

# Network News

Voice of the SWAN / IL Network

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## Network News

is published quarterly by the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network and Independent Living Program

Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare  
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## Assuring a Legacy:

### 2011 Permanency Conference Invites a Listen

*By Pam Wagner,  
SWAN Training / Conference*

“There is perhaps no greater way to show our regard for our friends, family and associates than to truly listen to them. The ‘listening heart,’ as this attitude is called, leads to a deepening of relationships and a greater sense of self for all parties.” This quote from our 2011 Summer SWAN/IL Statewide keynote speaker, Wayne Muller, continued to resonate with me throughout the 2011 Permanency Conference.

Listening to others is much harder than it appears, especially at a conference with over 700 people, like SWAN/IL’s most recent gathering. There are so many people, and just as you begin to talk to somebody, you invariably see another person you want to speak with, or you are interrupted by someone who wants to speak to the very person with whom you have just started a conversation.

But in spite of this there was a lot of listening going on. Some of it produced great laughter, some of it took on a more serious tone, and some of it even seemed to perplex the one receiving it. Mr. Muller said that “unwillingness to listen is a symptom of self-centeredness. It signals we are shut up in ourselves not interested in

participating in what is going on around us.” I didn’t notice any people who were “shut up in themselves.” Instead, this was a pretty open group, ready to absorb what others had to offer. Not a lot of self-centeredness going on in this crowd.

Then there is the listening we all do at the workshops, 45 in all this year. Two great keynotes, Ashley Rhodes-Courter and LaTasha Watts, both with astounding messages of triumph! There was tremendous fellowship at the conference awards banquet and picnic. All and all there were quite a lot of choices in what to listen to and a lot of decisions about what were the most important messages to hear. It was difficult to decide which workshops to sacrifice, as well as the fear we might have missed something that could have changed our lives. But the truth is we can’t listen to everything or everyone. Part of life is about deciding what to listen to, and in the end those decisions probably shape who we are and what we believe.

I asked people how they felt about the workshops they attended, or rather “listened to,” and they seemed pleased with their choices. People felt they learned something, and they were better for having listened.

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# 2011 AWARD WINNERS



**Lt. Governor Jim Cawley and family stopped by this year's Permanency Conference to show their support of the conference award winners. Many thanks and congratulations to all. You are "Assuring a Legacy."**

# 19th Annual Permanency Conference Award Winners

## **SWAN Advisory Committee Outstanding Service to Adoption**

**Linda Ciampi**, nominated by Richard Saylor, Lycoming-Clinton Joinder

## **Permanent Family Recognition**

Families selected for this award have provided legalized permanency for a child or children in the child welfare system through adoption, formal kinship care or permanent legal custodianship.

**Kelli and Chris Hanley**, Bucks County, nominated by Stephanie Croasmun, Bucks County Children and Youth Services

**Renee Smith**, Philadelphia County, nominated by Wanda Lassiter, Family Inc.

**Christy Noll and Molly Long**, Northumberland County, nominated by Carrie Kistner, Families United Network

**Robert Rock**, Beaver County, nominated by Kimberly Majors, Project STAR at The Children's Institute

**Jerver and Amanda Fernandez**, Luzerne County, nominated by Stephany Gallagher, CONCERN

## **Philanthropy Recognition**

The individual, business, congregation or organization selected for this award demonstrates a charitable contribution that promotes the permanency of children in foster care.

**MediaOnePA**, nominated by Joan Johnsen, Children's Home of York

## **Permanency Teamwork Recognition**

Teams selected for this award exemplify a collaborative effort that promotes the permanency of children with special needs.

**Chelsa Gerould**, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care

**Michelle Koontz**, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care

**Christine Smith-Hoh**, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care

**Clarissa McDonald**, Berks County Children and Youth Services

**Elizabeth Monick**, Berks County Children and Youth Services

**Barb Jakubek**, Berks County Children and Youth Services

Nominated by Elisa Esh, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care

## **County Collaborative Recognition**

This award recognized a collaborative effort between a county court and a county children and youth agency that expedites permanency through adoption, formal kinship care or permanent legal custodianship.

**Lycoming County Children and Youth Services and Lycoming County Court**, nominated by Mark Egly, Lycoming County Children and Youth Services

## **Permanency Advocate Recognition**

This category recognizes a dynamic individual or organization that does not fit the criteria of the other categories and may include parents, judges, attorneys or other individuals who, through their professional or volunteer efforts, had an impact on system change, judicial improvement, service delivery or family support either locally or throughout the state of Pennsylvania.

**Helen Blair Schuler**, Montgomery County Orphan's Court, nominated by Natalie Witt-Washine, Diakon/Family Design Resources

## **Independent Living Professional Recognition**

The individual working in the public or private child welfare agency selected for this award has demonstrated they have helped a youth transition to a successful contributing member of society.

**Bill Motsavage**, Valley Youth House, nominated by Cheryl Bleiler, Lehigh County Office of Children and Youth Services

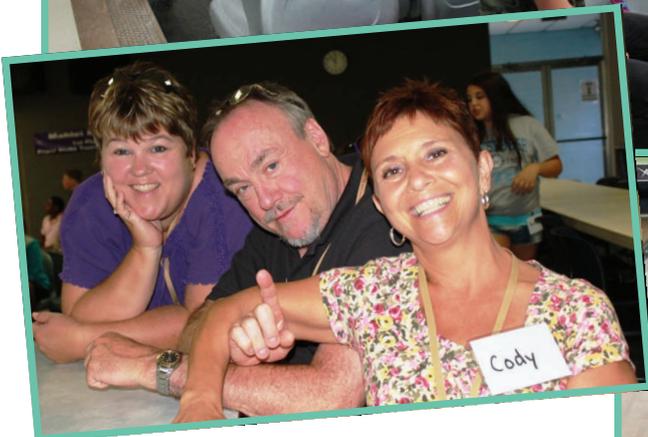
## **Permanency Professional Recognition**

Individuals selected to receive this award are permanency professionals working in a public or private child welfare agency, who have actively demonstrated their support and commitment to finding permanency for children in the child welfare system, through adoption, formal kinship care or permanent legal custodianship.

**Paula Roberts**, Lehigh County Office of Children and Youth Services, nominated by Cheryl Bleiler, Lehigh County Office of Children and Youth Services

# Fun at the Conference!

## We're Bowling!



# More Conference Fun!

Photos on these two pages highlight some of the activities the teens and children who attended the conference enjoyed during the event.



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



The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) was passed by Congress to address permanency outcomes and safety for children and families in the child welfare system. ASFA focuses on preserving families while assuring child safety, permanency and well-being. ASFA requires that county children and youth agencies make reasonable efforts to finalize permanency plans as soon as a child enters substitute care, and that they be diligent in identifying a permanent family for the child. To that end, concurrent planning is acknowledged in ASFA as a best practice for achieving permanency and stability for a child. The Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) issued OCYF Bulletin 3130-01-01 to assure compliance with ASFA.

Although ASFA encourages the use of concurrent planning when a child enters placement, many agencies still use a sequential approach to permanency planning for children. The first plan is generally for the child to return home, and planning for this may take 12 to 15 months. Once it becomes apparent that the child will not be returning home, another permanency goal is identified. This sequential planning takes much longer than if planning were done concurrently. As part of the assessment of the performance of state child welfare systems, the federal Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) address the extent to which states are using concurrent planning. The results of the 2002 CFSR of child welfare practices in Pennsylvania indicated that while not in use statewide, many counties reported the use of concurrent planning. However, the evidence from the records review was that workers seemed to view the practice as a 'back up' plan and not necessarily as a plan to be

implemented at the same time the plan is implemented to achieve child's primary permanency goal. As part of the 2010 Permanency Improvement Plan (PIP), resulting from the 2008 CFSR, which largely reiterated the 2002 findings relative to concurrent planning, Pennsylvania was charged with the task of developing a statewide policy to support case practice for concurrent planning.

As a result, members of the PIP Timely Permanency Committee formed a smaller committee, the Concurrent Planning Committee, to draft a Concurrent Planning Bulletin. The writing committee consisted of OCYF, public and private child welfare workers, attorneys, youth, families and advocates. Assistance and guidance was sought and provided from several national resource centers.

Successful permanency planning for all children in out of home care requires the development of a concurrent or alternative permanency plan. Concurrent planning is the ongoing process of actively working on two permanency plans at the same time. It is most effective when the necessary systems are in place to support the caseworker, the family, the resource family and the child through the concurrent planning process. Concurrent planning is not double the work. Thorough permanency planning efforts will result in faster permanency, either through reunification or another permanent plan; in either case the efforts and process is the same.

OCYF intends to release the Concurrent Planning Bulletin in March 2012. Central to the policy are eight core components. The core components of concurrent planning are:

1. Full disclosure to all participants in the case planning process;
2. Family search and engagement;
3. Family group conferencing or teaming;

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## Leadership in Action

*By Justin Lee  
Independent Living Program, CWTP*

Picture this scene: it is 4:25 p.m. A meeting is occurring that started at 10 a.m. Many of the participants in the meeting had to drive over two hours to attend, and all of the participants will have to come back the next day for another all-day meeting.

The discussion is about policies in development by the Department of Public Welfare's Office of Children, Youth and Families (DPW/OCYF). Every one of the meeting participants is asking thoughtful questions, providing feedback and staying engaged even though it is almost 30 minutes past what was already a very long day.

Is this some sort of utopian meeting filled with the nicest professionals in the world?

No, this is the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) and all of the participants are between 16 and 21 years old.

The YAB, whose mission is to educate, advocate and form partnerships to create positive change in the child welfare system,

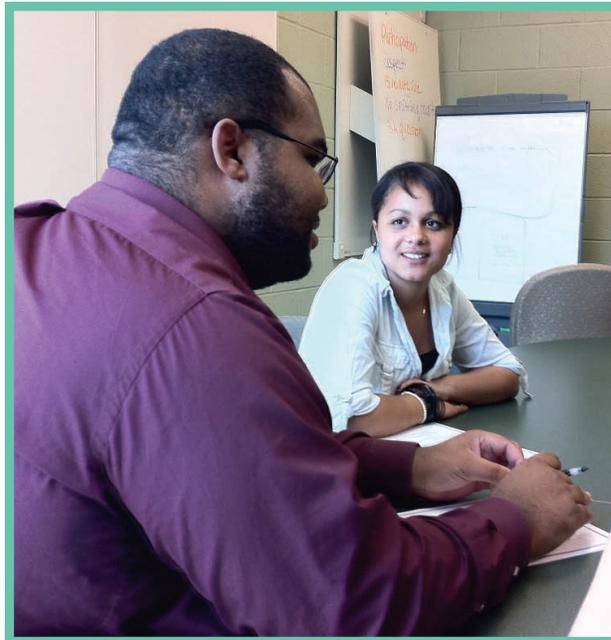
recently held its two-day leadership event in Mechanicsburg. Youth and alumni officers

from each of the six regions of the statewide YAB came together for two days of policy discussions and training. Statewide YAB partners like DPW/OCYF, Juvenile Law Center, and PA Partnerships for Children also attended to share information and hear feedback

from YAB members about policies.

"Finally, after years of schooling, trying to learn about different aspects of the law and its processes, after a one day training I fully know and understand the complete process of making policies!" said Demara, 20, an officer of the Northeast Youth Advisory Board.

After receiving training on how policies are created, the process by which DPW/OCYF issues bulletins, and other "ins and outs" of the policy process, YAB members were able to provide feedback on three policies currently being developed by the department. The policies included sibling visitation and placement through Act 119 of 2010, a memorandum of information (continued on page 8)



## IL: Leadership in Action

(continued from page 7)  
about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning youth from the Administration of Children and Families at the federal level, and Pennsylvania's education screen and bulletin.

Chris Nobles, 20, a member of the southeast YAB said, "A lot of us grow up feeling like the rules are what they are. This event helped us start to understand opportunities for feedback, and I thought, 'Wow, the rules are hard to change but when they do we can get in there and get our opinions heard.' We can try to make it a little better."

YAB members left the two-day event energized and ready to continue working in their communities. Armed with knowledge, skills and support, these current and former

foster care youth are ready to teach their peers and make positive change happen. Demara explained, "We have already taken the information back to our local YAB and are planning to reenact

the training, so that our local YAB can also fully understand and take away the knowledge that we have." 🌱

**Are you interested in supporting the YAB?  
Do you know a youth or alumni who wants to get involved?**

**Would you like to schedule training with the YAB?**

**Check out the YAB's website at [www.independentlivingpa.org](http://www.independentlivingpa.org)**

**or contact Justin Lee at [jml75@pitt.edu](mailto:jml75@pitt.edu).**

## Judi Damiano receives Shining STAR award

Judi Damiano, SWAN western technical assistant division manager, was recognized with the John A. Wilson Shining STAR Award by Project STAR at The Children's Institute on Saturday, April 2, 2011 as part of Project STAR's fifth annual *Growing Families Through Adoption* event.

The John A. Wilson Shining STAR Award was initiated at the 2005 Project STAR 20th anniversary event and was named in honor of former CEO, John Wilson, who retired in 2003 after 38 years of service at The Children's Institute. Mr. Wilson was committed to improving the well-being of



From left, Dr. Pat Saunders-Madison, director of Project STAR, the Children's Institute of Pittsburgh, Judi Damiano, Bethany Leas, supervisor of SWAN Services Project STAR, The Children's Institute of Pittsburgh.

all children, especially those with special needs. The Shining STAR award honors persons in the community whose work has made a significant impact to improve the lives of children.

Judi's commitment to finding families for the over 700 children in Pennsylvania who are waiting for secure, loving, permanent homes is inspirational to

many in the adoption community. Her work throughout the adoption network has a tremendous impact on practices to establish permanency for waiting youth, and her compassion for this work is admirable. 🌱

# Teen Match Parties are a Big Hit!

*By Christine Jacobs, Program Director  
National Adoption Center/Adoption Center of Delaware Valley*

The National Adoption Center, with funding from the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, designed and facilitated two teen match parties in March and May 2011, the first in Philadelphia and the second in Pittsburgh. The National Adoption Center has been a

believe that Stephen had the opportunity to meet some wonderful peers and got to see that he is not the only teen in his position. Thank you so much for the wonderful job that you and your staff did in putting together such a successful event!"

Understanding the importance of preparing attendees for what to expect at the match parties, the center offered two webinars for prospective families and two pre-party events for the teens. The webinars provided an overview of what to expect at the party and a chance for the prospective families to ask questions. The



leader in facilitating matching events for 25 years and finds specially crafted parties for teens to be an extraordinarily productive recruitment strategy. The concept of teen-only match parties comes from the belief that there are prospective parents willing and eager to open their hearts and homes to a teen in need. Such a party also eliminates the sense of competition with younger children that many teenagers feel when they attend events open to children of all ages.

While "matching" youth with families is the prime goal, there are so many other positive outcomes. The youth who attend are able to spend quality time with peers who are dealing with similar issues. They can express their feelings and show their true personalities in a safe and supportive setting. Through facilitated exercises, they share their life experiences and hear the stories of others. A social worker's remarks illustrate this point, "I

two pre-party events for the teens and their workers were facilitated by Kathleen Holt-White, a motivational group facilitator, who also worked at the match parties. These events give the teens a chance to meet one another, get acquainted with what will happen on the day of the party and ultimately help them feel comfortable and confident in moving forward.

At the March 26 Philadelphia match party 21 teens from 11 different counties and 29 prospective families were welcomed to the event. The room was decorated in a luau theme, with candy, plastic palm trees and games scattered around the tables. The DJ helped to set the tone with popular music already playing as (continued on page 10)

## Teen Match Parties are a Big Hit!

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people walked in. The teens' social workers received a family booklet with photos and descriptions of the families who were attending, and the prospective families received booklet about the teens. Kathleen, the NAC staff and the energetic DJ helped to make even the most nervous of guests feel comfortable and ready to open up and get to know each other.

The teens and families were led through interactive, get-to-know-you activities, including the youth art gallery that exhibited the teens' "dream boards," made during the pre-meetings.

Families walked around the room looking at the boards and asked all the youth questions about their boards to learn more about them. Another activity, called "Everyone Has a Voice," asked the teens to join a circle of their peers where they talked about themselves and their hopes and dreams. Almost 100 percent of the families noted on their evaluations that this exercise was the most effective and powerful way to learn more about the teens.

Equally as important to the organized activities, were the opportunities that really give attendees a chance to see the teen's true spirit. There were shrieks of excitement when the disc jockey played a teen's favorite song, the impromptu "dance-off" where the teenagers wowed the audience with their latest dance moves, the singing performances of courageous youths eager to share their talents,

the shy, reclusive teens who gathered their strength for a group song. One teen, when asked on the evaluation what was the best part of the day, wrote, "The Cha Cha slide because I felt like I was surrounded by family." Sixty-six percent of the teens received one or more inquiries as a result of the party - an extremely impressive outcome.

The May 7 Pittsburgh party, which offered identical activities as the Philadelphia party, welcomed nine teens and nine prospective families. The results were no less impressive with 90 percent of the teens receiving one or more inquiries.

Although too early to report on actual adoptions created, the

parties inspired strong interest from all of the families on many of the teens present. An appreciative prospective parent said it the best, "Thank you and all the people who worked with you for putting together that wonderful match party. I was nervous about going at first but when I entered the room, all my fears just melted away. The party exceeded both our expectations and it was great seeing the children in person! I think everyone had a great time. You could see the joy in each child's face because someone cared enough to put this event together for them. "

The center will track each family's progress and follow up with the teens' social workers until adoptive placements are reported. 🙌



# Northeast Family Training Collaboration

*By Roberta Daniels, SWAN Northeast Technical Assistant  
and Barbara Herring, Families Caring for Children*

The Northeast Training Collaboration is comprised of affiliates in the northeast region that have worked together since 2005 to meet the training needs of families and help facilitate permanency for children in Pennsylvania.

Each year member agencies sponsor a series of summer trainings for families who wish to adopt through the SWAN program. The day-long trainings are held one Saturday a month in June, July and August, and the permanency families are trained by St. Josephs Center, Catholic Social Services and Families Caring for Children. The 24-hour SWAN recommended training topics presented meet the training requirements for family preparation for each family. Transfer of

learning forms are completed after each training topic and shared with the families' workers.

The summer training program continues to be very successful, and the number of participating families has increased each year. The families find it easier to complete their training in the summer. They are also developing support with other families throughout the northeast. All northeast region agencies and their families are invited to participate.

**Please contact Roberta Daniels, northeast technical assistant, at [rdaniels@diakon-swan.org](mailto:rdaniels@diakon-swan.org) for additional information.**

## 2011 Permanency Conference Invites a Listen

(continued from page 1)

As the conference came to a close, I saw a lot of people saying goodbye. People were once again listening to last words, making arrangements to meet again, listening to one another. As I thought about it, I realized it is probably the "listening heart" of the network that makes us such a unified body. We take the time to hear about each other's struggles, to sit with each other in times of grief and

sorrow and rejoice with each other when placement happens, and permanency is found for a child.

If listening gives us a greater sense of ourselves and helps us to become the people we were meant to be, then I would say the network is definitely on the right path. Always showing regard for others and keeping an ear out for those who need our help along the way.



## Statewide Straight Talk

(continued from page 6)

4. Child/family visitation;
5. Establishment of clear timelines for permanency decisions;
6. Transparent written agreements and documentation;
7. Committed collaboration between child welfare agencies, the courts, resource families, service providers and other stakeholders; and
8. Specific recruitment, training and retention of resource families.

While each Core Component will be examined within the Concurrent Planning Bulletin, it is important to note that the Core Components identified are not new. Rather, they are the basis of effective permanency planning and most, if not all, of the Core Components are in place in most county children and youth agencies. Each of the Core Components will be discussed in more detail in future editions of the Network News.

In the meantime, the Concurrent Planning Bulletin writing committee will continue to finalize this very important document and looks forward to feedback upon its release in March.



## Meet the Hanleys

*By Kelli Hanley*

Miles was placed with his adoptive family as a high school junior at age 16. After meeting his soon-to-be father, a local pastor and high school football coach, and his mother, a professional counselor, Miles was invited to join the Hanley family as their foster son. This was a new experience for both Miles and the Hanleys, who interestingly are only 10 years apart in age. However, what started as a mentoring relationship between Miles and his foster parents soon became a deep, loving relationship between two parents and their son.

Miles was adopted by Kelli and Chris Hanley and became their first son. After becoming a Hanley, Miles went on to attend West Chester University where he earned multiple scholarships and awards. He graduated with a degree in business management in May 2011 and recently started his career at a prominent business solutions company. Miles has always been a talented young man, and there is no doubt that he has a bright future ahead of him.

Perhaps Miles's greatest achievement to date has been the lasting impact he has made on his parents and their friends. Because of Miles, adoption has become an ongoing theme in the Hanleys' lives. They have since adopted two more boys, now four and two, and are in the process of adopting a fourth child. The Hanleys tell everyone about the miracle of adoption, and the blessing it has been for them and their children. They have hosted representatives from Bucks County Children and Youth Agency at their church, The Church @ Franklin Mills, to discuss the foster care and adoption process and have since seen several other families positively impacted by foster care and adoption.

The Hanleys and their son Miles are extremely grateful for their wonderful experience and are so thankful for amazing social workers, like Stefanie Croasmun and Karen Murray from Bucks County children and Youth Agency, who have guided them through multiple adoptions. They look forward to an exciting and fulfilling future with their family.



# Make No Assumptions

*By Brenda Lawrence  
SWAN Prime Contract*

Recently I was reminded of the routine July 4 observance my parents practiced with me and my siblings – going to the local fishing area with hot dogs, potato salad and marshmallows. It was simple – no iPods or cell phones. But now many families would assume the old style picnic is too calm, boring and lacking in creativity.

That was then; this is now. The same is true in our professional lives, as well. As we learn new things about best practices, we change our practice and plans. Over the past 35 years the community of adoption and permanence for children in care has learned, changed and grown in practice and numbers. Sometimes the changes are clear and accomplished with ease. Other times the changes challenge our practice and belief system. The change can be a struggle, often with initial assumptions to overcome. Let's look at some of the changes and a few of the assumptions that haunted or impacted them.

Years ago decisions about choosing and selecting families for children or babies were based on assumptions that to assure success a similar appearance was a priority, as well as a bias of leaning towards couples of better economic status. The assumption was that all would go more smoothly if the families and children had similar features and the family had more financial resources. The hope was to find adoptive parents who lived in "the house with the white picket fence" for the child.

We later learned that children who have losses, prior neglect or abuse can assimilate well into families who have overcome their own challenges and who are able to accept the children as they are, helping them heal, develop and grow from there. We now provide a service intentionally developed to engage the child in their story, their history and helping them document and discuss it. We train professionals on the importance of understanding and addressing the child's grief and loss.

Then there was the practice of not allowing foster parents to adopt the child or children in their care. Foster parents were simply not considered as an adoptive resource for a child in their care who became available for adoption. Several assumptions came into play here; one was that foster parents should not get emotionally close with the child. Another was that the foster parents did not need to know the details of the child's history as they were only caring for the child temporarily. Foster parents were often given the message – directly or indirectly – not to bond with the child.

When concurrent planning was introduced and a charge to make the first placement the best placement became the norm, another assumption was made – that foster parents would not be able to help a child reunite with their birth family if they knew they could adopt if reunification did not work out. But then we saw that when foster parents bond with their foster children that is a strength for the child. Later we found that foster parents can and will support a child in their care during the steps of concurrent planning – helping the child through reunification efforts and then successfully serving as that child's adoptive family. This can result in the foster or resource family having an even better understanding of the child's challenges, thus feeling a strong connection for the child.

And what about the practice of years ago that said a child should not be told they are adopted even though other family members knew? The assumption was, "why tell them if you do not have to?" The justifications for this practice were "It will only confuse them," "We do not know how to answer the questions they might ask," "This is private information. We will tell them when they are old enough to understand," "Learning this information will be (continued on page 14)

## Make No Assumptions

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too painful especially if the circumstances of the adoption were traumatic, or “It will be easier for the child if they just forget their past.”

We have learned over the years that children need to know and understand who they are so they can develop and move on successfully to becoming an adult. Having caring and informed adults share this information with them supportively and confidentially is important. As many adopted people have shared in the past, we should plan to tell the information more than once as the child grows, matures and learns new perspectives on how to process the information.

Talking about how and when we tell children about their adoption story brings us full circle in Pennsylvania to Act 101 and the many doors it can open to families of adoption – developing voluntary contact agreements, providing more access to information in the child’s record, and encouraging medical and social information to be shared in a registry that many members of the adoption triad can access – birth family members, the child and the adoptive family, and finally enhancing the option to search for family members when ready.

For many years Pennsylvania did not have a formal law to support openness in adoption, but many adoptions practiced some form of openness. Today, there were and are many assumptions about why adoptions should be

closed, as well as why they should be kept open. In participating in the implementation of Act 101 with the SWAN prime contract, we hear some of the assumptions:

- All birth parents will want contact after the adoption;
- All older youth will want contact with birth families after the adoption;
- All adoptive parents will be resistant to contact;
- Negotiations or facilitation of the voluntary agreements will go smoothly and not take much time to develop; and
- Negotiations or facilitation of the voluntary agreements will be challenging and require many meetings, drafts of documents and requests from the court for revisions.

We have much to learn from the many assumptions we have worked under in the past. We know each child and each birth family and each adoptive family brings something different to the triad. The one assumption that may work best for us as we embrace the opportunity Act 101 affords us is to maintain our own openness about what each party brings to the table. For example, instead of operating under preconceived notions, we can learn from each of the parties who are considering post adoption contact what is important to them, what concerns them, what excites them, and what they have to offer to the new face of adoption in Pennsylvania. It’s time to leave our assumptions behind. 

# PAE and Helpline's Seamless System Brochure Now Available

*By Jane Johnston  
Division Manager, PAE*

"They troll the website. They know the names and details of every child posted. They watch for every new posting. They are sincere and caring and deserve our respect, which includes getting them more detail about waiting children as quickly as possible. Yet we know that child caseworkers can be overwhelmed with the number of calls they receive on waiting children." These are the words of Karen Oldham, director of the SWAN Helpline, describing waiting families who call for help, and it was this rationale that generated the creation of Pennsylvania's Seamless System.

The Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange and the SWAN Helpline have worked for two years on the implementation of the "seamless system" of services for waiting children and

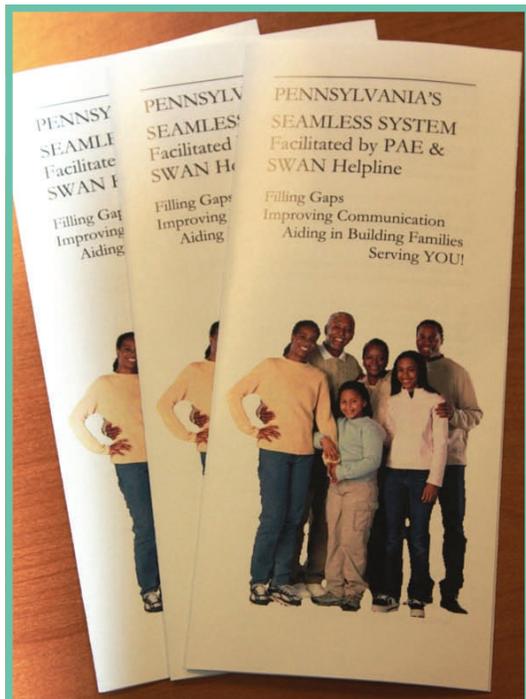
families. The brochure describing those services is now available for distribution to all families. This brochure describes how families can get more in-depth information about waiting children, especially information that goes beyond the publicly posted [www.adoptpakids.org](http://www.adoptpakids.org) narrative.

The initial response has been strong. Families can now quickly and easily rule themselves in or out based on the more

in-depth information in the child's record. Caseworkers can provide more sensitive information to their PAE coordinators. The information is then recorded in the child's notes section of the child record. This information is then shared only with approved families.

When the family rules themselves in for a child, the information can be shared with their family caseworker or an email can be sent by Helpline to the child's caseworker. The role of the network is to respond to the communication, so family workers send the family profile to the child's worker as requested. The various agencies should keep the email addresses for the family and child worker current with PAE as this information is referenced for the correspondence. Helpline staff, who routinely follows up with families, will notify them of the county's decision to review or consider their profile. The family's worker should continue as they normally would when an agency considers their family for a waiting child. The child's information is shared only with approved families. It is important to notify PAE when a waiting family is no longer available. 

**To obtain brochures to distribute to waiting families, contact Bobbi Whary at [bwhary@diakon-swan.org](mailto:bwhary@diakon-swan.org). Any changes in the family information can be directed to Dawn Sariano, PAE data analyst supervisor, at [dsariano@diakon-swan.org](mailto:dsariano@diakon-swan.org) or by phone at 717-231-5358.**



## Meet Idris

*By Lydia Lee, CSR Recruitment Specialist, SWAN OCMI  
Kristin Jacobs, CSR Recruitment Specialist, DiaKINnections*

Idris is a young man who will capture your attention immediately with his handsome face and warm eyes. He has a smile that can brighten up a room and an artistic ability that will leave you astounded at his creativity. Behind his kind eyes and toothy smile is a past that not many people would expect. Idris has been through many hardships, hurdles and disappointments in his short life— situations that no child should have to experience. Among these was his quest for a forever family who would love him and stay dedicated to him.

Idris was placed on the Older Child Matching Initiative (OCMI) caseload three years ago, and for three years he continued to be a waiting child. There were prospects and plenty of inquiries, but few families who could stay completely committed and dedicated to him. So Idris was placed in various foster homes and residential facilities as his behaviors escalated. Idris would sometimes test his boundaries and push to see how far he could go and how much people would be willing to take from him before giving up. Consequently, as the behaviors grew worse, the harder it became to find an adoptive resource who was willing to look past them.

Idris, though untrusting in many ways and anxious about the adoption process, really did seem to crave the love of a family. Once, during a visit at his most



current residential facility, we watched a friend of his leave with the friend's family. Idris had his face pressed up against the window, waving good-bye to his friend, and I asked him if he was sad to see the boy go.

Idris turned to me, with a serious and pensive look on his face, and responded matter-of-factly, "no, I'm not. I'm happy for him and I hope I never see him here again." Coming from a 14-year-old boy, I found this to be extremely poignant and mature. It showed me that Idris was ready to leave the world of residential treatment that he had become so accustomed to over the years, and I believed he would have his final good-bye as well soon enough.

Sure enough, an amazing family did come along within a couple of months. Idris's caseworker suggested the family to me after speaking with them on the phone, and the process began. The family was made aware of every painful detail of Idris's past, present and possible (continued on page 17)

## Meet Idris

(continued from page 16)

future—and they barely blinked their eyes at any of it. They saw what we all saw in Idris—a lonely, complex, brilliant young man with a ton of potential. They didn't care what his profile said about him or what his latest diagnoses were. They saw a little boy who had been left behind by life and needed the love of a family.

The family began visiting Idris weekly, and as their visits increased, so did Idris's trust—not only in the family, but in himself. Idris told me recently that he has started calling them Mom and Dad and that their support and visits are extremely important to him. Idris is scheduled to be placed with this family by the end of July, and he is very excited about leaving his facility and having that final proud walk out of the doors, just as his friend did months before him.

While Idris's workers were still searching for a forever family for Idris, we began to focus on birth family. Idris feels very strong ties to his relatives, as do most children in foster care. By searching for contacts on both his maternal and paternal side, we were able to locate 27 long lost family members who were all eager to once again be a part of his life. He hasn't seen or had contact with many of these relatives in more than five years, so we are taking our time introducing them to Idris so as not to overwhelm him.

When we asked the adoptive family their thoughts on reintroducing Idris to these individuals, they replied, "Absolutely! It would be a great benefit to him to learn more about his family." This was further proof that this

adoptive family is committed to him and only has his best interests at heart.

Idris's caseworker, family finder and child recruiter all worked together to build a support system for Idris with his birth family and the adoptive family. Idris's caseworker, one of the people Idris holds in highest regard in his life,

worked hard to support and facilitate the visits between Idris and the adoptive family, as well as facilitating contact between Idris and his birth family. She has always been Idris's cheerleader, and he likens her to a family member, someone he can trust and

who he knows has his best interest at heart.

Idris's family finder worked diligently and painstakingly to provide him with links to his past, so that he could have a possible future with these relatives. She went above and beyond what was expected of her to assure that Idris would have these contacts ready and waiting for him once his workers are out of the picture and he becomes curious about where he came from.

Idris's adoptive family has given him a bracelet with different colors on it that symbolize him, his birth family and his adoptive family and how they all come together to make one brilliant system. There is a happy ending for every waiting child out there. Sometimes it takes three months, and as in Idris's case, sometimes it takes three years. There is always a family out there who will see the child for who he or she truly is. It's just a matter of patiently waiting for those angels to come around and not giving up until they do. 🙏

**If you are interested in referring your waiting youth in need of permanency, contact Elisa Esh, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care at 717-724-7979 or by email at [eshe@diakon.org](mailto:eshe@diakon.org).**

## News from TAPLink

*By Phyllis Stevens, Executive Director  
Together as Adoptive Parents, Inc.*

If you attended this summer's 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Permanency Conference in Lancaster, you should have noticed something different about our exhibit table. We have added a lot more informational brochures this year. Of course we had brochures on *The Adoption Assistance Program*, and *Adoption Reimbursement of Nonrecurring Expenses*, but we also had brochures on permanent legal custodianship (PLC), *The Resource Family Care Act*, *The Philadelphia Resource Families Support Network*, *How to Negotiate an Adoption Assistance Agreement* and *The Adoption Tax Credit*.

I talked with Todd Lloyd at the conference, and we are working together to develop an Act 101 brochure. All of these brochures can be found on our website ([www.taplink.org](http://www.taplink.org)) under publications. We believe that one of the ways that we can help resource families is to equip them with as much information as possible.

In May for National Foster Care month, TAP partnered with Boscov's Department Store and Chick-fil-A to host a resource family recruitment event. Families had a chance to spin the Chick-fil-A wheel and win free food. The wheel gave us lots of opportunity to give out information about Pennsylvania's waiting youth.

On September 24, 2011 TAP hosted its annual AdoptWalk™ around beautiful Lorimer Park in Montgomery County. The purpose of the walk is to show support for waiting children and youth who dream of finding permanent families.

Our annual one-day conference was held November 12 in Philadelphia. This year we offered a workshop for youth on "Working Together to *Build Trust*." The objectives of the workshop were: to build trust by working together; to learn to



trust others; to learn not to be afraid to ask questions; and to learn the value of working as a team. To accomplish these objectives the youth built go-karts, which they raced for the parents at the end of the conference. They earned valuable lessons while having fun at the same time. 

# Heart Gallery Ends its Travels; Area Photographers Start Anew

*By Carrie Keiser*

*Human Services Program Specialist, OCYF*

After five years, 10,500 miles and 117 child portraits, the Pennsylvania Heart Gallery has come to an end.

The Pennsylvania Heart Gallery was intended to raise awareness about the more than 1100 children and youth who are without permanent homes and to encourage Pennsylvanians to adopt them. In five years, this traveling exhibit did just that. Of the 129 children and youth featured, 45 were adopted or placed in a pre-adoptive home. This is a tremendous success and accomplishment.

The Pennsylvania Heart Gallery exemplified teamwork - great people working together for a common cause. SWAN wishes to thank all of the caseworkers, photographers, resource families, businesses, churches, malls, fairs, airports and most importantly the children and youth who participated in this recruitment exhibit. The gallery made the faces of Pennsylvania's foster children real to everyone who saw them.

Having beautiful portraits that capture the spirit and individuality of Pennsylvania's waiting children is often the key to matching. To serve more waiting children, SWAN is building upon the success of the traveling Pennsylvania Heart Gallery by using the talents of volunteer photographers from across the state to obtain artistic portraits of all youth

registered with the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange (PAE).

SWAN, along with the commonwealth's media contractor, has identified professional photographers for all 67 counties in Pennsylvania. These photographers will donate their time and talent to create portraits that spotlight each child in a personal way. Participating photographers will submit new portraits on PAE's website, [www.adoptpakids.org](http://www.adoptpakids.org).

Caseworkers need to follow the *Heart Gallery Caseworker Photography Process*, which outlines the steps caseworkers must follow to participate. A copy of the process can be obtained by contacting Karen Lollo at 800-227-0225 ext. 1242 or [klollo@diakon-swan.org](mailto:klollo@diakon-swan.org). The document also explains where you can obtain the list of participating photographers.

Please use the participating photographers in your area and work together to capture Pennsylvania's waiting children in a beautiful portrait. 



## Cory—Star Athlete

Cory is a polite and charming young man. Some of Cory's favorite activities include football, wrestling, basketball, playing video games, spending time with friends, going on trips and being outdoors. Cory, who is 18, was a star cornerback on his high school football team last year, and he successfully led his team to many victories.

He has also participated on his school's wrestling team. When Cory is not busy playing sports, he likes to run and lift weights to stay in shape. His goal for the future is to be a professional athlete.

Cory is the first to admit that completing homework and school projects is not how he would prefer to spend his time. However, with the right amount of support and motivation, Cory will have no problem reaching his full potential. His favorite subject is physical education. He recently had a ballroom dance lesson while filming Val's Kids. What a great dancer!

Cory is eager to find his forever family and his main desire is to be placed with a



family who will love and take care of him. He would like a two-parent or single-father home and would like to have a dog. Cory would also like his family to be active and able to keep up with him, and to support and cheer for him at his sporting events.

All families will be considered for Cory. He is legally free for adoption. **For more information about Cory, contact Elizabeth White, 717-795-0479, Diakon Adoption Services. His PAE ID number is C49AA54.** 

# Pennsylvania resources

Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network  
[www.diakon-swan.org](http://www.diakon-swan.org)

Independent Living—[www.independentlivingPA.org](http://www.independentlivingPA.org)

Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange—[www.adoptpakids.org](http://www.adoptpakids.org)

Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association—[www.psrfa.org](http://www.psrfa.org)

SWAN Helpline—1-800-585-SWAN

Legal Warmline—888-793-2512 or [lsiwarmline@diakon-swan.org](mailto:lsiwarmline@diakon-swan.org)

Office of Children, Youth and Families

Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare—[www.dpw.state.pa.us](http://www.dpw.state.pa.us)

Network News—Karen Lollo at [klollo@diakon-swan.org](mailto:klollo@diakon-swan.org)

SWAN listserv through Google Groups—Desiree Weisser at  
[dweisser@state.pa.gov](mailto:dweisser@state.pa.gov)

SWAN Facebook page—Join the conversation

## 2011-2012 Savethedate

SWAN/IL Spring Quarterly Meetings – Scranton-March 29 — Clarion-April 4 —  
Monroeville-April 5 — Enola-April 17 — Philadelphia-April 25  
— Ft. Washington-April 26

Summer Statewide Meeting, July 17-18, 2012, Lancaster

Permanency Conference, July 18-20, 2012, Lancaster

Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association Conference—October 18-20,  
2012, Harrisburg