of Adams County Children and Youth Agency.

## Permanency Advocate Recognition

*William F. Peters, Esq.* of Crawford County who was nominated by Cheryl Donnell of Family Services of Northwestern Pennsylvania.

## Permanency Professional Recognition

*Pauline and Charlie Ruthrauff* of Family Care Services, Inc who were nominated by Andrea Adams and Sheila Scamardella of Family Care Services, Inc.

## County Collaborative Recognition

*Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Children, Youth and Families* and *Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas* who were nominated by Toniya Cruse of A Second Chance, Inc.

## SWAN Advisory Committee Outstanding Service to Adoption Award

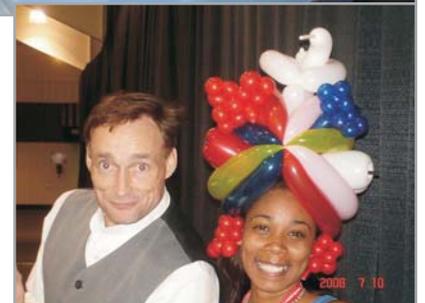
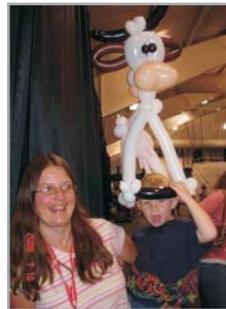
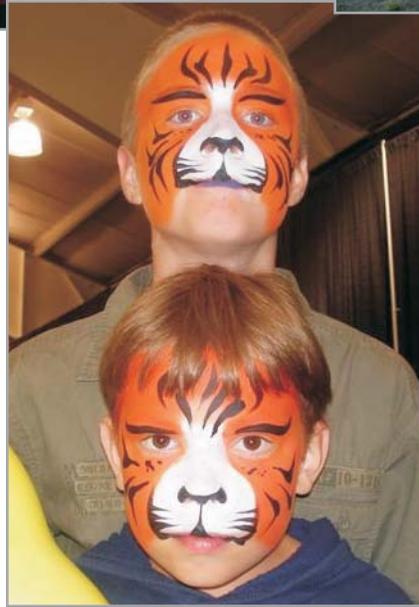
Elisa M. Esh of Diakon Adoption and Foster Care who was nominated by Linda Ciampi of Diakon Family and Community Ministries.

## Unsung Hero Awards

Congratulations to Kristine Kline, Kathy Roach, Heather Alt, Palma Bennie and Angie Vicchiotti for being selected as the Unsung Heroes at this year's Permanency Conference Banquet.

*Phyllis Stevens* of Together as Adoptive Parents Inc. was honored for her continued dedication and commitment for the past 15 years to the Permanency Conference's Teen Program by the Department of Public Welfare's Office of Children, Youth and Families. 

# Having Fun at the Permanency Conference Picnic!



# statewide straight talk

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



Congratulations Pennsylvania! Your continued efforts to help all waiting children find adoptive families has again been recognized by the United States Department of Health and Human Services with a 2008 Adoption Excellence Award in the category of Adoption of Minority Children from Foster Care.

We have done much since 2000 when we began an ambitious, on-going effort to reduce the number of minority children in need of adoptive homes. Of the 6,489 children available for adoption at that time, 4,241 were African American, while an additional 500 other minority race children were in need of adoptive families as well.

Our efforts have paid off. Since 2000 Pennsylvania has seen a 62 percent decrease in the number of children of color with a goal of adoption. In addition, Pennsylvania has increased the percentage of children of color adopted from our child welfare system from 16 percent of all available children in 2000 to 50 percent of all available children in 2007.

Our efforts have been multi-faceted, including our media campaigns that feature television commercials, radio and print advertisements 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. Our media campaigns have been so successful at recruiting foster and adoptive families that for the first time, Pennsylvania has more waiting families than waiting children. 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.

As most of you are aware, the media campaign was just the first step. Recruiting families willing to adopt minority 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 and challenge workers to help change the face of the waiting population of kids. In order to bring this crisis to the forefront, SWAN began to do something very simple...we talked about it. Beginning in 2001, during SWAN quarterly and statewide meetings, which are often attended by more than 300 representatives of public and private child welfare agencies, SWAN provided updated statistics about the number of minority 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 2000, not only were 65 percent 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 minority children more quickly through the system. Keynote speakers, training sessions and workshops focused SWAN's attention on this crisis. But nothing worked better than inviting families who had successfully adopted older minority youth to speak to our child welfare workers about the importance of providing permanency in a timely manner to all children in foster care. This openness, this ability to speak about the issue at hand, allowed the public and private child welfare workers in our system to really look

at their own values and how they compared or contrasted with best practices. By simply discussing the problem and bringing it into the open, we were able to recognize the problem and be more responsive to those families who were responding to the cry of the media campaign. As a result, Pennsylvania saw an increase in the number of minority children with adoption finalizations. For instance, in 2000, 934 African American children were adopted from foster care in Pennsylvania, compared with an all time high of 1,068 in 2002, a mere two years after we began our efforts.

While our work is by no means done, our efforts are paying off. Since 2000, Pennsylvania has seen a 52 percent decrease in the total number of children in foster care with a goal of adoption, with our biggest success seen in the overall reduction of the number of children of color with a goal of adoption. At the completion of 2000, there were 4,737 children of color available for adoption and by the completion of 2007, there were 1,805, representing a 62 percent decrease in the number of minority children in need of adoptive families. Comparatively speaking, we have seen a 26 percent overall decrease in the number of Caucasian children with a goal of adoption, from 2,042 in 2000 to 1,515 in 2007.

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 percentage of children of color who are finalized from the Pennsylvania foster care system each year grows every year. In 2000, 4,747 (73 percent) of the 6,489 children available for adoption were of a minority race. At the completion of 2001, only 1,050 (16 percent) had

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been adopted. Once we began our multi-faceted efforts, we saw an annual increase in the percentage of children of color who were adopted every year. By the end of 2006, 1,962 (58 percent) of the 3,370 children with a goal of adoption were of a minority race. By the end of 2007, 975 (50 percent) of the children adopted were of a minority race.

This achievement is largely due to the efforts of every one who is involved in this network. The kudos and recognition is yours. Thank you, each and every one, for all you do every day to help find adoptive families for Pennsylvania's waiting children! 🌸



Lorrie Deck is presented with the Adoption Excellence Award by Joan Ohl, Commissioner of the Children's Bureau for U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

## aroundthestate

# 15 Years with the Teens

*by Phyllis Stevens, Executive Director, Together as Adoptive Parents, Inc*

I cannot believe that I started working with teens at the Permanency Conference when I was 44 years old and the number one song on the pop charts was Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You." I can truthfully say that it is one of the highlights of my career. I look forward to seeing who will return and to meet the first timers. It is also comforting to know that most of the staff has been helping for years. They look forward to coming every year.

On Wednesday, the first day of the conference, all of the teens are quiet and sitting at different tables. The "leaders" have found each other, the girls are together and the shy ones are sitting by themselves. Pierre Cooper, who co-facilitates the Teen Program, and I know that our first job is to "conquer" the leaders. We do this by letting them do what they do best: lead, but only in a positive way.

All the activities that we do with the teens have a purpose. For instance, the "Human Tic-Tac-Toe" ice breaker gives the leaders a chance to show their skills by directing the others where to sit to get three people in a row in order to win the game. In another game to teach teamwork, we ask the youth to form two lines. Their job is to get a roll of toilet paper to the last person in line by passing it between their legs and over their shoulders without breaking the paper before the other team does. After a few games like

this they start to trust each other and even more importantly, they start to trust us. You could be just standing watching the group when one of the kids will come and stand next to you. They will start to talk about things in their life. We would love to take away the pain but we know that we can't, so we listen. We listen and we validate, and then we give lots of hugs.

I have learned many things while working with teens over the years. Some I can share and some I don't think would be approved for the network news. After 15 years of conference closings, one thing I have learned to do is to never take things too seriously. I learned this lesson a few years ago when one of the "leaders" insisted on leading the song we were to sing, so I agreed. We built the entire closing around him. Not only did he not lead the song, he hid behind the curtains until the program was over. This has taught me to expect the unexpected, and when the unexpected happens, keep singing.

I think I can speak for Pierre and the staff when I say that we count it a privilege to be able to spend time with such great kids! 🌸

# Milestones Along the Journey to Permanent Connections

by Darla Henry, Training and Best Practice Specialist, Diakon/FDR

*“Every child needs an adult who knows the color of their eyes”  
(Ashley Rhodes-Courter, foster/adopted youth).*

Former foster youth, now young adults, are using their voices to reflect on their lives lived in foster care and for some, the journey to adoption. Their words reflect changes that can be made towards improving permanency practices for those children and youth currently in care. In Pennsylvania, the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) and Independent Living (IL) Services are focused on the mission that no child or youth should live in long term care without a permanent relationship, someone who knows the color of their eyes. No other state has such a statewide collaborative network that combines the resources of the Department of Public Welfare’s Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF), public child welfare agencies and private provider agencies and technical support through SWAN/IL that assures services to children and families through best practice activities.

Over the past several months, SWAN/IL has been challenged by OCYF Deputy Secretary Richard Gold to expand network services to provide even more resources to the counties to achieve timely permanency for the children, youth and families of Pennsylvania, including:

- Child preparation services are being expanded into more involvement with biological family members.
- Family Group Decision Making activities are involving not only birth families, but also foster and adoptive families towards the most comprehensive planning for children and youth.
- Family finding activities, through the Legal Services Initiative (LSI) Diligent Search work and Child Specific Recruitment (CSR), are being used to develop connections for children and youth.
- LSI programs are being established in more counties.

New legislation, Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, provides for the option of expansion of services to youth in care to age 21; the provision of funding for training to private agency staff and relative guardians; and increasing educational stability and health care services for youth in foster care. It is a most exciting time to be involved in child welfare work and we in the SWAN/IL collaboration will continue with this very exciting work as we integrate new incentives into the current successful activities of the network.

Josh Shipp, now 21, who lived his entire life in foster care says, “you don’t have to be perfect to be a leader; and if you want to be above average, have an above average attitude.” In Pennsylvania, we have a unique statewide system of practice and service delivery that demonstrates an above average attitude about permanency for children and youth. Let us know the color of all their eyes as we provide the opportunity for them to belong along their journeys to permanent connections. 🌱

# Annual Independent Living Youth Retreat

by Barbara Huggins, Youth Ambassador, Child Welfare Training Program

This year's Pennsylvania Independent Living Retreat at Penn State Mont Alto went off without a hitch. The retreat began on Sunday, June 22, with co-facilitator training for the youth. These young people applied for the co-facilitator positions and were the lucky ones chosen for the job of helping out at the retreat and taking on leadership roles in the classroom. On Monday, the rest of the youth trundled into Mont Alto Hall with their luggage and their willingness to tackle what lay before them.

All classroom sessions were designed around the central theme of "Goals Produce Success." During the classes, young people were able to speak about their experiences in foster care and think about what goals were important in achieving their own success. The classes were a great time to meet new people and support their peers. Each youth had an activity they picked to do throughout the week. Stained glass, hip-hop dancing, painting and lyric writing were a few of the activities offered.

On Wednesday, four golden buses made their way to the off-campus excursion. The youth had a great time at All-Star Sports complex where they raced each other in go-karts, played miniature golf, hit some baseballs and took paddle boats onto the lake.

Thursday brought the activity presentations. This was an opportunity for youth to show off their hard work and to feel proud about what they accomplished. After the brilliant displays it was off to the formal banquet. Everyone looked absolutely smashing in their formal attire. The main speaker for the night was a former foster youth, Josh Ship. Even though he was a funny character he had a very important message: "Be above average!"

When Friday approached the youth took with them memories of their time at the retreat, and a readiness to tackle their goals! 🌱



Youth participated in many fun activities during the retreat.



Jamele Greenwood finds time for a quick photo during an outdoor activity.

## Milestones

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

Our lives are defined by the milestone events we experience and people in them. Just think for a minute and you can probably define who you are by three or four people you have met and by three or four events you have experienced. The events can be good or bad, joyous or sorrow filled, involve gain or loss. The people may have nurtured or rescued you, abused or ignored you or educated and guided you. The people and events are so significant that you would either be a different person or view the world differently having not met or experienced them. The images are powerful. They most likely define how you view yourself, others, and almost everything in the world. They influence your ability to love, who you love, what you like and they define your fears. They define how you feel about yourself and perhaps how you treat others. Milestones are windows to our gut, our minds, our souls and our behaviors.

Now, for a minute, look outside yourself to the children we care for. They too have milestones. They too have three or four people and events in their lives that define their perceptions and behaviors at this very moment. The milestones have defined their definition of love or the lack of it. They have engraved images on their souls that are almost impossible to erase. They define the level of loss

they have experienced and explain their resilience or lack of it. Milestones can be tremendously uplifting. In our kids they are often permanent scarring.

What if you want to erase a milestone? The name itself defines its permanence. Stone is relatively unchangeable. It can be eroded with a lot of force over a lot of time. So, perhaps while we can't erase a milestone we can change its effect over time. With the force of a connection that is just as permanent, just as unyielding, just as much a milestone, perhaps we can influence change. That influence is permanency. Over time, with much diligence it can slowly change the unchangeable. It can change a child's definition of love and loss and life. We must be patient and diligent and accept each change for the part it plays in the process. We must imprint new milestones over the old ones. While not a perfect or quick fix, it is the only force that allows for a connection strong enough to imprint over former, even stronger connections. The day a permanency arrangement is made is a milestone in a child's life. It is the day the opportunity for new imprints is made possible. Here is to new milestones! 🌱

## aroundthestate

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### New Behavioral Health Web sites

by Elisa Esh, Director, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care

The Pennsylvania Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative recently launched their new Web site at the Second Annual Pennsylvania Suicide Prevention Conference. The site is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Child Death Review Team. The Web site provides news and information about the ongoing work of the Pennsylvania Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative, as well as resources for youth and young adults, family members, survivors and professionals. Still in development is a section on local and county initiatives, highlighting the efforts of county suicide prevention task forces and other community organizations and linking people to resources within their local communities. Visit the Web site at [www.payspi.org](http://www.payspi.org).

The Pennsylvania Recovery and Resiliency Web site, [www.parecovery.org](http://www.parecovery.org), contains information related to many statewide initiatives including: Youth and Family Teams; Juvenile Justice Related Services; Alternatives to Seclusion and Restraint; Transition Age Youth; Early Childhood Mental Health and School Based Mental Health.

Both Web sites are filled with information that is helpful to professionals, families and children. They are easy to navigate, so take the time to visit the Web sites and see what they have to offer. 🌱

## Journey of the *Pennsylvania* Adoption Exchange

by Jane Johnston, Division Manager, Diakon/FDR

Milestones in the journey of the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange (PAE) show that nearly 22,000 children have been served since 1984. One-fifth or 22 percent are now adults with the oldest now 42 years old. What happened to those children?

Except for the 3,800 children currently active or on hold with PAE, all others have exited the child welfare system. Here is their story:

- Those children whose cases are closed range in age from infant to 42 years old.
- Fifty percent of those served are from Allegheny and Philadelphia Counties.
- Racially, 49 percent are African American and 37 percent are Caucasian.
- When first registered with PAE, the range of living arrangements showed:
  - ◆ Sixty-six percent were in foster care;
  - ◆ Eighteen percent in pre-adoption placements;
  - ◆ Five percent in relative placement; and
  - ◆ Two percent in residential placement.
- Most children were active with PAE for one year or less, with 55 percent opened and closed within that time.
- 33 percent who were registered waited for permanency for between two and five years.
- The remaining 13 percent waited longer than five years for a permanent family.
- The overall outcome of children registered with PAE is very encouraging as 82 percent of the children registered were closed because the children finalized, 10 percent were withdrawn because the goal was no longer adoption and 9 percent aged out of the system.

As we think about children served through Pennsylvania's child welfare system I am reminded of the words of Robert Little, a man raised in foster care who ultimately became the Director of Michigan's Department of Social Services, Commissioner of Child Welfare in New York City and author of multiple publications about children in care. While in care and as his brother, Malcolm X, began to speak out against racism in America, Robert's caseworker decided to place him "for his own good" into a residential facility. Through a series of fortunate circumstances, this placement did not occur. However, Robert aged out of foster care, went on to get an athletic scholarship to Michigan State, then a masters degree in social work from the same school. He eventually became the supervisor of his former caseworker at the very institution where, as a teen, the supervisor thought Robert should be placed. Robert Little retold this story as the keynote speaker at an Independent Living Conference in Pennsylvania in the early 1990's. His advice then is still pertinent now, he said, "treat all children as though they may one day be your boss." 🌱

# Successful Search Stories Here in Pennsylvania

by Natalie Witt, LSI Division Manager, Diakon/FDR

Each day, the Legal Services Initiative paralegals work diligently to locate missing parents and potential resources for our children in care. In 2007, the paralegals performed more than 2,200 diligent searches. So far this fiscal year, over 1,750 searches have been completed. Searches can often take several months to complete. These daily efforts go unnoticed by many until the final day arrives when they find that person or submit the Affidavit to Publish.

In the fall of 2008, LSI released the new 2008 Diligent Search Packet to assist counties and agencies with handling their diligent searches. Whether you are searching for a missing parent or a possible resource for a child, preparing for a Family Group Decision Making meeting or simply satisfying court requirements, the new edition of the search packet has been revised to make it even more user-friendly for those new to diligent search. In addition, LSI has expanded the packet to include two new sections – one focused on the *Indian Child Welfare Act* and a second for handling international searches. Today, I would like to shine a little light on a few examples of diligent efforts going on here in our own counties in Pennsylvania.

### Finding the Needle in the Haystack...

Tet George, paralegal for Lehigh County, or as I refer to her, the “International Search Guru,” recently found a father in the Dominican Republic. Tet reported that the county had a bad address in the Dominican Republic and only a name of Omar C. She searched far and wide with little success using various search methods.

The search effort that eventually led to the father came up almost by chance. Tet was perusing the Web site for the Embassy of the Dominican Republic in Santo Domingo, looking for an address to write a search letter. She saw a link to the American Citizens Services Unit and thought they may be more willing to assist her since she is an American. Tet stated, “I was surprised to find that they had a main email address posted, so I sent a search email to them, with very little expectation of a response.”

Three days later, Tet received a personal email from an American working in the American Citizens Services Department in Santo Domingo. He first verified the county information and then forwarded her request to someone else in the embassy to check their database. That same day, she received a long profile of someone named Omar de J. C. P., including a photo and last known addresses. Tet sent registered international mail to all the last known addresses.

Even with this new information, Tet still could not find any criminal records even though she was told that the father had been deported. Tet persisted. She contacted numerous jails where the mother of the child said he was once incarcerated, and she searched for criminal dockets throughout Pennsylvania. No one had any record of this man.

About a month after Tet sent the registered mail, she received a phone call from an Omar C. in Santo Domingo, who verified his identity as the father of the child and expressed a strong desire to regain custody. His mailing address and telephone number were confirmed. In later conversations

with him, the county determined he had used an alias in all of his criminal involvements in the United States. With this information, Tet was able to secure his criminal information and his deportation records from Homeland Security. The father was then assigned an attorney who represented him in the Orphans' Court proceedings. The Court did not sympathize with the father's situation and his rights were terminated shortly thereafter.

Whether handling an international search like Tet's or searching in your own area, this story clearly demonstrates how persistence truly pays off, even if the outcome is not the happy ending hoped for.

### Just when you think there's little hope...

Michelle DeRosa, paralegal for Westmoreland County Children's Bureau, was working on a case where the mother would not disclose the names of the fathers of her two children. The judge ordered the mother to disclose the names or she would be held in contempt of court. The mother disclosed the name of the oldest child's father but only knew the first name of the second child's father. With little information, Michelle began a search for the oldest child's father in Alabama and found four names that matched. She made several attempts to contact the men by phone but had no response. Diligently, Michelle followed up with letters to all four asking if they could possibly be the father.

A month later, she received a phone call from a man claiming he received her letter and could possibly be the child's

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father. The county did paternity testing which determined this man was in fact the father. They are currently in the process of introducing the child to the father and uniting the child with his extended family (father is married with three other children). So far, the visits have been going great, and the father is also willing to take the youngest child because he wants to keep the siblings together.

During all of this time, the county also published in the Atlanta area for the youngest child's father. Only having the first name, Michelle had to list the mother's name in the notice. Shortly after, the county received a phone call from the mother's attorney stating that mother has a sister in Cameroon, Africa, and another family member in the Atlanta area. The sister in Cameroon stated the family did not know the whereabouts of the mother. The last time they saw her was in Atlanta when she was pregnant. They stated every once in a while they would "Google" her name to see if they could find her. When they put her name in the Google search, the notice advertised in the Atlanta publication came up. As a result of reading the publication, they contacted the courts, also requesting custody of the children.

The county is now in the process of completing home study investigations. Just a few months ago, these children had no promising resources. Thanks to Michelle's diligent efforts, the children will soon be placed in loving homes.

### **Finding the Silver Lining...**

Some searches are not as "exciting" as others. Jennifer Risser, paralegal for Dauphin County, joined the LSI team this past year and dove right into handling the county's diligent searches. She had a case where the mother's whereabouts were unknown for seven years. Jenny stated, "When I first got the search request, I pretty much just sighed because the only information we had was her name, an alias and that it was believed that she was in Florida." As most of us know, it is not uncommon to have few, if any, details.

Jenny went on to say that mother had not had any contact with her daughter for that long either. But Jenny didn't let that stop her as she took the little bit of information she had and did an online search using Florida's inmate locator service. The Web site provides a large list of state and local links for Florida prisons. With the help of the county prison and probation offices, Jenny was able to find the mother in state prison. Jenny stated that was not the happy ending that she was hoping for, but she's sure there's a silver lining here since her daughter now knows where her mother is instead of imagining an even worse result.

### **It's so important to keep accurate records...**

Last month, Barbara Stockton, paralegal for Lehigh County, was able to find a father who had been "missing" the entire time the child has been in the county's care. The father had an Asian name and the only information the county had was that the brother of the father owned a specific type of store in the Bethlehem area. Barbara searched for the shops in the area and then did a business search on each, using Accurint. Amazingly, Barb found one business owned under a different Asian name. Here the county had both mispronounced and misspelled the name in the file all along, which resulted in the delay in finding him. Once they had the correct last name, the paralegal found the father instantly. Good, accurate records are necessary for successful searches.

### **Family Finding...**

Searches should not be focused on just finding "the missing parent." The recent buzzword throughout Pennsylvania has been "family finding" – a similar initiative that the LSI, through our Diligent Search program, has done here in Pennsylvania since 2002.

Crystal Bowman, paralegal for Lancaster County, was approached by an Independent Living (IL) caseworker to perform a search for a former IL

youth who is now 23 years old and expecting his first child. The young man wished to reconnect with his birth family so his child might have a relationship with his biological family. The caseworker was hesitant to ask Crystal for help because the young man was no longer in foster care, and the caseworker assumed that she would not be able to offer assistance in locating the birth family. Crystal stressed to the caseworker, "The LSI program is all about finding connections for children and I would be more than willing to attempt to locate any and all members the young man wished to find." And that's just what she did! Crystal was able to find a current address for everyone on the young man's list. Although it is too early to know if any future connections or relationships will be made, Crystal commented, "it's so nice to know that I may have assisted him in making the connection and taking the first steps." Crystal reiterated to the caseworker, "we paralegals are able and willing to assist in searches such as this at any time, that's what we are here for!"

If you are struggling with a search and have been unsuccessful, please send an email to the Diligent Search Committee for assistance. The committee will not perform the search for you; however, they will analyze your efforts and provide helpful suggestions that you may not have considered. Send requests to LSI Warmline at [lsiwarmline@diakon-swan.org](mailto:lsiwarmline@diakon-swan.org). Please indicate "Diligent Search" on the subject line so that your inquiry can be properly routed to the committee. As with any inquiry to the Warmline, be sure to tell us the time frame you are working with so we can do our best to comply with your time constraints.

LSI continues to strive to expedite permanency for Pennsylvania's waiting children. You can do your part by performing diligent searches at the earliest possible opportunity, preferably at the time of Intake. By doing searches early, we could find many possible resources for each child, thus reducing the time the child remains without a permanent family. 🌱

# Autumn Matching Event

by Kelly Myers, Matching Specialist, Bethanna

The Delaware Valley Adoption Council (DVAC) held a matching event on September 17 at the Branch Creek Community Church in Harleysville. The Delaware Valley Adoption Council is a consortium of over 50 public and private agencies, individuals and groups in Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania who promote and advance the cause of adoption in the Tri-State region.

DVAC has held matching events in the past, so the idea was not a new one for the council. Kelly Myers, Public Relations Chairperson for DVAC, led a team of volunteers from the council to organize the September event. “Without all of the hard work from the team of volunteers, we would not have been able to pull it off,” said Myers. The matching event included representation from 24 different agencies from across Southeast and Southcentral Pennsylvania, as well as New Jersey. The event attracted 40 families and was a huge success.

Families mingled with agency social workers representing waiting children, enjoyed a beautiful display of refreshments, including baskets full of soft pretzels donated by Bakers Best Snack Food Corporation and were able to view a continuously running video “*Through the Eyes of a Child*,” to learn more about the need for families for our waiting children. Karen Knodel, from Bethanna, noted “as a network, we need to work on ways to target families for our older kids, and events like this can really open the eyes of families.”

A range of families attended the event, from fully approved waiting adoptive families, to families affiliated with the church who wanted to gather more information about adoption. Shadell Quinones and Mary Lou Beck from Chester County Department of Children, Youth and Families commented, “There were a lot of new families here. It was a great opportunity for us to talk about the

process, which was helpful for them.” Sheina Martinez, from the National Adoption Center, agreed that the variety of families at the event was a strength.

Susan Guntz, from the Salvation Army suggested Branch Creek Community Church as a prime location to host the event as it would support the church’s current efforts in “Fostering and Adopting as a Ministry.” The church’s spacious lobby was the perfect atmosphere, with enough room for all of the agency tables, ample parking and a café area for the families to mingle and enjoy the refreshments. Louis Couderc from Friends Association affirmed, “It is a beautiful facility with easy access to both counties and families.”

Maryann Cirigliano, a member of an approved waiting family, made the following comment about the event, “This experience was a real eye-opener for me. Even though I constantly scour the SWAN Web site for available children, it really blew me away to see just how many agencies are out there working a common goal for way too many displaced children.”

Another waiting family, Edward and Sheila Klos said, “The matching event was an emotional event yet fulfilling. We were aware of foster care and adoption but neither one of use realized the number of children/siblings in need. We feel fortunate to be able to provide a home for a child or siblings. We realize we can't help all the children in need, but maybe we can set the example for others to follow.”

Karen Park, from Children’s Choice, said that the event was “a great way to kick off the fall season and a way to re-introduce matching into the Southeast region of Pennsylvania. DVAC hopes to hold similar matching events in the future and is pleased with such a great turnout and positive responses to this year’s event. 🌿🌿



Donna Kilpatrick from Philadelphia Department of Human Services talks with prospective adoptive parents.



The Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange display table featured photographs of several youth available for adoption and provided DVD's that included power points and flyers of Pennsylvania's waiting children.



Kelly Myers (left) from Bethanna and Karen Park (right) from Children's Choice greeted families as they entered the event.

# Celebrating Education Achievements and Gifts of Caring

by Evelyn Jones Busby, Executive Director, Achieving Independence Center

Over 200 Achieving Independence Center (AIC) members were recently recognized for their achievements in education. Nine young adults celebrated earning a four-year or professional degree, four celebrated earning a certificate from a technical school, 166 celebrated being a college student during the 2007-2008 school year and 15 rejoiced as they headed to college with over \$160,000 in scholarships. Forty received member leadership awards at ambassador, gold and silver levels.

The recipients of the Outstanding Achievement awards were presented to alumni members who have graduated with a bachelors and/or professional degree. The recipients include: Brandon Bruce, who received a law degree from Villanova University School of Law in May 2008 and a bachelor's degree from LaSalle University in 2005; Margarita Davis-Boyer, who received a master's degree in social work from Temple University in 2007; and Kimberly Washington, who is in her final year of law school at Temple University Beasley School of Law and who received a bachelor's degree in business administration from Temple University in 2005. The following received bachelor degrees: Vaneeda Days; Gwyneed-Mercy College, 2008; Nija Leek, Trinity in Washington, D.C., 2008; Daniel Weinberg, New York University, 2008; Amalris Gonzales, Temple University, 2008; Despina Tsikinis, Philadelphia University, 2006; and Barbara Francois, Chestnut Hill, 2004.

The honors were a part of the annual Education Recognition and Back Pack Challenge event designed to recognize and honor the achievements of the AIC members, support their efforts in continuing higher education and collect filled back packs for members who are enrolled in secondary and post-secondary educational institutions.

Because people cared, over 160 members headed to college and over 300 headed to high school with back packs filled with gift cards, toiletries, hygiene products, school supplies, foods and other goodies. "It's exciting," said Rachel Baldino who received a donated bag a couple years back and has been handing them out to students ever since. "To some people it means a lot," said Baldino a senior at Penn State/University Park.

"Before, all I had was loose-leaf paper, binders, it wasn't what I needed," said Kevin Williams, 19, who grew up in foster care. "I needed protractors and rulers for math class." Therefore, the AIC, a program of the Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS), responded with the Education Recognition and Back Pack Challenge event. "It makes a big difference performance-wise and financially," said Williams, who is now a student at Morgan State University in Baltimore. "That's one less task I had to worry about in preparing for college."

The Education Recognition and Back Pack Challenge event doesn't just help the students' academic performance, it builds their self-esteem. "To have and to know that someone really cares about you really makes a big difference," said Sharon Jones, a student at Widener University. Jones was another foster child who benefited from the back pack challenge. Annually, donations are received from individuals and organizations from all across the United States and Puerto Rico.

The event keynote speaker, Loree D. Jones, President and Chief Executive Officer of AchieveAbility, a West Philadelphia non-profit organization, offered key points to the youth in advancing their goals while overcoming adversity. Anne Marie Ambrose, Commissioner of Philadelphia Department of Human Services, shared her ideas and vision for working on behalf of the youth. Members and alumni members in higher education and graduates from higher education comprised a panel and shared their experiences, offered advice and addressed questions from members in the audience.

Education is the great equalizer. At the AIC, the vision is for each member to reach the highest level of education that is possible for them and their aspirations. "The AIC is a model of what is possible for youth when they are

*(continued on Page 15)*

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offered added supports and services. Many of them come to the center thinking that they can't go to college. The AIC approach has transformed the way members think about who they are and who they can become," states Evelyn Busby, AIC Director.

The AIC was established by DHS to help young people ages 16-21 make a successful transition from foster care. The AIC offers members many possibilities and opportunities to acquire skills and linkages to resources that exponentially increase the chances of achieving success as an adult.

The center is made up of 12 partnering organizations dedicated to providing high quality independent living programs. This one stop concept with collaborative partnerships provides an optimum environment that fosters a holistic approach to the needs of the members. Services are based on developmental needs of the individuals connected to the foster care system as they transition to adulthood. Six days a week, a team of dynamic professionals from multiple disciplines serve and support members in life skills, education, employment, mentoring, relationships, risk reduction, technology, coaching and case management. The on-site teams are supported by teams at DHS, partner organizations and hundreds of associates and volunteers.

Each year in Philadelphia, an estimated 500 youth age out of foster care and must prepare to live independently. Several studies have found that without a strong support mechanism, a significant number of youth leaving foster care experience homelessness, victimization, unemployment and dependency on various types of public assistance.

The AIC, in its sixth year, is producing a different set of outcomes. Recognized as a national model, practices and outcome data reflect promising best practices that can be duplicated. Casey Family Programs, owners of the Ansell Casey assessment, reported in November 2007 that the AIC members' life skills assessment scores improved in six months after the initial assessment. These levels of improvements are higher than any other group in the United States using the Ansell Casey assessment tool. There appears to be a direct correlation with the life skills instructions at the AIC and the level of skill improvements. Others recognizing the AIC for best practices and promising approaches includes: Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition by Philadelphia Safe and Sound 2007's Report; National Associations of Counties' February 2008, Presidential Initiative of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care: Identifying Strategies and Best practices; and the National League of Cities' most recent publication.

The AIC leadership, staff and DHS leadership are excited and pleased with the outcomes and promising practices but more importantly we are proud of the achievements of the young people that we serve daily. "We applaud the graduates and the members headed off to college," says Commissioner Ambrose. "Their accomplishments demonstrate that with access to resources, role models and supports, all foster youth can achieve their full potential." 

## **around**thestate

# Clean Indoor Air Act

Senate Bill 246 was signed into law by Governor Rendell on June 13 and is now known as Act 27 of 2008. Also known as 'the Clean Indoor Air Act', this act restricts smoking in many public places and in some private homes, if those homes offer child care, adult day-care or services related to children in state or county custody. Resource family homes are considered homes that offer such services. The act enjoins the Department of Health, as well as local boards of health to monitor complaints and to

impose penalties on prescribed infractions. The Office of Children, Youth and Families reviewed Act 27 of 2008 in order to issue appropriate guidance to agencies regarding its implications. The law went into effect on September 11, 2008 and agencies would be well advised to ensure that, at the very least, all resource homes are aware of the law, and that they have "No Smoking" signs posted. 

# Paying it Forward

by Nicole Sonsini, Achieving Independence Center member

Margarita Davis-Boyer is many things to many people—a wife and a mother, a graduate student, and a social worker with a stubborn streak that, years prior, had made for some interesting conversations. She’s a superhero with a smile that could melt the paint from the walls. But Davis-Boyer wasn’t born for this. She spent her life growing up with families she’d resent, house hopping from foster home to foster home, a product of the system to which she’d return with a vengeance, and, in this case, for all the right reasons.

When she was in seventh grade, Davis-Boyer was taken from her home abruptly, a circumstance arising from problems within her family. She’d been placed in foster care, constantly meeting new people, seeing new faces, social workers coming and going, a fact of foster life she’d come to begrudge. She knew, even then, young and confused, that something had to give, had to change; only she wasn’t sure she’d be the one to do it. Much of her teenage life was spent hanging out at the Achieving Independence Center (AIC), the “one-stop” program at which she’d eventually meet her mentor, Harold Brooks, Temple’s Program Coordinator and AIC’s on-site education go-to-guy. Though the relationship was one with many different points of view, Davis-Boyer learned to value Brooks help to support her through many of her academic ups and downs. The final result? One well-earned master’s degree in social work from Temple University, to which Davis-Boyer states she greatly owes to her mentor and the staff at the AIC.



Margarita Davis-Boyer celebrated at the grand re-opening of the AIC with Alba Martinez, former DHS Commissioner for Philadelphia.

Since earning her credentials in the social services field, Davis-Boyer has been working closely with youth in whom she sees much of herself, her own struggles, her own day-to-day challenges. Nothing is easy in her field or her work, but this time she’s got the upper hand. She encourages the youth with whom she works to ask lots of questions, the most important of all being, “Why?” “Why” is such a powerful word. It makes you think before you do something. That’s what I always teach my kids,” Davis-Boyer told Temple University’s Denise Clay in an interview held earlier this year. And with that power, comes a sense of understanding, and ultimately, acceptance.

Davis-Boyer, despite her larger-than-life goals and dreams is a normal woman, looking to use all that she has learned and that which she has experienced to make change happen. She works tirelessly at her job, never forgetting her past or what and where she has come from. She is a hero to her younger sister whom she adopted; she did not want her growing up in foster care.

She has turned much of the bad and turned it into something good, something powerful, something for which to strive, that same hero, wife, mother, sister, and friend, the one with all the drive in the world and the big smile that could melt paint from the walls. 🌱

# Raising the Bar: Education and Expectations are the Keys to Success in Allegheny County

by Heather Samuel, Program Coordinator, Ward Home and John V. Vinay, Program Director, Ward Home

Most young adults do not live independently until their mid-twenties, but society expects foster children to be able to live on their own at the age of 18 without any other support. Unlike typical teens who leave their homes voluntarily when they are emotionally and economically ready for independence and give up the security of their family, a foster care teen encounters independence before they are fully prepared to do so. Research supports the fact that after a teen leaves the foster care system, only 37 percent complete high school (Tarrico, 2005).

Obtaining an education is one of the many obstacles for teens in the foster care system. The research conducted by Mech (2003) found that foster care kids are twice as likely as the general student population to fail classes in school and three times more likely to be considered special education students.

The Ward Home in Pittsburgh is a 100-year old agency that specializes in teaching teens to live on their own. We have successfully raised the expectations for teens in the foster care system, providing them with training and support needed to develop concrete and realistic plans for the future. Society may view young adults in the foster care system as delinquents, victims or mental health clients. They are also seen as potential homeless shelter residents, prisoners and welfare recipients. At Ward Home, we view them as future college students, employees, business owners or professionals.

All of our programs working with young teenagers present college or trade school as a viable option and teach the teens that furthering their education is essential in developing lifelong learning skills that will equip them for future career opportunities. In 2008, 18 out of the 22 (82 percent) graduating seniors of the Ward Home programs were accepted into a college or technical post-secondary education program.

Ward Home could not do this without the support of others. The Allegheny County Independent Living Project is comprised of the Ward Home, Hill House Association, Circle C, Auberle and Family Links. The IL Project is under the direction of the county's IL Coordinator, Alan Milliner, and has been diligently working to encourage youth to further their education beyond high school. Collectively, the IL Project reported having a combined total of 71 youth graduate in the 2007-2008 school year with 50 youth entering a post-secondary educational program this fall and three more youth to enter in the spring of 2009. Allegheny County's Transition Program Manager, JoAnn Hannah, reports that the IL Project, in collaboration with the county's IL Initiative, has reported record numbers for the county's youth attending post-secondary programs. Ms. Hannah reported that in 2008 the county had 96 youth attend some type of post-secondary educational program. This is a great increase considering that in 2007, the county had just 40 youth who attended a post-secondary program and only 35 in 2006.

In conclusion, this paradigm shift in expectations for teens in the foster care system must continue. Raising the bar for them while giving them the support that they need is a simple and effective recipe for success. For information about the programs at the Ward Home, simply email Heather Samuel or John Vinay at

[programs@wardhome.org](mailto:programs@wardhome.org)

# Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association's 32nd Annual Conference

by Kathy Ramper, Executive Director, PSRFA

The 32nd Annual Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association's (PSRFA) Conference was held from October 23-25 at the Holiday Inn-Harrisburg/Hershey in Grantville. This year's theme was Hollywood inspired: Presenting...Resource Families in "Our Children's Hope."

The conference focused on ways to better serve Pennsylvania's foster children through the improved array of services available to children and their resource families. This year's speakers addressed issues pertaining to education, cultural diversity, mental health, advocacy and support and legal issues. The conference provided excellent opportunities for participants to learn and share information regarding best practices. The conference is designed for resource families, (foster, adoptive, and kinship), health professionals, as well as public and private agency professionals providing permanency services.

The conference opened with a luncheon featuring Roger Reese and his alternate personality, Buford P. Fuddwhacker. The opening night's dinner featured our spectacular Annual Benefit Auction for the PSRFA Scholarship Fund, which raised \$4,266. Along with the money from our raffle and resource store, collectively we were able to raise more than \$7,700 for our scholarship fund. We are always looking to do bigger and better!

We honored the individuals who have done so much to help improve the lives of our families and children at Friday evenings Annual Awards Banquet. Congratulations to the award winners!

The conference ended Saturday morning with the incredible storytelling and great sense of humor of Karen Vadino.

A special thank you to everyone who helped make this conference a success! 🎉

## 2008 Award Winners

### **Foster Parent Association of the Year**

Erie County Foster Parent Association

### **Agency of the Year**

Northwestern Human Services  
Pocono Mountain Center

### **Foster Parent of the Year**

Sandra Barnaby

### **Community Partnership**

Willow Valley Community Center

### **Caseworker of the Year**

Anna Frank

### **President's Award**

Stephanie Wolfe

### **Executive Director's Award**

Statewide Adoption and  
Permanency Network Helpline



Members of the Erie County Resource Family Association enjoy the food and the fun at PSRFA's Annual Auction.



Shyrell and Shante Newkirk pose for a quick picture while helping during the Auction.

# Sprint Car Races Focused on Finding Forever Families

by Elisa Esh, Director, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care

On Friday evening, August 1, Williams Grove Speedway observed Adoption Night to raise awareness about the need for the more than 900 Pennsylvania children searching for a family to call their own. Sprint cars displayed photographs of more than 80 children searching for families as well as Diakon Adoption and Foster Care contact information and the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange Web site. 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.

Adoption Night at Williams Grove is sponsored by Diakon Adoption and Foster Care in collaboration with Dauphin and Montgomery County Children and Youth agencies, Bethanna, NHS Services, Families United Network and Project STAR of Pittsburgh.

According to Elisa Esh, Director, Resource Family Recruitment, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care, “The response was incredible to our event that highlighted the need for families for children with special needs. Our adoption fair was crowded all night and we suspect many matches were made between families ready to adopt and children available for adoption.”

A family that actually came out of the stands at last year’s Adoption Night event and soon after began the adoption process, has now finalized the adoption of their son, Michael, and were honored for their commitment to adoption in Victory Lane. The family will be traveling to Disney World thanks to the Adoption Night Consortium of SWAN

affiliate and county agencies who secured the tickets and funding for their trip.

Several of the children featured on the sprint car wings along with more than 40 adoptive families attended a hospitality event prior to the race. During the hospitality event, each of the children were able to have their photograph taken in front of a race car, get driver autographs, play carnival games, have their face painted and win prizes.

A memorial was held for a waiting child, Eric, who participated in the event in 2007 and died tragically earlier in the week. His photo was featured on the #30 410 sprint car, sponsored by Leach’s Automotive and Pancho’s Racing Products and driven by Doug Esh as a memorial to his life. “We at Diakon and our partner agencies were deeply saddened by this tragedy” expresses Esh. “Eric’s passing brought further attention to the general public of the need to find ‘forever families’ for our waiting children.” We all kept asking ourselves, “Who will cry for Eric?”, as he never found that permanent connection that our youth in care so long for.

Some of the children who participate in the SWAN Older Child Matching Initiative program attended the event and expressed their hopes that they will find a family that will love them unconditionally for a lifetime. These children deserve an adoptive home like the one that Eric dreamed of. 🌱



Representatives from Diakon Adoption and Foster Care, NHS Human Services, Families United Network, Project Star and Dauphin County Children and Youth Agency get a photo-op with winning driver, Todd Shaffer.



Super Sprint Car driver, Doug Esh, featured Eric after his tragic passing. Eric loved the Pittsburgh Steelers so the emblem for the team was added to the sprint car vinyl in his memory.

# Love and Logic Seminar

by Don Fitzkee, Development & Interpretation Coordinator, COBYS Family Services

More than 400 foster and adoptive resource parents, professionals and others attended a September 19 “Love and Logic” seminar at Calvary Church in Lancaster, sponsored by members of the Adoption Coalition of Lancaster County.

Dr. Charles Fay led the day-long seminar on “How to Teach and Raise Responsible Kids (without Raising Your Blood Pressure).” Author of a best-selling video series, Dr. Fay is president of the Colorado-based Love and Logic Institute, an organization dedicated to making parenting and teaching fun and rewarding.

Dr. Fay was introduced by abc27 news anchor Valerie Pritchett, whose weekly “Val’s Kids” segment features children in foster care who, through the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, are looking for permanent homes.

Participants gave Dr. Fay high marks, frequently citing his use of humor and stories as strengths. One participant praised Dr. Fay for his “skillful weaving of stories with the Love and Logic philosophy.”

Love and Logic seeks to shape children’s behavior by combining firm limits with empathy. Kids fight limits, Dr. Fay noted, but deep down they desire them. He encouraged adults to avoid power struggles with children by “going

brain dead” when conflict arises and waiting until a later time to establish consequences. “Reasoning with an angry kid is about as effective as fighting fire with gasoline,” Fay observed.

In the afternoon session, Dr. Fay focused on improving school performance. He noted that struggles in school often are an indication that basic needs of the child are not being met. “When basic needs are not met,” he observed, “the drive to learn takes a back seat to survival. Meeting these needs unlocks the door to achievement.” He recommended focusing on children’s gifts and strengths, rather than on deficiencies.

The event was sponsored by Bethanna, Bethany Christian Services, COBYS Family Services, Families United Network and Pressley Ridge with additional support from the Lancaster County Children and Youth Social Service Agency and Children’s Home of York. Widener University Center for Social Work Education provided continuing education credits for professionals. ❧❧



Mary Sourber (left) from COBYS, Valerie Pritchett and Dr. Fay share in an enjoyable conversation with each other.



Dr. Fay answers questions from his captivated audience.

# Pennsylvania's Waiting Children

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



## Meet Destiny!

Destiny is 17 years old and is a joy to spend time with. One of Destiny's charming traits is that you can sit down with her and within seconds be engaged in a conversation. And make no mistake, a conversation with Destiny is a very special thing. These conversations can be serious or light, lengthy or brief, but while they are going on, you just love having them! Destiny is insightful and is willing to share the things she has learned about herself. She is also interested in hearing about others and has a wonderful ability to take what she learns from others and use it to better understand herself.

Another great thing about Destiny is her love of art and creativity. Destiny enjoys all types of arts and crafts. One of her favorite ways to express herself artistically is through making collages. She assembles seemingly random pictures and words from magazines into fun expressions of her personality. Destiny will even be creating a special collage to display at an upcoming SWAN event.

It is important to Destiny that she finds a family that will commit to her. She believes that families stick by one another

even in tough times. If a family commits to Destiny, they can be sure that she will do the same for them. Destiny also would like to be with a family that believes in God and attends church. Destiny has been brought up in the Baptist faith and her religion and spirituality are very important to her.

Destiny hopes to one day become a motivational speaker. She would like to talk to young people about strength, determination and hope. She wants to share her life story in order to demonstrate to young people that they can overcome even really tough situations and end up on top. Destiny's desire to open up to others simply to provide them with encouragement is a testament to her kind and loving heart.

All families will be considered for Destiny. She is legally free for adoption. For more information about Destiny, contact Angie Gillen from Diakon Adoption Services of Topton at (484) 300-2074. ☺☺



## Meet Jaelyn!

Jaelyn is a beautiful 10 year old girl with the deepest dimples you have ever seen and a big smile that catches everyone's attention. She would like to be an actress or model someday and she loves music and wants to take flute and piano lessons. Jaelyn likes singing and dancing to a variety of music and especially loves singing in the church choir.

She is very artistic and likes to draw and make things with her hands. Jaelyn enjoys school and gets good grades. She loves animals and has enjoyed her experiences with horseback riding.

Jaelyn responds well to individual attention and likes interacting with adults. She has a warm personality, is friendly and loves being around children. She would like to be part of a family that has other children.

All families will be considered for Jaelyn. She is legally free for adoption. For more information about Jaelyn, contact Lee Maley from Adelphoi Village at 724-838-9074. ☺☺



## Meet Justice!

Justice is an active 13 year old boy who enjoys swimming, throwing snowballs and playing his PlayStation. He likes playing a variety of card and board games. Justice is very witty, funny and great with numbers.

Justice's favorite sport is football, and he loves playing catch. He is a Pittsburgh Steelers fan and would love to see them play at Heinz Field some day.

Justice is ready to find his forever family. He needs a family that will provide him with consistency and patience. Justice would like his forever family to spend time with him outdoors and doing fun activities.

All families will be considered for Justice. He is legally free for adoption. For more information about Justice, contact Lisa Richards from Children's Aid Home Programs of Somerset County, Inc. at 814-445-2009. ☺☺

# Culture Camps: the Enhancement of Cultural Identity and Ethnic Diversity

by Jean M. Barney, Executive Director and Barbara Herring, Permanency Programs Coordinator, Families Caring for Children

Families Caring for Children, Inc. along with White Rose Families with Children from China, recently co-sponsored a Chinese Culture Camp for children who were adopted from China, along with their families. The camp was held on July 14, 16 and 18 at the Unitarian Universalist Church in York. Several of the families who participated are receiving post-permanency services through the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network through their affiliate, Families Caring for Children, Inc.

The camp was designed to help children who were adopted from China, and their siblings learn about and develop an appreciation for Chinese heritage and culture. The camp was primarily organized and run by volunteers from White Rose Families with Children from China and others having knowledge and interest in Chinese Culture.

About 40 children, ages 4 through 12, attended and participated in activities which included: Chinese ribbon

dance, Mandarin Chinese language lessons, paper making, arts and crafts and calligraphy. They also learned about Chinese food and geography, with the children creating flags representing their area of origin in China. The final event, somewhat patterned after the Beijing Olympics, included non-competitive games culminating with a parade of flags, and each child received a commemorative badge for their participation.

Comments from families and children who participated were overwhelmingly in agreement that they left the camp instilled with a greater sense of their cultural identity and ethnic diversity. Lisa Hoffman, president of White Rose Families with Children from China, and Joe Stoppard, treasurer, verbalized great satisfaction in knowing that the state of Pennsylvania offers support services to any family in the state who has adopted a child. 🌸



The children learned about and how to perform a Chinese ribbon dance.



Children who attended the camp pose for a group photo.

# Child Preparation Training

by Debra Thomas, Senior Preparation Technical Assistant, Diakon/FDR

Since May 2008, seven training sessions on Pennsylvania's new Child Preparation Guide have been presented around the state. The six-hour training focuses on the core issues, the five goals of child preparation, the value of using child preparation with all permanency goals and the 3-5-7 Model.

The Child Preparation Guide training is used to familiarize new child preparation workers with the basic concepts of child preparation and to enhance the practice of more experienced workers.

The interactive, hands-on session includes valuable practice exercises in completing a child preparation plan, meeting activity reports and the final summary report. Some of the comments after the training included:

- "Confirmed that I am on the right track for Child Prep."
- "Useful and will impact how I prepare for each individual case."
- "Gave practical ideas and ways to incorporate them into practice."
- "Exercises were very helpful."

Sites where the training sessions were held include Scranton, Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Clarion and Pittsburgh. The 152 attendees represented seven counties and 48 affiliates. Please contact your SWAN regional technical assistant if your agency would like to offer this training in your area. Contact Deb Thomas at [dthomas@diakon-swan](mailto:dthomas@diakon-swan) to order a CD of the guidebook. 

# Face2Face: A Chance for Older Youth and Prospective Parents to Meet

by Julie Marks, Project Manager, National Adoption Center

"She Skated Into Their Lives" was the title of a recent article in the National Adoption Center's newsletter, describing how 13-year old Alma met her new parents at a Match Party sponsored by the National Adoption Center last year. Since then, the National Adoption Center has been able to assist other older youth in finding new families through similar events.

The National Adoption Center, with the support of a grant through the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, is excited to offer two upcoming matching opportunities designed specifically for older youth searching for an adoptive family and for families interested in adopting older youth in Pennsylvania.

These events are designed to provide older youth and families a chance to get acquainted through various interactive and fun activities. The youth will take an active role in planning the event, including choosing the lunch menu, activities and entertainment.

Who should attend? Caseworkers should register youth ages 13 to 18 who have a court-ordered goal of adoption and who would be open to meeting potential adoptive

families. Any approved adoptive family interested in adopting a child or children over the age of twelve should also consider attending. Caseworkers are also expected to attend to support the youth during the event and to answer questions from the families.

The Philadelphia area event was held on March 28, 2009 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, 4100 Presidential Boulevard in Philadelphia. Two pre-event meetings were held on February 26 and March 5 from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at the Greater Plymouth Community Center, 2910 Jolly Road in Plymouth Meeting. The Pittsburgh area event will be held on May 9, 2009 at the Radisson Greentree, 101 Radisson Drive in Pittsburgh. Two pre-event meetings will be held on April 16 and April 30 from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at The Kinsley Association, 6118 Penn Circle in Pittsburgh. Light meals will be provided at all pre-event meetings.

For more information and to register your youth or adoptive families, please contact Julie Marks at the National Adoption Center at (215)725-9988 extension 367 or at [pateen@adopt.org](mailto:pateen@adopt.org). 

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# Governor's 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.pa.gov](http://www.pa.gov).

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## Savethedate

### 2009 Independent Living Youth Advisory Board Meetings

**May 12: Child Welfare Training Program, Mechanicsburg**

### 2009 SWAN/IL Summer Statewide Meeting

**June 23 – 24: Lancaster Host Resort and Conference Center, Lancaster**

### 2009 Permanency Conference

**June 24 – 26: Lancaster Host Resort and Conference Center, Lancaster**

### 2009 Annual Independent Living Youth Retreat

**July 13 – 17: University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown Campus**