

network news

Spring 2011

The Voice of the 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
Office of Children, Youth
& Families
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Network News *is Back!*

By Brenda Lawrence, SWAN Prime Contract

Are you wondering if you missed the last edition of Network News? Perhaps you thought your e-mail was removed from the distribution list or that your SPAM filter stopped the last newsletter delivery?

Not to worry, the lapse was just a pause in the action while OCYF turned over much of the preparation for the Network News to the SWAN prime contract when the new 2010 – 2015 prime contract began.

The prime contract collaborates with Independent Living (IL) services and OCYF to bring you the most important news items to include in the newsletter. The prime contract employs staff from around the state, working with both public and private child welfare agencies. The SWAN staff, along with the Child Welfare Training Program's practice improvement specialists who support the IL services, will make sure news from around the state is reported.

Three to four issues a year will be sent electronically to a large distribution list of permanency agencies and interested parties. Here is what you can expect in the months ahead:

- Information about children waiting for permanent families;
- Success stories telling what worked for children and youth;
- New ways to involve children in defining and delivering services that help keep them in permanent resource families – by adoption, finding custodial guardians or by returning home to a family who is ready to care for them safely;
- Upcoming matching events;
- New ideas and resources agencies can use to find permanency;
- IL activities and ideas to help our older youth succeed; and
- Legal service ideas and solutions to expedite getting children to permanency showcasing outcomes that clarify what works and how.

If you or your agency has an activity or article for the Network News, please contact Karen Lollo at klollo@diakon-swan.org.



Statewide straight talk

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



A record breaking 2,388 Pennsylvania children were adopted from foster care in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2010. This exceeds our previous record of 2,175 adoptions established in FFY 2009. In fact, since SWAN began in 1992, more than 29,000 children have been adopted from foster care, which is more than the populations of some Pennsylvania cities including Johnstown, Hazleton, McKeesport and Pottstown!

Because of the record number of adoptions in FFY 2010, Pennsylvania was given \$1,264,154 in Adoption Bonus Incentive Funds. The United States Department of Health and Human Services offers Adoption Bonus Incentive Funds to those states that increase the number of children adopted from foster care. To determine the rate of children adopted from foster care Pennsylvania relies on the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS).

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act changed the ways in which Adoption Bonus Funds are calculated to include:

- \$4,000 for every finalization;
- \$8,000 for every older child finalization
- \$4,000 for every special needs adoption; and,
- the addition of a new category for exceeding the "highest ever" adoption finalization rate since 2002.

The funds awarded can only be used on activities or services allowable under Title IV B or Title IV E and must be directed to children receiving foster care or adoption assistance payments. Therefore any Adoption Bonus Incentive Funds received are used to further enhance our permanency efforts for all children in foster care and specifically for those with a goal of adoption. The 2010

bonus funds are being used in a variety of ways designed to help increase permanency outcomes for children in foster care including:

Media Campaign: Funds were used to develop three new SWAN television commercials and a new radio commercial that are currently airing in targeted markets across the commonwealth including the Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Harrisburg markets. All four spots feature the need for adoptive families who are willing to consider adopting sibling groups.

Older Child Matching Initiative, OCMI: Funds for the OCMI were increased in order to serve more children. The OCMI provides intensive recruitment services to children in foster care over the age of 10 who are in need of a permanent family. Funds were increased to this initiative because of the demonstrated outcomes in the first two years of the grant. Of the 111 youth served:

- 83 were matched with an adoptive family, representing 130 percent of the original deliverable of 64 matches over the two-year grant period;
- 47 of the youth were placed into an adoptive family, representing 147 percent of the original deliverable of 32 placements over the two-year grant period;
- 20 of the youth had intents to adopt filed on their behalf, representing 125 percent of the original deliverable of 16 over the two-year grant period; and
- 12 of the youth had a finalized adoption while four of the youth were discharged to the permanent legal custody of a relative, representing 100 percent of the original deliverable of 16 over the two-year grant period.

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May is Foster Parent Month

By Kathy Ramper, Executive Director, Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association

May is National Foster Care Month – the perfect time for honoring the many people who are making a difference in the lives of children and youth in foster care.

Take a moment to recognize a foster parent, relative caregiver, mentor, volunteer or social worker for their efforts throughout the year. Remember, a simple “thank you” is a powerful reward as it helps build retention and encourages recruitment, too.

The Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association sponsors a gathering of resource families at a Harrisburg Senators game as a way to encourage them to come together for a relaxing day of family fun and networking. Family outings are also a great opportunity for siblings living in different foster homes to reconnect and spend some quality time together.

We applaud your caring commitment and continuing support. Without the ongoing efforts of foster parents, relative caregivers, mentors, advocates, social workers and volunteers, too many children will end up facing life’s challenges all alone.

Together, we can offer young people in foster care the guidance, stability and love that are so essential for becoming successful adults. We greatly appreciate and recognize all that you do to help *Change a Lifetime* for a child in need.

May is National Foster Care Month. Every state in our country has children in foster care. They belong to all of us. Now is the time to show we care. 

statewidestraighttalk

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Matching Parties: Funds were provided to the National Adoption Center (NAC) to host Matching Parties on March 26th at the Crown Plaza Hotel, Main Line Philadelphia and on May 7th at the Radisson, Pittsburgh. To date, SWAN has partnered with NAC to host five matching parties which have all been successful events. If you have an older youth who could benefit from attending, please contact Julie Marks at 215-735-9988 x 367 or by email at pateen@adopt.org.

Child Specific Recruitment Bonus, CSR: Funds are being used to provide a \$1,000 bonus to SWAN affiliate agencies for every child over age 12 who is adopted or placed with a legal custodian or fit and willing relative through the use of CSR.

Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association, PSRFA: Funds were provided to help complete the Parents as Tender Healer Training which is designed to help agencies train their resource families, particularly around the issues of grief and loss that children in out of home care experience. When completed, the training will be provided at no charge to all county children and youth agencies. Funds were also provided to PSRFA for conference scholarships so that resource parents who may not be able to afford to attend the annual PSRFA conference can do so to receive training and support and network with other resource families. 

Milton's Fishing Derby Matching Event



Above: North Central region county and affiliate staff prepare their foster care/ adoption awareness table at the Milton Fishing Derby. From left are Kay Carpenter, Fran Stiber and Kristen Sweger, all from Lycoming County Children and Youth; Melissa Kern, Kidspeace; and Dawn Warren, Northwestern Human Services.



Which tattoo to pick?? Dawn Warren from Northwestern Human Services helps a young boy decide.



Nearly 30 families braved the ice and snow to attend the matching reception in Harrisburg in January. Several matches, including two sibling groups, were made at this event, and one lucky youngster has already moved in with his adoptive family!

If you missed this event, a matching brunch will be held in Lancaster in July. Stay tuned for details!

January SWAN Winter Statewide Matching Reception

Increased OCMI Capacity, New Partners Give More Youth a Chance at Permanency

By Elisa Esh, Grant Director, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care

The SWAN Older Child Matching Initiative (OCMI), a grant program administered by the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) and the SWAN prime contract, recently announced increased capacity, which will afford more waiting youth the opportunity to be involved in a highly successful child-focused recruitment program.

For the past two years, the grant contract was held by Diakon Adoption and Foster Care in partnership with Project STAR and Bethanna. The positive outcomes of the initiative throughout the first two years of the grant were a leading factor in DPW's decision to extend the grant to Diakon Adoption and Foster Care and its partners into the 2010-11 state fiscal year.

During the first two years, Pennsylvania realized some exciting results from this targeted effort to achieve permanency for older children and youth. Of the 111 youths served by the OCMI from July 2008 through June 2010, 83 were matched with adoptive families; 47 of the youths were placed for adoption; 20 had intents filed on their behalf, and 16 had a finalized adoption, four of whom were placed in the permanent legal custody of a relative. All of the young people served were over age 10 and have significant special needs.

With the added capacity within the grant, two new partners were recruited to the OCMI program, which increased coverage to nearly 75 percent of Pennsylvania. Family Pathways, an agency with a history of successful child specific recruitment, will offer OCMI services in the northwestern part of the state through their child focused recruiter, Nic Landon. Children's Service Center of Wyoming Valley, an agency experienced with

the child focused recruitment model used in the grant through a contract with the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Wendy's Wonderful Kids program, will service the upper northeast region of Pennsylvania with its two child focused recruiters, Amanda Sevison and Marion Kolcun.

With the addition of these two grant partners, the SWAN OCMI is now collaborating with 31 county children and youth agencies across the state to provide recruitment services for youth in need of permanency. Additional counties are also eligible to refer children to the OCMI program if services are needed for their waiting youth.

Karen Knodel, child focused recruiter for Bethanna, continues to serve the southeastern region of Pennsylvania. Elizabeth White, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care, continues to recruit for youth in the central and south central regions for the OCMI grant. Russ McCurdy, Project STAR child-focused recruiter, continues to work for OCMI youth in the western and southwestern regions of the state.

The grant allows a child focused recruiter to be assigned to each youth. The recruiter assesses the child's strengths, needs and challenges and arranges for adoption preparation in addition to carrying out recruitment activities. Each youth works closely with his or her recruiter to help identify kin and non-kin resources with whom they would like to have contact and who they think may even become an adoptive resource for them.

The grant uses a three-pronged approach that targets non-relative families who can (continued on page 6)

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meet the specific needs of a waiting youth, collaborates with the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange to match youth with some of the more than 400 waiting families registered with the exchange, and conducts diligent searches for kin and fictive kin through family findings. The increased capacity of the grant specifically allows for a part-time recruiter who will focus on providing family finding services for youths who have had long waits for permanency with little to no results so far.

Kristen Jacobs, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care, will support the family finding efforts. The grant prides itself on non-traditional child-focused recruitment and will continue to use efforts that have proved successful to match some of the youths who are more challenging to place.

During the new grant term, the program will study older youth who have had successful adoptive placements. This study will help to determine the types of successful adoptive families for older youth, how to make successful matches, the characteristics of specific families and youth that make them more successful in adoption, causes for disruption and the additional supports families need after an older youth is placed for permanency.

The SWAN OCMI recognizes that families who have adopted previously know the system, have gone through the process of adoption and are more likely to adopt again. The SWAN OCMI has proudly collaborated with Together as Adoptive Parents, Greater Lehigh Valley Foster Care

Coalition and Children's Aid Society of Mercer County to promote the need for permanent families by distributing the OCMI waiting child lists, promotional items and brochures about the program at support groups, conferences, family trainings and to their internal staff. Through this networking, successful adoptive families who are aware of the unique and sometimes challenging needs of older youth from the child welfare system will consider adoption of an older youth again.

Diakon Adoption and Foster Care and its

partners have proposed to match 120 children, place 60 children and file intents for and finalize 30 children in the upcoming two-years. Since the start of the current contract, outcomes are already far exceeding what we hoped to achieve. As a result of the efforts of the six full-time recruiters, 19 matches were made; 12 youth were placed; intents to adopt were filed for eight youth, and five youth now have finalized adoptions.

The SWAN OCMI serves children over the age of 10 who have a goal of adoption or a concurrent plan of adoption. As each child is matched, another can be added to the OCMI caseload. As a result, the SWAN OCMI is always looking to work with new counties and for our collaborating counties to serve more waiting youth as space becomes available. 

To learn how to take advantage of this cutting edge recruitment service for your waiting youth in need of a "forever family," please contact Elisa Esh, Grant Director, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care, at eshe@diakon.org or by phone at: 717-724-7979.

Please visit the Diakon Adoption and Foster Care website at www.diakon.org/adoption to view some of the unique and wonderful OCMI waiting youth who want nothing more than to be a part of a family

FOREVER!

A New Graduate!

By Karen Lollo, Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange Coordinator

Austin Starke was placed with his adoptive mom out of foster care in 2005, shortly before his 17th birthday. His adoption was finalized and celebrated in August 2006.

Austin was ready to be part of a family when he came to live with his new family and adjusted very well. In his senior year of high school, he was a valuable member of his high school football team at Cumberland Valley High School in Cumberland County. He graduated and then attended Harrisburg Area Community College. He was enrolled in the HVAC certificate program but decided that wasn't what he wanted.

In 2008, his adoptive mom moved from Harrisburg to a suburb of Philadelphia. Austin also left central

Pennsylvania and moved with her. In his new area, he applied, passed all of the preliminary tests and was accepted into the Montgomery County Police Academy. Not an easy feat!

At the academy Austin excelled, maintained a 92 percent average and was among the top five members of his class for marksmanship. The academy has provided a wonderful opportunity for this young man to prove himself. Austin graduated with a new-found maturity and self-discipline in a ceremony on March 2, 2011. Austin is now seeking a position as a police officer or prison guard.



Austin Starke at his police academy graduation ceremony in Montgomery County in March 2011.

IL's Youth Ambassador

By Chris Nobles, Youth Ambassador

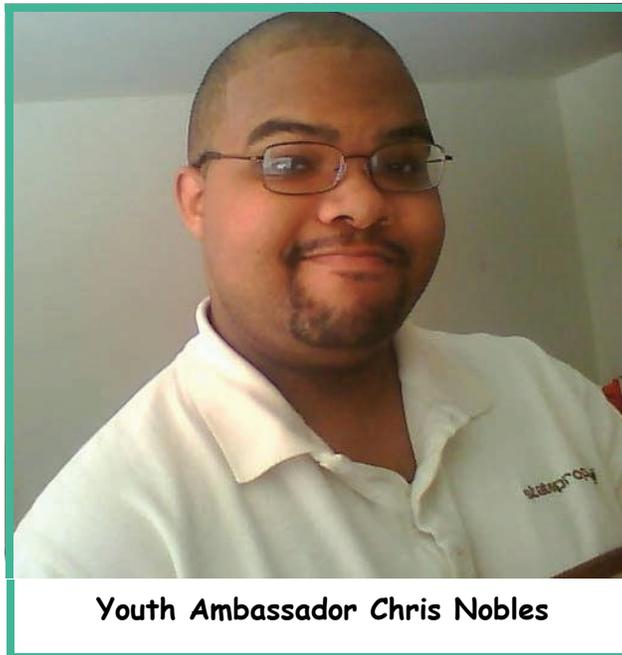
The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program (CWTP) supports student internships for youth and alumni of the child welfare system who are currently enrolled in post-secondary education. Youth ambassadors play a critical role in all training program products and services including advising and assisting with technical assistance, reviewing training curricula, developing policies and procedures, and many other activities throughout the commonwealth. There were four youth ambassador positions during the 2009-2010 school year, and I was fortunate enough to be one of them.

Here is my story about my experience as a youth ambassador.

In February of 2010 a unique and exciting opportunity was brought to my attention. There was an opening as a youth ambassador with the CWTP, a position available to former or current foster care youth currently attending college. I understood immediately that I met these qualifications as I am a sophomore in college currently and had just aged out of the system a little over a year prior. What was not entirely clear is what I had to offer, and admittedly the formality of it all seemed beyond me.

For example, the term "youth ambassador" made for an awkward title at first. An ambassador is typically an individual working as a spokesperson from one place, or culture, or environment to another. While

these drastically different places most likely have a working knowledge of one another, or at least that the other exists; an ambassador's role is unique in moving at least temporarily from their home setting and being immersed into whichever environment expects to receive them.



Youth Ambassador Chris Nobles

I did not honestly expect any of this to apply to me when I signed on for the youth ambassador position. I thought the term was a bit of an exaggeration, or a coined phrase I was simply going to be stuck with for the duration. I had these beliefs right up until orientation.

My first day at the CWTP office in Mechanicsburg, I was greeted with more smiling faces than I expected. I was greeted with more folders of

information than I ever anticipated. It was explained to me that as alien as the immaculate office and business attire-clad workers felt to me, my feedback would be appreciated simply for how out of place I actually was.

I would be taught skills of the strange new work environment such as how to participate in meetings and digest hours of conversation for example. My first day at the office was

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Independent Living (IL)

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the first day I had worn formal shoes for more than two hours at a time. I learned first to walk in the fascinating environment, one that had always existed directly beside (or above) the one I was accustomed to. I was invited into meetings, and eventually I found my voice among them.

It was a voice I grew accustomed to using frequently for the entire summer. In just over two months, I attended a two day DAPIM™ (*editor's note: A method for continuous quality improvement: Define, Assess, Plan, Implement, Monitor*) meeting for the statewide Youth Advisory Board, the SWAN conference in Lancaster, the Youth in Transition conference in State College, the System of Care Retreat in Harrisburg, the Independent Living Retreat in Johnstown, and completed more than enough assignments to keep the position active and engaging. In all places I found myself again and again pleasantly surprised by how

relevant my input and the input of other youth truly turned out to be. The "system" is taking large steps to move toward this incorporation, and I will always value the summer I spent close to the forefront of that movement.

Ambassador is a term that implies being not only a voice to others, but also a level of immersion in the new setting. In the beginning, only one of the two words in my to-be title felt as though it fit me. I am certainly a youth, but "ambassador" seemed like a bit of a long shot. The experience took my simple "youth" tag and made me into a participant, a facilitator, an advocate, an expert, an intern, a student and a friend. Ambassador can mean a great deal, and I ended the summer as a youth ambassador with many things. One of which is a title that is not simply a title given for the sake of tokenism but one that I know now attempts to express at least a half dozen real purposes and possibilities in only two words. 

Tabor Matching Event—Thursday, June 23

"A Forever Family For Me"

Using a movie theater setting, this matching event will give families the chance to learn about children in a new and exciting way through

Multimedia presentations

Agencies will create PowerPoints, movies and music videos that feature their waiting children and will be shown to the attending families!

Three showings during the day!

11:00a.m.— 2:00 p.m.— 4 :30 p.m.

After each presentation, families can talk with agencies, collect fliers and view poster boards. The day's activities run from 9:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Location: 57 E. Armat St., Philadelphia Pa 19144

To reserve a table and display contact Connie Pinero 215-842-4800 x442, constance.pinero@tabor.org (fax 215-842-4809)

FREE breakfast, lunch and evening snacks provided to ALL agency workers

Runaway Bunny

By Karen Oldham, SWAN Helpline Director

One of the most beautiful stories ever written is a simple tale in a children's book. It speaks to our universal need to be loved no matter who we become, where we run to or the decisions we make. It speaks of deep commitment. It is a guide for resource families.

In the tale, a baby bunny decides he needs to run from his mother and find his own way. No matter where he decides to run, his mother finds a way to transform her caring and love into a safety net for the bunny. He can run but cannot escape the influence, the love and the protection of his mother. She finds him no matter where he goes. She becomes the incarnation of places he imagines to run to and reinvents herself as need be to assure his safety. In the end, the baby bunny realizes running will do no good, settles in his home, and accepts the comfort, love and security of his mother. The tale, "*The Runaway Bunny*," inspires us by documenting our belief in the power of commitment and its ability to calm the chaos of a child through steadfast love and caring.

The children that come into our lives are "Runaway Bunnies." They often run physically from situations that are overwhelming. They run from memories of traumas they have experienced. They run emotionally by hiding from feelings that are painful. They run or act out to divert us from the sources of their discontent. They run mentally from the losses and/or abuses they have experienced to find relief from the pain of facing them.

Resource families are the "mothers" (and fathers) to these running bunnies. They provide a safe haven, quietly and without pomp. They transform themselves in whatever way is appropriate to protect the

children in their care. They "run" after the children who are afraid to stand still and commit and gently show them ways to calm the chaos within and settle in a home.

Not all of the children placed in our care realize, like our baby bunny friend in the tale, that running will do no good. Sometimes they need to "run" to survive. Resource families "run" with them and are ready to catch them and bring them home when they are tired. What a wonderful tale in and of itself! Committing to kids no matter where they are or are "running" to, and catching them and bringing them home when they are ready.

It is the patience to endure the marathon that is important. Patience is born of commitment, love and the belief that chaos can be calmed. The strength for the marathon comes from the knowing that all things can endure and thrive given their own timeline for resolution and growth. The marathon is won by realizing victories are measured by a different barometer when "running" is involved. Speed is not always important, rather endurance drawn from commitment.

May all your bunnies travel lightly with few burdens and "run" short distances and land safely home. For those who don't, keep the faith, the commitment, and the light on for when they are tired. Keeping the home ready is what being a resource family is about. 

Meet Cheilin

By Karen Knodel, Bethanna, OCMI Recruiter



Cheilin is a beautiful girl, born May 14, 1993. Her nicknames include Princess, Chelinnny and CheiChei. She likes her personality and describes herself as funny, bossy, pretty, crazy (in a good way), caring and helpful. Cheilin is girly, fun-loving, compassionate and a social butterfly. She is able to make the best of all situations; she may get disappointed but then bounces back and does not let it ruin her day. Cheilin is also a self-proclaimed diva. She enjoys having her hair done and afternoons of being pampered, which consist of having a manicure and a pedicure. When someone is doing her hair, she usually prefers them to straighten it. Cheilin enjoys taking walks outside with friends when the weather is nice, as well as swinging on the wheelchair swing outside in the yard.

Cheilin enjoys socializing but also enjoys spending time alone. While alone, she listens to her favorite music on her iPod. Her play list on the iPod consists of R&B and rap music. She also enjoys watching movies and television with friends. Her favorite shows

include Gossip Girl, the Disney channel, Hannah Montana, Degrassi High and Kyle XY. She is a fan of movies, especially if it is a horror movie, or from the Twilight series. Her favorite scary movie is Halloween, both the original and the remake. She also loves Lifetime Movies and video games. Grand Theft Auto is Cheilin's favorite game to play on the X-Box.

When Cheilin grows up she has two career aspirations. First, she would like to be a nurse in pediatrics. She wants to be a nurse because she likes to help people and has had extensive experience with nursing. Her other aspiration is to be a therapist who works with children, because again she likes helping people and she thinks she would be good at it. She also stated she is good at answering phones.

Cheilin is open to any type of family but would like to remain living in Pennsylvania. She also wants access to a large city. She is open to any race of family, as well as siblings. Due to her respiratory difficulties, she would do better in a family who does not have any animals.

She wants her family to attend church, go to the mall, cook at home, give some hugs and kisses and understands she may need some space. She needs a family who can understand her medical needs and can help her.

For more information regarding Cheilin, please contact Karen Knodel, MSW, LSW at 215-366-6500 x193 or email her at kknodel@bethanna.org. 

Latest PA Adoption Trends

By Mike Kovacevic, FDR Research Specialist

Although the new national report on child welfare outcomes for the U.S. is not yet published, the data that will be used to write the report is available and already highlights some interesting adoption trends in Pennsylvania.

- The total number of children in Pennsylvania's foster care system has decreased nearly 19 percent, from 21,395 children to 17,395 children, between 2006 and 2009.
- At the same time, the number of children waiting for adoption decreased three percent, from 1,857 to 1,800 children, and the number of adoptions increased 13 percent, from 1,926 to 2,243 children.
- The percentage of children age 12 and over who are waiting to be adopted decreased from 26.2 percent in FY 2006 to 21.9 percent in FY 2009. Unfortunately, the percentage of waiting children age 12 and older who are eventually adopted also decreased, from 15.3 percent in FY 2006 to 10.9 percent in FY 2009.
- In FY 2009, only .7 percent of children older than age 12 exited foster care to adoption. An additional 3.7 percent exited to guardianship while 28 percent had "other" indicated as their exit.
- The percentage of children with a diagnosed disability who exited foster care by way of adoption increased from 15 percent in 2006 to 21 percent in 2009.
- In 2009, African American children made up 41 percent of children waiting for adoption and 39 percent of children who are adopted. Caucasian children were 40 percent of children waiting for adoption and 48 percent who were adopted.
- Hispanic children were 11 percent of waiting children and 10 percent of adopted children.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, examined data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, NCANDS, and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, AFCARS, for federal fiscal years (October 1-September 30) 2006 through 2009.

Other data now available includes information about child maltreatment, characteristics of children in foster care, reductions in the recurrence and incidence of child abuse and neglect, and composite and individual measures established for the Federal Child and Family Services Review. The data can be accessed at <http://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/data>. 

Adoption Day Events: A Planner's Guide

By Natalie Witt-Washine, LSI Lead Division Manager

Many of us know that adoption awareness month is nationally recognized every year during November. The primary focus for National Adoption Month is to recognize and celebrate the adoption of children in foster care and create awareness of those children still awaiting permanent families.

Recognition of this month began with President Ronald Reagan proclaiming the first adoption week in 1984. In 1995 President Clinton proclaimed November as national adoption awareness month. National Adoption Day was begun in 2000 by the Alliance for Children's Rights, with support from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, and Freddie Mac Foundation. This day is recognized annually and is also celebrated nationwide with finalization events, recognizing the adoptions of children and their adoptive families. By 2006, events were held in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. In the past 11 years more than 35,000 children were adopted on National Adoption Day!

Here in Pennsylvania, counties have hosted adoption day events for many years. In 2010 Governor Ed Rendell signed a proclamation stating that November would be recognized as Adoption Month with November 20 as Adoption Day. SWAN LSI staff have participated in these events in various capacities over the years. Before becoming the SWAN LSI region 2 coordinator, Belinda

Muschar was a paralegal supporting Westmoreland County Children's Bureau. While there, Belinda and Melissa Eller, SWAN LSI coordinator for region 3, were instrumental in preparing for their county's adoption day festivities, which received national recognition.

Belinda remembers fondly the labor of love that led up to the county's November Adoption Day event. Belinda says, "We had no budget in place, but with some hard work,

fundraising efforts and generous donations from the community, we were able to pull together a festive day of celebration and help create a joyous atmosphere for children and adoptive parents as they finalized their relationship as a

family." Many of us felt privileged to do our part and help a child achieve permanency with their forever family."

I too have been fortunate enough to have volunteered for a few of these events over the years and witness the faces of children and their families. They truly are magical moments for everyone who gets to share in their joy.

Adoption Day events have been celebrated in many unique ways and at varying times of the year. Allegheny County, for example, holds monthly adoption days but also holds an annual day of recognition each year in November. (continued on page 14)

Get the new
Adoption Day Event Handbook,
and learn ways to celebrate adoptions and
plan an adoption event on even a very
limited budget.

Due out in late May

Contact Natalie Witt-Washine at
nwitt@diakon-swan.org or
888-793-2512, ext. 6449

SWAN Legal Services Initiative (LSI)

(continued)

Josh Lewis, director of the Adoption Legal Services Project in Allegheny County, looks forward to each monthly Adoption Day. "These events provide a time for all of the professionals who work in child welfare to come together and celebrate with the adoptive children and families. Seeing the tears of joy on the faces of a new legal family after an often long and difficult journey through the dependency system provides a concrete reminder of why I chose this line of work," he said.

Many of us have had the privilege of attending an Adoption Day event in the past, but most of us do not realize how much time and effort is involved in preparing for an event nor when you need to get started! To help with this, SWAN LSI has put together an Adoption Day Committee. Chaired by Belinda Muschar, this committee is comprised of nine paralegals, two SWAN LSI coordinators and the SWAN LSI lead division manager. This committee is charged with putting together an Adoption Day Handbook that will aid agencies and workers in organizing and holding an Adoption Day event on a limited or non-existent budget.

The handbook will contain general adoption day information, sample forms and

letters, a timeline and additional resources that provide everything you will need for your event. To hold a well-prepared event, planning should begin by early June. With the anticipated release of the handbook in late May, you will have the necessary tools to get started as soon as possible.

The Adoption Day Committee hopes that the creation of this handbook will help you prepare and plan for your county's event, which will ultimately help us celebrate and honor families who adopt, raise awareness of our waiting children, and support and encourage collaboration among local agencies, courts and advocacy organizations.

As Belinda once told me, "It's a time to come together with the courts, county children and youth agencies and community to celebrate and create awareness about children who are touched by the child welfare system and their need for permanency!" Those words truly reflect the passion that steers our committee.

We wish you luck in preparing for your event! For questions or to obtain a copy of the Adoption Day Event Handbook, please contact Natalie Witt-Washine, SWAN LSI lead division manager, at nwitt@diakon-swan.org or 888-793-2512 ext. 6449. 

Adoption Connection PA

Presents

"A Portrait of Adoption"

August 6, 2011 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

At Chippewa Evangelical Church, 239 Braun Rd., Beaver Falls PA 15010

Nancy Honeytree—keynote speaker

For more information, contact Adoption Connection PA,
700 Turnpike St., Beaver, PA

Ph. 724-371-0671

Pennsylvania's Youth Advisory Board: Leading Change in Child Welfare

By Justin Lee, Independent Living, Practice Improvement Specialist

The mission of the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is to educate, advocate and form partnerships to create positive change in the child welfare system. Youth and alumni of the child welfare system ages 16 and older are organized into six regional boards, numerous local county boards and a statewide board.

There are over 200 YAB members throughout Pennsylvania. These youth and alumni have presented at over 100 conferences, agencies and other settings and reached over 800 audience members; everyone from foster and adoptive parents, to caseworkers and supervisors, to judges and attorneys were impacted by the YAB's message.

In addition to presentations, the YAB carries out its mission by:

- Consulting with child welfare agencies on best practices and policies for children and youth in the child welfare system;
- Engaging in peer mentoring to provide guidance and support to youth in the child welfare system facing tough decisions or in need of extra support;
- Training and co-training different curricula for child welfare professionals, youth and resource parents; and
- Implementing newly passed laws that affect youth and alumni of the child welfare system.

For the current year, the YAB is also focused on:

- Creating a value statement about the importance of maintaining family connections and educating stakeholders on its importance and how they can encourage it in their work;
- Creating a value statement about high quality casework skills and educating caseworkers, supervisors and child welfare agency administrators on how they should assure high quality casework among their staff; and
- Creating public relations and marketing materials to further communicate the YAB's mission and goals in order to encourage additional youth and alumni to join as well as reach out to more child welfare professionals.

The YAB's partners are extremely important in supporting and leading the change efforts needed for Pennsylvania. These partners include the Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families; the Juvenile Law Center; Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children and KidsVoice.

Please contact Justin Lee (jml75@pitt.edu) to schedule a YAB presentation or consultation for your agency, resource parents, adoptive parents or youth.



Pennsylvania resources

Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network—www.diakon-swan.org

Independent Living—www.independentlivingPA.org

Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange—www.adoptpakids.org

Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association—www.psrfa.org

SWAN Helpline—1-800-585-SWAN

Legal Warmline—888-793-2512 or lsiwarmline@diakon-swan.org

Office of Children, Youth and Families

Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare—www.dpw.state.pa.us

Network News—Karen Lollo at klollo@diakon-swan.org

SWAN listserv through Google Groups—Desiree Weisser at dweisser@state.pa.us

2011 Savethedate

SWAN/IL Summer Statewide Meeting—July 19-20 at the Lancaster Host Resort and Conference Center, Lancaster

19th Annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference—July 20-22 at the Lancaster Host Resort and Conference Center, Lancaster

Independent Living Youth Retreat—August 8-12 at the University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown

35th Annual Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association Conference—October 20-22 at the Central Hotel and Conference Center, Harrisburg