

# network news

Spring/Summer 2008

The Voice of the Network

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## network news

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## Foster Parenting: God's Call to Reach Out and Love Someone Else's Child

by Kristin Williams Balla, Resource Parent

Are you aware that there are currently over half a million children living in foster care in the United States? Laura (not her real name) used to be one of those precious children. In 2002 she joined our family of seven after “disrupting” from two previous foster homes.

In the warm June weeks following her arrival, Laura had a habit of curling up in my lap in the fetal position, communicating in wordless grunts and leaking crocodile tears. She wanted her mommy. This little girl had known so many changes in six short years that her head didn't spin anymore. She had lived with her birth-mother for the first 18 months. Then, due to neglect and molestation, she spent 18 months in foster care. She returned home to her birthmother for two years, but re-entered foster care at age 5, following a second molestation by a different perpetrator. After two disrupted foster placements, lasting a few months each, Laura crash-landed in our home, emotionally exhausted and utterly bereft.

Although she appeared at first glance hopeless, there was a light in her eyes – a certain radiance born of survival and glowing with resilience. There was also a

fire, stoked by anger and the need to control something – *anything*.

My husband Attila (my Hon) and I were humbled by the enormity of the commitment we had so quickly made to this child. We wondered how God could possibly trust us this much. Our life vest was (and is) a phrase we once read on a church sign: “God does not call the Equipped, He equips the Called.” We count on that, because we feel reasonably sure that we heard the call.

I have to admit that it took us by surprise when we first recognized that it was, indeed, a call. It was July 1998. Our oldest birth daughter Lyrin was about to turn 16. Our birth sons, Brent and Declan, were 14 and 11. Our adopted daughter Ashley was rapidly approaching her 6<sup>th</sup> birthday. We had a full house and full hands! After experiencing the adoption process with Ashley, we told ourselves and others that we could never do foster care. We said that we would “love them too much to let them go.”

That July, our friend Louise called out of the blue. She had done our home study for Ashley's adoption, and she needed a favor. She asked us to take a young boy

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# statewide straight talk

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



The current fiscal year holds much promise for the children and families we serve. Increased funding to SWAN direct services will provide greater opportunity for us to serve more youth, regardless of their court-ordered permanency goal, with services in a timely manner.

One of the reasons often given by county agencies for the challenges we face in meeting federally defined outcomes of ensuring that all children who enter foster care achieve permanency within 24 months of placement is a lack of SWAN funding. However the 2008-09 budget for SWAN direct services is almost triple what we had available in previous years and includes:

- \$25,131,000 for County Requested Direct Services (Child Profile, Child Preparation, Child Specific Recruitment, Family Profile, Placement and Finalization services).
- \$1,000,000 for Affiliate Referred Family Profiles, for those families recruited through the SWAN media campaign or by affiliates; and,
- \$3,600,000 for Post-permanency services.

But with increased opportunity, comes increased responsibility to perform. Permanency outcomes must improve in Pennsylvania, not only because we are mandated to do so, but also because our foster children deserve it. Fortunately, Pennsylvania is uniquely positioned to meet the federally defined outcomes of timely permanency.

The SWAN Program is unique in the nation. We offer adoption services prior to a court ordered goal of adoption in order to decrease the overall length of stay for children in care with a goal of adoption. By referring for services prior to the court-ordered goal of adoption, the

child profile, family profile, child preparation and child specific recruitment services can be complete or nearly complete before the goal change and/or termination of parental rights hearing.

As a system, we need to plan to ensure timely permanency for children with a goal of adoption. Planning ahead means making referrals prior to the court ordered goal of adoption. Waiting for that court order or a termination of parental rights hearing before referring for SWAN services could delay a child's adoption by 6 - 12 months. No child should linger in care because we neglected to refer services in a timely manner.

Each county should be reviewing their caseload and deciding what services children in foster care need now, in 2008-09, and planning for what services they will need in State Fiscal Year 2009-10 so that they make appropriate requests in their Needs Based Budget. For instance, children in a pre-adoptive home with no intent to adopt filed should be referred for Finalization services. Children with no identified adoptive resource should be referred for Child Specific Recruitment, even if they received the service in the past. Any child with a goal of adoption who has not had a child profile completed should be referred. Older youth in danger of aging out of care without a permanent connection should be referred for Child Profile and Child Preparation services.

The SWAN Program is the first in the nation to partner with our Independent Living Services (IL) to offer what have traditionally been considered "adoption only" services to all children in foster care, regardless of their court ordered permanency goal, and to promote the use of these services for older youth in care in

danger of aging out of the system without a permanency resource. In addition to helping older youth find a permanent connection, whether that is an adoptive resource, a relative, a legal custodian, a mentor or a positive relationship with a significant adult, SWAN services provide something older youth in care desperately need, and which most of us took for granted as we became young adults:

- Their history;
- Their understanding of what happened to them;
- Their medical records;
- Their social summaries;
- Their sense of connectedness;
- Their sense of belonging; and
- Their relationships.

Older youth in care, especially those in danger of aging out, have a right to know why they were placed into care, why they were moved from place to place, where their family members are and how to obtain their medical history. Without these valuable pieces of information, they are left to believe their own, often contorted, views of their placement and their personal history. The collaboration between SWAN and IL has resulted in older youth being discharged from care to a more secure future and earned SWAN and IL an Adoption Excellence Award for increasing the number of older youth discharged to a permanent placement.

In addition to direct services, SWAN offers several support services that are designed to help move children more quickly through the child welfare system. Two of the most successful services provided are the SWAN Legal Services Initiative (LSI) and the American Bar Association's (ABA) Barriers to Permanency Project. *Those counties that use either the LSI or who have used both the LSI and ABA projects have seen*

*(continued on page 3)*

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an average decrease of 262 days - more than 8 ½ months - in a child's overall length of stay in foster care, compared to counties who do not use either project. Both the ABA and the LSI have won Adoption Excellence Awards for decreasing the overall length of stay of children in foster care.

Another important support service offered to waiting children is the services of the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange (PAE) and our Web site [www.adoptpakids.org](http://www.adoptpakids.org). Pennsylvania was one of the first states to have a Web site devoted specifically to its waiting children. When a child is registered with PAE, they are also registered on [www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org). For the last several years, the majority of adopted children that were featured on the [www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org) site were Pennsylvania children. The Heart Gallery, a photographic exhibit of waiting children that travels the state, is also featured on the PAE Web site. The photographic exhibit has proven very successful. Of the 100 children

featured, 35 have been placed into adoptive homes. In addition to the Heart Gallery, SWAN funds three waiting child segments, WHTM's "Val's Kids," KDKA's "A Child Waits" and WBRE's "A Little Love," that are designed to help find permanent families for children with a goal of adoption. Each is very successful, with 40-60 percent of the children featured placed into adoptive homes.

In an effort to help sustain those families who do step forward to provide a permanent home to children from the Pennsylvania foster care system, SWAN offers post-permanency services to any family that has adopted, whether or not they adopted a child from the child welfare system and to families who provide permanency to children from the child welfare system through permanent legal custodianship or formal kinship care. Families self-refer for SWAN post-permanency services; there are no costs to the families or to their county agencies for these services. SWAN post-

permanency services are also one of a kind. No other state provides the amount of post-permanency services to the adoptive, kinship and legal custodianship families. SWAN post-permanency services also received an Adoption Excellence Award for continued support to adoptive families.

Pennsylvania has what it takes to help move children more quickly through our system. We have the direct services, the support services and the policies in place to ensure success. All of the support services offered are designed to work hand-in-hand with SWAN direct services. Both the direct services and the support services are provided to help achieve permanency for all waiting children in a timely manner. Any county interested in learning more about any of the support services offered should contact me at [lodeck@state.pa.us](mailto:lodeck@state.pa.us) or at (717) 772-7046 for more information. ✂

## **aroundthestate**

# **SWAN Matching Committee: What We Can Do For You!**

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

Are you planning a matching event or hosting some other type of matching activity? The SWAN Matching Committee was created under the SWAN prime contract to promote and support matching events across the state.

The Matching Committee can help support your event by posting information on the [www.adoptpakids.org](http://www.adoptpakids.org) and [www.diakon-swan.org](http://www.diakon-swan.org) Web sites, supplying posters about your waiting children, providing waiting child compact disks and attending the event to promote the waiting children registered with the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange and SWAN services.

Additionally, if you provide information about your matching event to the SWAN Helpline, they will share that information with families to help publicize your

upcoming event. If you request it, Helpline will also contact families in your area to tell them about the event.

The committee is comprised of contract staff from across the state and DPW staff. The current Matching Committee members are Denise Maxwell, Jane Johnston, Karen Lollo, Sue Zola, Karen Oldham, Kim Deiter, Roberta Daniels, Pat Hostetter, Tammy Hendrix, Melissa Eller, Pam Wagner, James Biesecker and Desiree Weisser.

If you would like the Matching Committee to help support your event, please contact Denise Maxwell, Chair of the Matching Committee, at 717-231-5385 or [dmaxwell@diakon-swan.org](mailto:dmaxwell@diakon-swan.org). ✂

# 2008 Pennsylvania Youth Summit: Partner for Change

by Barbara Huggins, Youth Ambassador, Child Welfare Training Program

In March 2008, youth gathered from across the state at the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program (CWTP) to discuss the child welfare system and to make recommendations for changes and improvements.

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Youth Workgroup, while developing the statewide self-assessment, simultaneously planned a two-day leadership event designed to engage youth and stakeholders to further identify challenges in the child welfare system and develop strategies to overcome these barriers. The 2008 Pennsylvania Youth Summit: Partner for Change, laid a framework for future youth engagement efforts and change plans. Youth from around the state participated in their choice of three out of five of the following workshops:

- Rites of Passage: Mentally, Physically, and Emotionally
- Unleash your Genius: Getting Prepared for College or Career
- Fights for Your Rights! Speak Up, Speak Out!
- Get Connected, Stay Connected
- Write for your Rights: Where I'm From

Each workshop was designed to build skills for youth while allowing them to discuss the current strengths and barriers/challenges in Pennsylvania related to the topic. Youth co-facilitators led discussions about these strengths and challenges while helping participants to develop

strategies and recommendations to improve services.

Youth recommendations garnered at the Youth Summit will be used to inform the state's Program Improvement Plan (PIP). The PIP will guide Pennsylvania's practice improvement efforts for the next five years; thus it is critical to involve youth in the planning process and implementation phase. Therefore, Youth Ambassadors will continue to be involved with the CFSR Steering Committee as it works to improve child welfare services in Pennsylvania.

The CWTP, with the support of its many partners, is committed to engaging youth in all levels of program assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation; as well as involving youth in technical assistance and training efforts. We are pleased to partner with youth and other key stakeholders from across the commonwealth to help improve outcomes for children, youth and families involved with Pennsylvania's child welfare system.

For more information regarding the Youth Summit and other Youth Advisory Board happenings please visit Pennsylvania's Independent Living Web site at [www.independentlivingpa.org](http://www.independentlivingpa.org) and refer to the "Current Events" section where there is more information plus a video highlighting the event. ✎✎



Youth from across Pennsylvania participated in discussions, workshops and fun activities during the Youth Summit.

# Changing the Perspective of Traumatized Children and Youth

by Darla L. Henry, SWAN Best Practice Specialist, Family Design Resources

Why do traumatized children think, feel and act the way they do? Are traditional methods of therapeutic intervention effective, and if not, what alternative approaches might reach these children and youth? While an adolescent's refusal to go to school or their angry outbursts may appear to be oppositional behavior or depression, in fact, they may be a reaction to a traumatic reminder from their past. Their reactions to our words or cues frequently trigger out-of-control reactions that result in our feeling inadequate, unappreciated and finally angry at the child.

Inherent in working with children and youth who have come into the system as a result of abuse or neglect are the profound losses they have experienced in their lives. Attachment difficulties are evident and impact the ability of children and youth to relate in mutually satisfying relationships with their caregivers and social networks. They are unable to accurately evaluate or trust the motives of others, even when these are good and loving messages.

Relationship coaching (Leslie, 2002), an approach to working with traumatized children, suggests coaching these children, rather than working with children and youth in the context of a parent-child relationship. Behaviors are first categorized as annoying, immoral or destructive to “normalize” understanding and expectations for the work. For example, a child who is attention-seeking is annoying, not destructive. However, ongoing attention-seeking behaviors bring frustration, anger, withdrawal and often power struggles within the context of a parent-child relationship. Moving into a coaching relationship eliminates the pressure of “pretending” a parent-child relationship. Reciprocation is unnecessary in the coaching relationship, and negative behaviors are recognized as part of a child's natural response system.

Coaching initiates pro social interactions by presenting instructions to the child on how to interact with another to get their needs met. Coaching is teaching the child a language that helps them recognize feelings and needs, as well as recognizing that traumatized children do not have this language. A good analogy is the teaching of a foreign language.

In a coaching role, the adult or parent has no emotional investment with the child and only interacts in a teaching role. A coach wants to bring out the best and sees solutions to problems and difficulties. A coach assumes the child knows nothing about the game. Using this approach instead of a parent-child model fosters connectedness by first identifying feelings and then prompting their expression, offering guidance (not solving the problem), separating “bad” behavior from the “good” self, role-playing conflict situations, humor and fun, and the teaching of “I” statements.

The coach supports and reinforces the child's efforts to respond to the instructions given. Negative behaviors are contained or controlled with natural and logical consequences. The progression of change in behaviors occurs in four phases where a child moves from opposition to being coached (language is modeled), to reluctance (behavior is shaped), internalization (responses are reinforced) and finally spontaneity in a reciprocal relationship. The child or youth is told what to do and how to do it. For example, if a child is talking incessantly, the coaching response to identify feelings might be, “You are chattering again. You are worried that you don't exist.” What follows is a shaping instruction where the coach would say, “Here is where you tell me that you are afraid that no one loves you.” “Go.” These instructions show the child how to practice relationship building by first learning the language of recognizing their own needs and then communicating them to others. In the final phase, the child is able to spontaneously say that they want to be loved.

And finally, reducing negative behaviors does not necessarily result in an increase in positive behaviors. “All children have negative behaviors and parents still love, value and care for them” (Leslie, 2002). Leslie's approach provides another tool to support the work with our traumatized children that leads to effectiveness and change for the lives of these children. ☘

*Leslie, K. (2002). When a stranger calls you mom. Brand New Day Publishing: NC.*

(continued from page 1)

for a week of respite from his foster family, who needed time to determine if they were meant to adopt him. We promptly fell in love with him. His family decided to make the long-term commitment, and legally adopted him.

The experience left us suddenly, aching aware of the great need for foster parents. It was as though we had walked into a dark room and God had turned on a lamp. We discovered that the room was filled with children who had been orphaned – through neglect, abuse, addictions or other bad choices. They had been orphaned emotionally, physically and spiritually. We felt that God was calling us to be part of the solution, one child at a time.

In January 1999, we updated our home study to include foster care. We started doing weekend respites for kids in birth families with fragile home situations. We could handle that. But after a while, our family decided that what we really wanted was to adopt another child. In June 1999, Johnna (then 8 years old) joined our family. We were the seventh home in her eight years of life. We simply plugged her in between 6-year-old Ashley and 12-year-old Declan. A year later she had melded into our family and been legally adopted, and we opened our home again to foster children.

So what motivates a person to become a foster parent? I took an informal survey of friends from my foster parent association, asking them to put into their own words why they made the decision to enter the unique realm of foster care. Sandy Schindler of Coatesville said, *“David and I feel this is a ministry. It makes us feel closer to God.”*

My friend Tom Houghton of Avondale said he and his wife Danielle became foster parents initially *“because we had an extra bedroom that we felt guilty about having, knowing there were many kids out in the world who need a roof over their heads. Plain and simple.”* Renee Granger of Exton added, *“to give a child a chance to start over.”*

These statements echo results of the 2001 University of Tennessee study “Recruitment and Foster Family Service” (by Mary Ellen Cox, Cheryl Buehler and John Orme). The paper summarizes, *“In terms of fostering motives, 51 percent of families reported one or more ‘wanting children’ motives; 67 percent of families reported four or more ‘giving to children’ motives, and 34 percent of families reported one or more ‘satisfying family needs’ motives.”* Our family is not adequately represented in this study. We would be included in the percentage of families who report the “listening to God” motive.

I live in the real world, where emotions sometimes run high, wounds sometimes run deep, and exhaustion sometimes seeps out of every pore. But my heart’s desire can be found in Jeremiah 7:23: *“Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you”* (NASB).

I want it to be well with me - even if it means dwelling (well into my 50s) in décor from the Early Garage Sale Period, surrounded by fingerprinted wallpaper. Even if it means dashing past lizards trapped in plastic containers on the kitchen counter or spending evenings entangled in teen angst.

And I want it to be well for these kids. Even if it means that first we have to slice through lots of yucky stuff before the healing process can begin – both our yucky stuff and their yucky stuff. In our house, healing is an “equal opportunity blessing.” We don’t assume that only foster children have issues. Everyone in our house has issues! We want everyone to feel that he or she deserves the love, commitment and prayers of everyone else within our home.

So how can we be absolutely sure that we heard “the call?” Usually the certainty comes to me in a whisper, when I least expect it. It has a tendency to bless my socks off!

For example, Laura used to listen

intently to the children’s message in church each Sunday, invariably anxious to contribute her thoughts. Her little hand would shoot up as my big husband hunkered down in the pew, preparing for the worst. One week, our pastor shared the story in Luke where Jesus is asked about whether a citizen should pay taxes. Jesus responds to the question with his own question, *“Whose image appears on the coin?”* He is told, *“Caesar’s.”* And Jesus replies, *“Then pay Caesar what is due Caesar, but give God what is God’s.”*

The pastor then asked the children, *“Where can we find God’s image?”* The familiar hand flew into the air, dancing like a hummingbird. How could the pastor ignore her passion? I had to choke back tears when my precious foster daughter answered, *“My life?”*

That’s right, little one – your life. And you have stamped your image on my life forever.

Laura left our home in June 2004, almost two years to the day of her arrival. I thought my heart would shatter, but it didn’t. Laura returned to her birthmother and they are doing well. I told Laura that she should be proud of her mom for working so hard to get her back. We see Laura regularly and have forged a positive relationship with her mom. I am sure this is the reason we maintain the level of access that we have.

In six years as a foster family, God has supplied our every need. Twenty-six children have blessed us with their beautiful smiles and unique personalities. Some come for a weekend respite, some for several months. Laura stayed the longest. I think we taught her about God’s love. And she taught us that although we may “love them too much too let them go,” it is our job to love them *enough* to let them go. 🌱


# Child Abuse Prevention Month 2008: Blue Ribbons and Painting Across Pennsylvania

by Beth Bitler, Program Manager, Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance

Pennsylvanians observed Child Abuse Prevention Month in April with several events, led by Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance (PFSA) in cooperation with a dozen other organizations. The highlight of the month was the creation of four murals – in Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Scranton and Pittsburgh. Members of the General Assembly and Department of Public Welfare staff, school children, families visiting the Children's Museum in Pittsburgh, folks having their lunch break on a gorgeous spring day and the residents of My Sister's Place (mother/child substance abuse program) participated in the creation of the murals. The murals will be permanently displayed in government and nonprofit agency buildings.

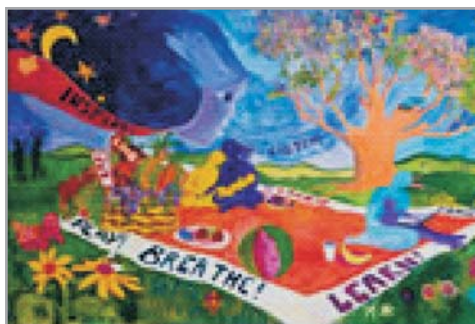
Working with Heart to Art, a dynamic group of artist mentors who designed the murals based on what each community and location felt was important, we were able to create unique pieces of art. For example, the Pittsburgh mural featured the three rivers and the Pittsburgh skyline, with families at play and learning nearby. The Philadelphia mural included slogans from recovery and twelve step programs. Reproductions of the murals in poster and postcard form will be available this fall.

During the month of April, PFSA distributed more than 200 copies of the "Resources for Local Communities" book, approximately 6,000 blue ribbon pins and almost 3,000 "One Tough Job" cards, a new prevention resource for parents. Hundreds of people attended each mural painting event and learned more about the many ways child abuse can be prevented.

It's not too late to order "One Tough Job" cards, the new resource for increasing awareness in parents – that their job is tough, but help and support are available from a number of Pennsylvania organizations. These eye-catching cards can be displayed in reception areas, enclosed in information packets or serve as a quick reminder of positive parenting strategies. To see a sample of the cards, visit our Web site at [www.pa-fsa.org](http://www.pa-fsa.org) or contact our office for a sample copy. They will be available while supplies last at a minimum cost. 



Harrisburg Mural



Scranton Mural



Philadelphia Mural



Pittsburgh Mural

# Mentors

by Sandy Gallagher, Director, Office of Children, Youth and Families

If you have seen Pam Wagner's child preparation workshop you probably liked the balloon exercise as much as I did. If you haven't seen this exercise, you can view it at [www.independentlivingpa.org](http://www.independentlivingpa.org) as part of the Youth Summit held in March 2008.

Pam demonstrates that each balloon represents an issue that we all face in life like bills, vehicles, school, insurance, relationships, etc. If you are all alone it is impossible to keep all of these balloons in the air without any of them hitting the ground. But when you add significant people in your life that you can depend upon, the balloons stay afloat with the help of many hands. This exercise is a metaphor for managing life and the depth of your personal relationships. Older youth in foster care need many persons to help them manage their issues as much, if not more, than any of us.

Mentors are one way to keep these many balloons afloat. By being involved with youth, even those who are adopted and now have new families, life becomes easier to navigate with many trusting relationships rather than being alone.

I have had the pleasure of knowing Quinton Brubaker for the past five years. He is a celebrity within this network for his public speaking, conference keynote address and membership on the SWAN Advisory Committee. Over the past five years he and I have remained in close contact and met many of life's challenges together. We have celebrated his adoption finalization, first apartment, new jobs, birthdays and Christmas, marriage and the birth of his children. Together we have also mourned the deaths of his infant daughter and birth father, divorce and recent deployment to Afghanistan with the U.S. Army.

Committed and loyal friends are there for you no matter what life brings. These friends do not replace



Quinton, proud father with baby Owen.

your family but rather, enhance your life. There are many ways to make a commitment and have meaningful relationships with older youth. There is no magic about it – the greatest gift you can give is as simple as being a good listener.

Our youth deserve many significant individuals in their lives. An abundance of people who care about you is never a bad thing. We all need to check in with family and friends when we have a job

interview, make decisions about education, finances, relationships, etc. Bouncing ideas off of many people is always a good way to gather information and arrive at your opinion or decision about how to proceed.

Everyone needs a supportive network to get them through life. Please do not miss the opportunity to become a friend to a youth who needs one. There is no shortage of youth who need others or the ways that you can contribute your gifts to others. You too can become a balloon-keeper-upper!

Quinton would be thrilled to receive your well wishes. He has requested care packages (crackers, Pringles Potato chips, peanut butter and coffee) be a part of any packages that are sent. He can be reached at:

PFC Brubaker-Gass, Quinton R.  
68<sup>th</sup> CSE, 62<sup>nd</sup> EN BN  
ORGUN-E  
APO AE 09311

The US Post Office has free flat rate boxes available and the postage to an APO or FPO is \$10.95 regardless of the weight of the package. ✂



# Achieving Independence Center, Job Corps Student “Paints It Green”

by Rachel Thomas, Communication Coordinator, ResCare

Regional Director of Arbor Education and Training, Ron Spangler, is all fired up about the synergy between Arbor Education and Training and ResCare Job Corps Centers. Stories like 18-year old Lindsay Benjamin warm his heart. Lindsay, a former student at Arbor’s Achieving Independence Center (AIC), came back to the AIC after graduating from ResCare-managed Blue Ridge Job Corps Center.

“The AIC had a great impact on me,” Lindsay said. “As soon as I left Job Corps I came back to learn more.” Lindsay, who first started taking life skills classes at the AIC, became interested in Job Corps when his father suggested that he go to Job Corps to pick up skills and earn his GED. He signed up, and nine months later graduated with a Career Diploma and a Certification in Landscaping.

Lindsay is currently taking housing classes at the AIC where he is learning about landlord and tenant issues, rights and leases. He also participated in the Hospitality Training Program, where participants learn everything from dishwashing to cooking in a café setting.

“Over the next 20 years, 70 million workers, mostly Baby Boomers, will be leaving the workforce, with only 44 million youth to fill their positions,” Ron said. “This means one person will be doing the job of two people. It’s critical we don’t leave the youth behind.”

The AIC is a collaborative one-stop center that provides access to a full range of independent living services aimed to ensure that youth leaving foster care have an opportunity to develop independent living skills, build a network of social supports,

find safe affordable housing and stable employment. Government studies identified foster care youth as a top priority of the neediest young people. Youth in foster care are emancipated between the ages of 18-21. Usually, they need additional training.

“It is essential that we provide training to equip them, not just to get a job, but to get a job with livable wages,” Ron said. “This is where Job Corps comes in.”

Job Corps can provide foster youth, including those receiving services from the AIC, help in transitioning to self sufficiency and independent living. Job Corps can help youth get their General Educational Development (GED) or high school diploma. They also provide medical and dental care, housing, meals, career and trade training and job placement.

For Lindsay, Job Corps and the AIC go hand-in-hand. He feels Job Corps would be beneficial for other youth in the AIC who want to further their skills or get their GED. “As long as they stay focused on what they want

to do, Job Corps is there to help,” he said.

Ron is making plans to urge other students at the AIC to follow in Lindsay’s footsteps. He is in the process of scheduling Job Corps representatives to come to the AIC monthly to explain the benefits of Job Corps and get acquainted with the youth. He also plans on taking students in Philadelphia to tour a nearby Job Corps center in Edison, NJ, which is also a member of the ResCare family.

The key to building relationships, Ron said, is spending time with students on a regular basis. “We will have 650 foster care youth next year and I would love to have a significant number of them in Job Corps centers,” he said.

A project of the Department of Human Services, the AIC partners with Philadelphia based groups dedicated to providing high quality programs for youth in Philadelphia. Since opening its doors in December 2002, the Achieving Independence Center provides diverse services to youth ages 16-21 who are transitioning from foster care to independent living. This innovative program has adopted the One-Stop center model.

The AIC is a prime example of successful city-led partnerships. “Youth Come First,” has been DHS guiding principle for the Center since its inception. The AIC consistently succeeds at accomplishing this goal. For additional information contact the AIC’s Program Director, Evelyn Busby at 267-514-3554 or [ebusby@aicenter.us](mailto:ebusby@aicenter.us).



AIC Center student Lindsay Benjamin, also a graduate of Blue Ridge Job Corps Center in Marion, VA, plans to pursue a career as a culinary chef and open his own restaurant.



# *Celebrating Resource Families*

*by Kathleen Ramper, Executive Director, Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association*

May is National Foster Care Month, a time when communities across the nation honor America's foster families. On May 12, 2008, the Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association (PSRFA) and Three Rivers Adoption Council (TRAC) held a celebration at the Capitol in Harrisburg. It was a great event and brought awareness to our legislators about the number of foster families that provide safe, stable and supportive homes to over 20,000 children and youth in our state. In addition, it brought awareness to our legislators about the need for permanency in these children's lives.

This year, a poster and essay contest for children from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade was held. More than 55 poster and essay submissions were received. The

winners attended the event where they were presented with awards and were recognized by Lt. Governor Catherine Baker Knoll and legislators. Resource families (foster and adoptive) and their children, PSRFA and TRAC stakeholders, Department of Public Welfare staff and other resource family advocates attended the event where they were inspired by songs performed by 15-year old DeMarra Underwood, and the spiritual dancing of two members from Rejoice! Inc. foster care agency's dance troupe. Attendees were also led on tours to the Senate chambers and the Lt. Governor's office where photos were taken and several of the essay winners shared their emotional stories with the group. ✿✿



*Essay winner, Danny Turner, accepts his award from Catherine Baker Knoll.*



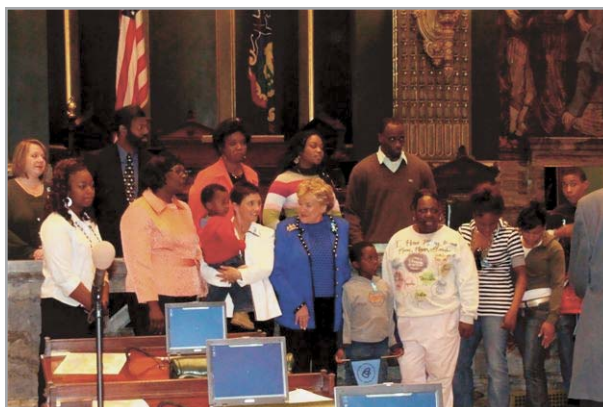
*Kathy Ramper, Executive Director of PSRFA and Jackie Wilson, Executive Director of TRAC present Catherine Baker Knoll with an award for her continued support of resource families and foster children.*



*De Marra Underwood accepts a recognition award from Catherine Baker Knoll for her involvement in this year's event.*



*Caran Sensenig displays his winning poster with a representative from Senator Mike Folmer's Office.*



*Resource Families, children and others who attended this year's event, pose for a photo in the Senate Chambers.*

# A Family Of Your Own “Building And Growing A Family” A Two-Sided Story

by Jeffery Richards, 2008 Foster Care Month Essay Winner

When I was fourteen years old I became involved with the Clinton County Children and Youth Agency. When I think about myself at the age 14, I can honestly say, I was juvenile and did not know much about life and family values. As a young child, I grew up in a family that found it hard to show that they cared about me. I never had the best of best relationships when it came to my father and stepmother, but everyday I am grateful that I still have the opportunity to know them. Now that I do not live with my father, I can honestly say my relationship with him and my stepmother is better that it has ever been.

When I was fourteen, I was removed from my father’s home and placed in foster care with Richard and Barbara Forshey. For many children who are placed in foster care, this is a dramatic situation to overcome. Me on the other hand, I felt it was the beginning of a new life. I knew my foster family from before I was placed there, so I knew things would be okay. I never thought that one day I would find a family who truly loved and cared about me like they do. At age seventeen, I am still a foster child, and I have been blessed with the most important gift in life, a family.

Family is a hard concept for me to define. Many people like to say a family is a group of people what share common bloodlines, moral values, and ideas. I, myself, like to think of a family as a group of people who grow and share a personal relationship between themselves and each other.

I feel a good family is built on the growth of relationships and trust. From the time children are born, they learn to know who their family is. It is like instinct to them as babies. They start building a relationship with their mother and father and siblings, giving each relationship their own recognizable personality traits and characteristics. As time goes by, they become friends and learn to love each other. This is what brings a family together.

But what about children who are placed in foster care? Most children who are placed in foster care already have families or people who care about them that they anticipate going home to. And then sometimes you are given children who have no one. How are these children supposed to be dropped into a home and feel comfortable

living with complete strangers, especially if they will be living with a family long term?

The goal of any adoption agency is to provide a home to children growing up without a permanent caring family! For adoptive and foster parents the most rewarding thing about having children is that each day they get the opportunity to build a relationship with a child and grow to love them.

I have been given the opportunity to become part of an amazing family. I have the best relationship with my foster mother. I truly know what this is where I belong because I have grown to love her. It’s the greatest thing when you are given a child who is looking for a place to belong, and finally finds a family who cares about them.

*(continued on page 12)*



Jeffery Richard accepts his winning essay award from Lt. Governor Catherine Baker Knoll.

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I was an unfamiliar part of the Forshey family when I first went to live with them. But, with time, I came to realize that they really did love me. In order for a family to really thrive, relationships have to be two-sided. Both sides have to work to build their relationship with love and trust. It will not work if one side of the relationship holds back any feelings. Those feelings will leave doubts in a person's mind.

I have been through many situations with my family but no matter what happens, in the end everything comes out fine. The best thing about being part of a family is that every problem encountered will bring a family closer together in the end. When I think about the future, I plan to go to college. As a foster child I can up and leave and never return to my home again. But I know that no matter where I go in life, I will always have a home to come back to. After I leave for college and Christmas break comes, I will come back home because I feel in my heart that that is where I belong. I know that I am wanted there and that makes coming home feel really special.

A few months ago my foster parents asked me if I wanted to be adopted by them. However, because of personal affairs, I felt it was not a wise decision to make at the time. I sometimes regret my decision and deep down inside, the fact that they would be willing to go out of their way to make me a permanent part of their family is

so much to be grateful for. I can say I truly love them as my own parents, and I hope that someday I can find peace in myself to allow them to adopt me. Sometimes I wonder if they feel I do not love them enough to allow them to. I have grown so much as a part of this family that I cannot even fathom ever leaving them behind.

I have become a part of their family unit and that is the most important thing in my life. The one thing that everyone looks for in life is a place to belong, and I have found my place without a doubt. I thank God that I have found a family to call my own. I feel that all children should have a place where they are cared for, much like my home. What makes my parents great is that they give children a home with lots of love and are always open to making life the best they can for them.

What I hope for people to gain out of this essay is that a family is not built from conception or blood, but a relationship that is grown and built with love, trust, and friendship. I have grown up so much since I have been in foster care. It has been a great experience and I will never regret that I was given a family who loves me the way they do. I love my parents and brothers and sisters. One day, I hope I will be able to give back to them everything that they have given me. Just because a child is not a member of a bloodline does not mean one can't be a part of a loving family. Families are built on love, not blood. ✨

## Paralegal Corner

# LSI Diligent Search Efforts

by Natalie Witt, Esq., Legal Services Initiative Division Manager, Diakon/FDR

The Legal Services Initiative (LSI) has created a Diligent Search Committee with a goal of improving the quality of diligent searches for missing parents or relatives conducted in Pennsylvania. By encouraging counties to begin searches right at a child's intake, participants for a child's Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) meetings can be identified early on. By starting diligent searches right away, a child's permanency solution may be expedited.

The committee is comprised of seven paralegals from around the state: Suzanne Lovecchio, Lycoming County; Lorelei Johnson, Lackawanna County;

John Porecca, Delaware County; Meagan Belcher, Montgomery County; Jennifer Risser, Dauphin County; and Barbara Stockton and Tet George, both Lehigh County. The committee meets once a month and is currently updating the Diligent Search Packet, which will be submitted to the Office of Children, Youth and Families with a planned release date in early fall.

In addition, the LSI Warmline can help support your diligent search issues. If you are currently working on a search and need assistance, you can submit your problem to the LSI Warmline and a Diligent Search Committee member

will respond. Please note that LSI will not perform your diligent search, but a committee member will analyze your own efforts and make suggestions that you may have overlooked or will explain your next steps when all avenues are exhausted.

LSI's new Diligent Search Committee plans to offer diligent search trainings throughout the network beginning this fall. If your county would like to schedule a diligent search training session, please contact Natalie Witt at 888-793-2512, extension 6449, or at [nwitt@diakon-swan.org](mailto:nwitt@diakon-swan.org). ✨

# Older Youth and Adoption: Adopting Teen-Friendly Practices

by David P. Kelly, assistant staff director, American Bar Association, Center on Children and the Law

## *Overcoming Preconceptions*

When thinking of adoption the most common picture that enters people's minds is of an infant or very young child. This makes sense, as children usually enter families as infants. Babies are cute, wholly dependent on their caretakers and, in the adoption setting, offer something of a blank slate or opportunity to mold. However, statistics show that nearly one-third of all youth awaiting adoption are between the ages of 11 and 15.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, when it comes to adoption, older youth, and especially teens, are viewed differently.

There may be a perception that older youth are better able to care for themselves, and therefore in less need of adoptive homes or that they are uninterested in or even resistant to being adopted. Caution must be taken not to accept or interpret typical teenage behavior as informed adult decision making and professionals must work hard to see past tough and sometimes unpleasant exteriors. As bonding and attachment studies make clear, past parental failures, fears of rejection, and histories of abandonment and neglect deeply affect youths' abilities to put themselves in situations where they are vulnerable to further rejection and disappointment.

## *Avoiding Common Pitfalls*

Two common explanations are given to explain why adoption is not the permanency goal for older youth. The most common explanation is that there are “no adoptive resources.” The second is the child does not wish or is “unwilling” to be adopted. Overwhelmingly, the permanency goal for youth that fall into either category is another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA).

While both explanations and the corresponding permanency goal of APPLA are valid, each is also dangerous, as they may mark the end of diligence in pursuing adoption as a permanency goal. Child welfare professionals should be aware of these common pitfalls and work to identify adoptive resources and counsel youth on their options.

## *No Adoptive Resource*

The “no adoptive resource” explanation should be viewed as a point-in-time determination to be revisited regularly, not a final conclusion. It signifies that work must continue to identify potential resources and these resources need not be family. The decision to adopt is monumental for the prospective family and child alike. The decision warrants careful consideration and takes time since, in addition to providing permanency for the child, it permanently alters and adds to an existing family. While legal and case work professionals deal with the topic regularly, the children and youth they represent are likely to face the decision once in their lifetime.

If initial searches are unsuccessful, efforts should be encouraged to create or develop an adoptive resource. Adoption should always be an option. Resources should be routinely revisited to check for change. Continued follow-up may give current placement resources and foster children time to fully consider the matter or possibly lead to identifying a new resource.<sup>2</sup>

## *Youth “Unwilling” to be Adopted*

The second explanation, that the youth does not want or is unwilling to be adopted must be respected, but should not mark an automatic end. This answer is common in jurisdictions that have adoption consent language in their regulations. Pennsylvania statute, for example, requires that youth consent to adoption before proceeding with any

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adoption of a child 12 years or older.<sup>3</sup> While this provision supports child-centered practice, it can be interpreted as a final answer and may lead some professionals to end adoption efforts. The word “unwilling” is suggestive, and unnecessarily negative.

Find out why. Caseworkers and attorneys should not assume all youth fully understand adoption. It can be a difficult concept to comprehend. Refusal in some instances may directly result from misunderstanding or fear. Make sure a meaningful and complete explanation of the process is provided in a way the youth understands and that no questions are left unanswered. Encourage the youth to consider the idea.

When making a life-changing decision one typically proceeds with caution. Think about the last permanent life-changing decision you made, and reflect on the time and information you needed to think it through. Now try to make the same decision with the life experiences of a foster youth. Try to imagine it from the perspective of a prospective adoptive parent as well. From this day forward you will have a new member of your family forever. Any concerns?

### ***Another Planned Permanency Living Arrangement (APPLA)***

Unlike all other permanency goals, APPLA is designed for older teens. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997<sup>4</sup> (ASFA) makes safety and timely permanency for all children a priority. Teens present a unique challenge, especially those who grow up in foster care and have little prospects for adoption. APPLA is designed for youth who are unlikely to achieve permanency through reunification, adoption, permanent legal custodianship or placement with a fit and willing relative. It is the least preferred permanency goal under ASFA. It is also the only permanency goal that requires the agency to document a compelling reason to the court before selection.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, it is one of the most common permanency goals for teens in foster care.

The goal of APPLA is to equip youth with skills to function independently and to piece together comprehensive services and supports to help them be self-sufficient. Practitioners and judges often misunderstand APPLA and misidentify it as “independent living” or “long-term foster care,” neither of which are permanency goals under federal statute. Independent living services should be available to teens in care and include life skill instruction and opportunities to learn skills typically taught by parents. Independent living programs often place youth in supervised living settings where they can learn and practice domestic, budgetary and decision-making skills to meet adult responsibilities.

Child welfare professionals should ensure youth are not prematurely moved to an APPLA case goal. When APPLA is the primary or concurrent goal for a youth, be sure the APPLA plan is complete, and is moving the youth toward sustainable independence. Just as the court requires heightened scrutiny from the agency in providing a compelling reason why APPLA has been chosen over other more permanent placement options, child welfare professionals should also closely evaluate the decision for details about the skills the youth needs to develop and how and when the plan will develop those skills. Find out what the plan is for permanent housing, transportation, education, employment, health care, therapy and/or counseling, connecting with important adults and/or mentors, support services, establishing or nurturing familial relationships if appropriate, and establishing sustainable independence.

### ***How Children's Attorneys Can Encourage Teen Adoption***

Experience with the ABA Permanency Barriers Project has shown children's attorneys can play a vital role in their child client's life in and out of court. Trusting relationships are established and the attorney becomes a source of continuity in the child's life. To adequately fulfill this charge, children's attorneys must get to know their clients.

While case files, court reports and conversations with case workers help you understand your clients' backgrounds and histories with the child welfare system, there is no substitute for one-on-one conversation. Make the effort to meet in person and make sure to give your client your full attention. Do not rush and do not interrogate. Try your best to get to know your client as a person, not just another case.

### ***Ask the Important Questions***

All of your client's experiences, before and after placement in the child welfare system, may affect their receptiveness to being adopted. It is important to learn as much as you can about your client to address their

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concerns and present information clearly. The best way to learn about your client is to speak with them directly and ask about their experiences, wishes, concerns and needs.

Children's attorneys should be actively involved and informed of all case planning for their clients. In seeking answers to the above questions and taking the time to get to know your client, you will be better informed and establish trust with your client. Never underestimate the impact your interest and attention has on a youth. Although agency case workers carry the primary responsibility to case plan with youth and explain the options, a child's attorney can provide reinforcement and counsel. Given the nature of teen behavior and relationships with authorities, the recommendations and advice from a case worker may not always be well received by a teen. The input and support from an outside advocate, someone whose job is to represent and advocate for the child, can make a powerful contribution.

### ***Promote Concurrent Planning***

ASFA encourages using concurrent planning,<sup>6</sup> which involves working toward two different permanency goals at the same time, rather than waiting for plan A to fail before beginning work on plan B. That is, even if adoption seems improbable, adoption planning and counseling should continue as part of the youth's concurrent plan. Time and knowledge can increase the likelihood that youth and adults alike will consider adoption.

### ***How Children's Attorneys Can Encourage Concurrent Planning for Adoption***

Although all advocates face limited time and resources it is critical to remain as actively involved in the youth's permanency planning as possible. Become familiar with agency case planning policy, regularly reach out to your client's case worker for updates (or counsel for the agency where that is protocol), attend multidisciplinary meetings (MDTs) or case review conferences and ask specific questions. Write and submit guardian *ad litem* reports to the court and other legal counsel, and while in court, never leave a permanency hearing without making sure the current permanency goal is clearly put on record and efforts made toward achieving the goal are specifically stated by the case worker or his/her legal counsel. Finally, always remember to ask what other options are being considered and stress the importance of covering all the bases.

### ***Conclusion***

Adoption should be seriously considered for all youth in care when reunification is unlikely, no matter their age. Agency case workers must continuously support and pursue adoption as an option for teens in care. Children's attorneys must remain strong advocates and counselors on adoption, hold case workers accountable and above all, be there to help their clients navigate difficult adoption decisions. ✂✂

*The views expressed herein have not been approved by the House of Delegates or the Board of Governors of the American Bar Association and, accordingly, should not be construed as representing the policy of the American Bar Association. The American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law is a program of the Young Lawyers Division. Nothing contained in this report is to be considered as the rendering of legal advice for specific cases, and readers are responsible for obtaining such advice from their own legal counsel. This article and any other materials herein are intended for informational and educational purposes only.*

<sup>1</sup> The AFCARS Report, August 2004, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. As of 2002 there were 126,000 youth awaiting placement in the United States. Revealing that 29% of all youth awaiting adoptive homes are between the ages of 11 and 15. An additional 5% of youth awaiting placement are between the ages of 15 and 18.

<sup>2</sup> For additional information on innovative foster parent recruitment programs, see *Foster Care Adoption in the United States: An Analysis of Interest in Adoption and a Review of State Recruitment Strategies*, November 2005, Commissioned by the National Adoption Day Coalition and conducted by The Urban Institute Child Welfare Research Program, available at [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)

<sup>3</sup> 23 Pa. § 2711.

<sup>4</sup> 42 U.S.C. §§ 620-679

<sup>5</sup> 45 C.F.R. § 1356.21(h)(3)

<sup>6</sup> 45 C.F.R. § 1356.21(b)(4)

# It's a Well Kept Secret...But Why?

*by Brenda Lawrence, SWAN Program Administrator, Diakon/FDR*

Every time I go out in public, I meet at least one person from a family who provides care to a child or older youth from the public child welfare system. Many of these families do not know about the great Post-Permanency services provided in Pennsylvania. So in case I do not run into you soon, let me tell you more about these services now.

Did you know that if you provide a child or youth with formal kinship care, have permanent legal custody or if you have adopted, your family may ask for services from the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network? Many families are not aware of these services, what they are or how to get started.

First let me tell you what they are. Post-Permanency services help families find the right services for their children and youth. The services are there when you are not sure how to help your children or older youth or when you are just feeling overwhelmed. I believe I have just described almost any family, but these services are designed specifically for families providing permanent homes to children from other birth families. The services will first find out what you need and then will connect you or your family members to useful services in your area. Support groups are available where families can meet with other families who are experiencing similar challenges. Another service will help your family design a respite program so your family members can have prepared and committed support from friends or extended family or other experienced families.

So how do you get started? You are in charge of the services. You decide when to make the call and select the

agency. The first step is to call the SWAN Helpline at 800-585-SWAN (7926). The phones are staffed Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Once a staff member answers your questions, you decide if you want to go forward and when you want to start. Besides getting started with the services, the staff also have many articles, resources and Web sites to point you to where you can get more information and resources about the situations that best relate to your own family's needs. You can also e-mail [info@diakon-swan.org](mailto:info@diakon-swan.org) and ask to be called or e-mailed about Post-Permanency services. It is your choice!

So what is the catch? Will anyone know you are asking for help? Good questions. The services are set up so confidentiality is assured. Only the agencies you select to provide services will know about your family. Sometimes families hesitate to ask for help because they are afraid someone will think the family cannot handle the child or situation. The truth is all families need help at some time, and this is the opportunity to get the specialized support needed for the many challenges faced by families who are raising children from other birth families.

If you are aware of Post-Permanency services and have used them in the past, you may still qualify for more services. The guidelines have recently changed, so please call the SWAN Helpline. It is always best to call and ask. If you know someone who could benefit from Post-Permanency services, please pass this information on to them and encourage them to call. We do not want these services to be a secret anymore. 🌱



# Achieving Independence Center Finds *Its Place* To Help Philadelphia's Youth Find Theirs

by Rachel Thomas, Communication Coordinator, ResCare

Foster care systems across the country face challenges in supporting the unique needs of older youth as they transition into adulthood. Philadelphia's Achieving Independence Center (AIC) has a solution. In fact, their visionary and promising one-stop membership model is emulated in other cities.

The AIC is a collaborative, one-stop operation that provides services for youth, ages 16 to 21, to help them develop independent living skills, build a network of social supports and find safe, affordable housing and stable employment. Through their unique, proactive approach they are able to provide services to the majority of their members while they are still in care.

The AIC opened the doors of its new, larger location to better serve Philadelphia youth transitioning from foster care to independent living.

The new location provides larger classrooms and technological

upgrades, allowing more workshops and easier access to coaches. The center will also provide more resources to train various Philadelphia Department of Human (DHS) Service teams and regional child welfare groups.

In the heart of Philadelphia's downtown business district, the new space is centrally located to transportation hubs and allows students to seek part-time employment close to the center.

The AIC celebrated its grand reopening in style with Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter, and senior DHS officials in attendance.

"Finding your place in the world is difficult enough for an 18-year old, but for these young people, attaining and maintaining self-sufficiency is extremely challenging," Mayor Nutter said. "By providing them with concrete educational and career development skills, as well as access to a strong network of social

supports, these young people will have an improved chance of achieving and sustaining self-sufficiency."

Regional Vice President for the Mid Atlantic Region of Arbor Education and Training, Dave Meara, agrees on the importance of the AIC in the lives of the youths it serves.

"For the past five years, the AIC has been a safe haven for youths transitioning out of the foster care system," Mr. Meara said. "The new facility demonstrates the commitment Mayor Nutter, the City of Philadelphia and the DHS has to help these youth reach a higher quality of life that they so rightly deserve."

For additional information regarding the AIC's transition programs for youth in foster care, contact Evelyn Busby, Director, at 215-574-9194 or [ebusby@aicenter.us](mailto:ebusby@aicenter.us). 🌱



At its new facilities, the AI Center will provide services to youth that are "aging out" of foster care.



Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter attended the reopening of the AI Center to show his support for the difference the center is making in the lives of the youths it serves.

## Profile of Jared Wiley

by Ali Nagle, Planning & Evaluation Specialist, Achieving Independence Center

“Live life to the fullest and understand you are somebody and not a number.” This quote by AIC member Jared Wiley describes both his advice to other youth in foster care and also his way of living life. Jared has certainly spent his time as a member of the AIC living to the fullest and taking advantage of every class and opportunity offered to him. Since becoming a member of the AIC in 2005, Jared has completed all the classes offered, was a trainee in the Hospitality Training Program and was named Male Mentee of the Year in 2007 by the Male Mentoring Program. Jared has continued his commitment to participating at Livingstone College where he recently completed his freshman year majoring in Social Work and Education. This past year at Livingstone, Jared was a member of the marching band, Assistant to the Director of Food Management and Assistant Manager of the Stage Crew. Jared plans to continue participating in the same clubs next year and will also be a Resident Advisor.



Jared has been in the foster care system since he was two years old. Throughout the years he has been in numerous

foster care placements but has been determined to continue working to achieve his dreams. Jared faced some challenges during his senior year at Northeast High School but through hard work, determination and the assistance of former Male Mentoring Coordinator Jamal Laidley, he was able to overcome his obstacles and was admitted to Livingstone College with a partial scholarship from the Marching Band. Between the partial scholarship he received and additional grants, Jared was able to attend college this past year without taking out any loans and expects the same for this

upcoming year.

Jared feels that his time at the AIC has been well spent and has helped him better himself and take responsibility for his life. Once he completes college, Jared plans to one day start his own foster care agency and also attend film school. He plans to work with other youth in foster care to ensure they continue to move forward with their lives and never let their dreams die.✂

## independentLiving

# Achieving Independence Center Members Receive Scholarships

by Ali Nagle, Planning & Evaluation Specialist, Achieving Independence Center

This academic year, Achieving Independence Center (AIC) high school members have been able to take advantage of local enrichment programs through a new relationship formed with the Program Coordinator of the Charles E. Ellis Grant and Scholarship Fund. The purpose the Charles Ellis Grant is to provide grants to girls enrolled in high school in Philadelphia County, from single-parent families, in need of aid to complete their high school education. The intent of the trust is to distribute grants on behalf of Philadelphia public school students to provide substantial, meaningful and life-changing benefits to students. The money is spent on programs in pre-college preparation, music, theater, sports and a host of other opportunities for

girls in Philadelphia public schools, as well as tuition assistance at diocesan and independent schools for girls in grades 9 through 12.

Five AIC members have received the Ellis Grant and used the funds for SAT preparation classes at Sylvan Learning Center, SAT testing registration/scores forwarded to colleges, music lessons, college enrollment and room and board fees. To enhance the number of youth applying for the grant for the upcoming academic year, the Education Team and Female Mentoring Program will be partnering on an information event in August. For additional information contact Ali Nagle or Harold Brooks at 215-574-9194.✂

## Commitment

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

It is funny how things work out. Rarely do we end up living our dreams as we imagine them. Somewhere between the dream and the destination are the lessons learned on the road that connects the two. By walking the road, we gain the wisdom that the dream and the destination are not as important as our commitment to the journey. Playing the part we were meant to play, in the way we were meant to play it, is a source of great joy and contentment. Likewise, successful resource families exhibit profound commitment to the journey and measure the joy of parenting by the contentment born of their commitment. It is the earmark of their success. It fosters contentment along a continuum of the possibility for it, in the kids they care for.

We all know that many of the kids we care for live in a world of chaos born from lives of uncertainty, loss and abuse. Sometimes the chaos is so profound that it functions as a coping mechanism to avoid overwhelming grief and to prevent the anxiety associated with belonging and risking reconnection with others. Developing connections, even for a fleeting moment, is essential to calm the tempest of chaos within. It is a process not a destination. It is fueled by a commitment that is stronger than the chaos it treats.

I have spoken to many resource families. One woman tearfully described her life as a resource family with her foster, now adopted son. She epitomizes the level of commitment of our resource families. Her son had physical, emotional and sexual abuse issues so profound that he functioned in a cycle of chaos. Unable to sit in a chair because of anxiety, he rarely rested long enough to watch a movie, have a conversation or participate in a board game. He ran away as a lifestyle. He climbed out windows and sat on the roof when he could not run far enough or fast enough. He was kicked out of school because he could not conform to their rules that prevented chaos.

He was severely neglected and initially he overate and was unable to be satiated. Later he rarely finished a meal and had an eating disorder. He was so uneasy in his own skin that he began to exhibit behaviors of self-harm. He bit his nails until they bled. He never slept regularly and would be up all night for days on end. He stole compulsively, hoarding what he stole. Stealing was his way to control his chaos. He stole things both sensible and senseless, from money to red beets. He was in residential treatment for three years battling episodes of attempted suicide. He had many counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists.

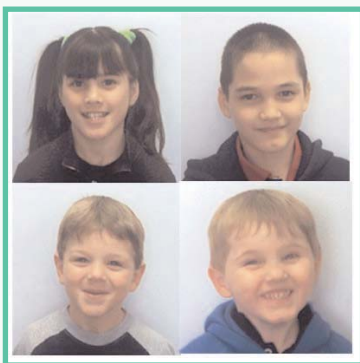
His adoptive mother weathered medication trials to treat his disorders and spent hours trying to get her son treatment, any treatment, that would work. She weathered the exposure of being a resource family and had her home, her life and her intentions constantly inspected and re-inspected while trying to deal with her son's inability to maintain his physical and emotional safety. She lost friends and relatives to his behavior. She spent thousands of dollars repairing the damage to her property from his behavior issues. He threw plates out of windows. She picked them up hoping the neighbors didn't notice. What he could not do for himself, she did for him.

Holidays were impossible, although she played them as though they were typical and normal. Eventually, he took drugs to calm his chaos. He burglarized a house to support his drug habit. After a decade and a half of attempting to calm his chaos, the woman spoke of her journey as his parent. She cried for his struggles. She cried for her fatigue. She spoke of her pain in visiting him in jail behind a piece of glass, unable to hug him. She rejoiced at the opportunity to just speak with him. Her life was without chaos as his chaos was confined by bars. Yet her joy was in seeking time with him. Her joy was in making the connection despite the journey and the chaos. When I asked her why she didn't just take a break or give up along the way she said, simply "He is my boy. No matter what, he is my boy." That is commitment of incredible strength. She will be there until death and beyond. She has the stamina for it because she has the commitment required for it.

The value of commitment is often underrated in our society. Everything is disposable, from diapers to marriages. Unyielding commitment creates connections despite efforts to sever ties. Commitment is not love but can be born of it. Love is not enough to parent hurt kids. Commitment is. A recruitment tool for developing and selecting strong resource families may not be matching likes and dislike but rather choosing families that share a single trait, the ability to profoundly commit, no matter what, despite whatever, forever. That is true permanency. It does not require a legal document, only a human connection of unyielding strength. ✨

# Pennsylvania's Waiting Children

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



## Meet Alyssa, Sam, Derrick and Nate!

Alyssa is a friendly 9-year old who has cerebral palsy. She makes friends easily, loves going to school and enjoys drawing, putting puzzles together, swimming and riding her scooter.

Sam is a friendly and outgoing boy 9-year old. He has a good sense of humor and loves to make people laugh. He is also artistic and has a good imagination. Sam enjoys playing outdoors and riding his bike as well as watching Yu-Gi-Oh on television.

Derrick is a delightful 6-year old who warms up easily to new people. He enjoys being active and likes coloring, swimming and playing outdoors. Derrick also loves fire trucks and cars. Derrick recently finished kindergarten and is improving his listening skills.

Nate is a charming and inquisitive 5-year old. He enjoys being active and likes playing outdoors, watching "SpongeBob SquarePants" and playing with his cars and trucks. Nate just finished preschool and is learning to listen and follow directions.

Alyssa, Sam, Derrick and Nate share a special bond with one another and it is important that they be adopted together. They need a patient forever family that will keep them safe while providing them with structure and consistency. They would do best in a home where they are the youngest or only children.

All families will be considered for this sibling group of four. Parental rights will be terminated upon identification of a permanent resource. Families who are interested in making this sibling group a part of their family may contact the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange at 1-800-227-0225. When contacting the exchange, please refer to the PAE identification number, C11AA30. ✂✂



## Meet Ray!

Ray is a kind and athletic 16-year old who is ready for a forever family. Ray is very active and enjoys competing in track and football. He is proud that he has earned varsity letters in both sports for several years. Ray has many interests, including sports, cars, action figures and video games. Ray likes spending his free time listening to music, working on the computer, taking walks and walking dogs. He is a responsible young man who maintains a paper route and works hard to earn good grades in school.

Ray enjoys the company of his peers and adults. He can be a risk taker but is successful with a positive male role model. Ray would like a family who can keep up with his busy lifestyle. He would also like a family who will allow him to maintain ties with his mentor. He is doing well in his present placement and likes to keep order by completing his chores and keeping his bedroom neat and clean. Ray's goals are to succeed in a family and study computers in college.

All families will be considered for Ray. He is legally free for adoption. Families who are interested in making Ray part of their family may contact the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange at 1-800-227-0225. When contacting the exchange, please refer to Ray's PAE identification number, C65AA01. ✂✂



## Meet Caitlin!

Caitlin is an active 14-year old who likes to participate in everything. She is a very good hip-hop dancer and she enjoys singing. She also likes shopping, crocheting and Chinese food.

Caitlin considers herself to be a leader and takes pride in doing well academically. She has expressed an interest in wanting to be a nurse.

All families will be considered for Caitlin. She is legally free for adoption. Families who are interested in making Caitlin part of their family may contact the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange at 1-800-227-0225. When contacting the exchange, please refer to Caitlin's PAE identification number, C6410289. ✂✂

# 2008-2009 Chafee Education and Training Grant Program

The 2008-2009 Chafee Education and Training Grant (ETG) Program Application is now available.

The ETG Program is a federally funded program that offers grant assistance to Pennsylvania undergraduate students aging out of foster care who are attending a postsecondary institution approved for Federal Title IV student financial assistance programs.

Pennsylvania's Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) will administer the ETG Program for the 2008-2009 academic year on behalf of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare.


The maximum award under this program is \$5,000 per academic year. However, no award may exceed the student's cost of attendance minus other financial aid the student is receiving. Awards are contingent upon federal funding and are not guaranteed.

The application can be found at the following websites:

- PHEAA - [http://www.pheaa.org/specialprograms/pa\\_chafee\\_grant\\_program.shtml](http://www.pheaa.org/specialprograms/pa_chafee_grant_program.shtml)

- University of Pittsburgh, IL Project - <http://www.ilp.pitt.edu/edtraingrant.htm>
- Youth Advisory Board - <http://www.independentlivingpa.org>

When applying for the 2008-2009 ETG Program please ensure the following:

- Youth applying must be identified as a youth in foster care or a youth adopted from foster care after reaching age 16.
- The youth is a participant in the ETG Program on their 21st birthday and until they turn 23 years of age.
- Youth must complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form prior to completing and submitting the ETG Program application.
- If school information on the ETG Program application differs from the information on the FAFSA form or a youth chooses to attend a school different from the schools listed on the FAFSA and/or ETG application, contact PHEAA at 1-800-692-7392. 

# Montgomery County's 4th Annual Matching Event

by Sandy Gallagher, Director, Office of Children, Youth and Families

Montgomery County will be holding their 4th Annual Matching Event on November 18, 2008. The event will take place from 4:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Montgomery County Human Services Center. Affiliate agencies, county agencies and families are invited to attend this wonderful event. Families can bring their children, but no waiting children will be in attendance. There will be live music, plenty of food, a room for kids to hang out and play and a power point presentation of waiting children and families that will be displayed throughout the event.

At last year event, approximately 30 agencies and 200 people attended. There was news coverage and as a result of the event, eight children were matched with families.

Agencies should reserve their display tables in advance as they will be filled on a first come first serve basis.

For more information about attending this event or reserving a table, please contact Pam Hartman at (610) 278-5829 or [phartman@montcopa.org](mailto:phartman@montcopa.org). 

# **Diakon Adoption and Foster Care is Awarded Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network Older Child Matching Initiative Grant**

*by Elisa Esh, Director, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care*


Last April, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care, along with their collaborating partners, Bethanna and Project STAR, submitted a Request for Proposal to the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network for a two-year, \$300,000 grant to provide services for youth over the age of 10 waiting in foster care and in great need of adoptive homes. Diakon and partners were awarded the grant in late May and have been working furiously since that time to get the grant up and running by the inception date of July 1, 2008. The grant proposal submitted by Diakon, Bethanna and Project STAR is unique in that it provides a very child focused recruitment service which not only empowers the youth involved in trying to locate a family, but also looks at former foster parents and kin of the youth as potential resources for young people who have waited for extended periods of time in the child welfare system and have had many residential treatment facility placements.

The grant provides for four Child Focused Recruiters to be stationed in all parts of the state and therefore provides services to children from multiple county children and youth agencies. Diakon Adoption and Foster Care was able to elicit the partnership of 12 counties in the state.

Allegheny, Bucks, Berks, Chester, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lehigh, Northumberland, Washington, Erie, York and Philadelphia DHS have all agreed to refer children to the program at no cost to their county agencies. Each Child Focused Recruiter will carry a caseload of 16 children so potentially each year of the grant term, 64 children will be served. Other dynamics of the grant include working closely with the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange to examine some of the more than 500 families waiting to adopt that have indicated that they will adopt children from ages 10-18.

Our goal is to match 64 youth within the next two years with permanent forever families. We recognize that our youth are at a disadvantage merely because of their ages but also due to the fact that if we are unable to locate resources for these children they will age out of the foster care system to a very uncertain future.

Recruiters chosen for this grant program come with a variety of different experiences and possess exception skill sets in working with older youth awaiting permanency. Karen Knodel from Bethanna, has been working in the field of recruitment for youth for over five years and will be serving the Southeast Region and surrounding counties. Angie Gillen from Diakon Adoption and

Foster Care, has more than five years of experience in matching families and children and will be serving in the Northeast Region. Elizabeth White is Diakon's resident Wendy's Wonderful Kids Recruiter and will be working with children in the Central Region. Bethany Leas from Project STAR, recently came on board. She has experience working with children in the foster care system and will be working in the Western Region. If you are interested in learning more about the children the grant will be serving and would like more information about how to become a permanent resource, please feel free to contact any of the Child Focused Recruiters mentioned above at the following: Karen Knodel - [kknodel@bethanna.org](mailto:kknodel@bethanna.org) or 215-355-6500; Angie Gillen - [gillena@diakon.org](mailto:gillena@diakon.org) or 610-682-1504; Elizabeth White - [whitee@diakon.org](mailto:whitee@diakon.org) or 717-795-0479; Bethany Leas - [ble@the-institute.org](mailto:ble@the-institute.org) or 412-244-3066. 

## Social Networking Safety

A Guide for Parents

### Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are all the rage with teens. These sites provide a place for them to express their personal identity and maintain connections with friends. On these sites they can ...

- Create personal profiles.
- Post images and writings.
- Link and communicate with friends.



### Why Teens May Not Make Good Choices Online

#### Didn't Think

Teen's brains are a "work in progress." They are biologically incapable of consistently making good choices ~ even if they want to. Learning to make good choices requires paying attention to the consequences of actions.

#### You Can't See Me ~ I Can't See You

- The perception of invisibility and the ability to establish anonymous accounts reduces concerns of detection ~ which could lead to disapproval or punishment.
- The lack of tangible feedback about consequences of online activities interferes with recognition that actions have caused harm and empathy for others.

#### Who Am I? Am I Hot?

Social networking sites have become an important vehicle for teens to explore their personal identity, values, and relationships with others. Unfortunately, this can sometimes lead to ...

- Posting outrageous material to attract attention.
- Posting material that explores emerging personal issues, including sexual identity.
- Preoccupation with the amount of electronic communication with friends.

#### Everybody Does It

Common online norms include ...

- "Life online is just a game ~ it's not real"
- "It's not me ~ it's my online persona."
- "I have the free-speech right to post anything I want, regardless of the harm it might cause to another."
- "If I can do it, it must be okay."

#### Doing What They Say

Sophisticated techniques are used online to influence attitudes and behavior. These techniques are used by commercial web sites, as well as dangerous individuals. Common techniques include offering "gifts," encouraging commitment to an individual, group, or product, creating "special" relationships, establishing an image of authority, and threatening a loss if one fails to act.

#### Looking For Love

Teens who are "at risk" in the real world are at higher risk online. They are ...

- More vulnerable to manipulation.
- More likely to engage in risk taking behavior.
- Less likely to listen to Internet safety guidance.
- Less willing or able to rely on parents.

### Help Your Child Make Good Choices

#### Remain Involved

- Keep the computer in a public area of your house and pay attention to what your child is doing online.
- Keep younger children in safer places by limiting their access to pre-approved sites.
- As your child grows, gradually allow greater freedom online.
- Engage in respectful monitoring.
  - Public online activities are public and always open to your review.
  - Private communications should be reviewed only if there are reasons for concern.
  - Use monitoring software as a consequence to misuse or if you feel your child is at risk and your child refuses to talk with you.

#### Provide Accurate Information

Provide teens with accurate information about online risks and effective strategies to ...

- Avoid getting into a risky situation.
- Detect if they are at risk.
- Respond.

#### Focus on Values and Standards

Emphasize important values and standards to guide online choices. Review the Terms of Use for the sites and discuss these terms in the context of your family's values.

#### Respond Appropriately

Never overreact if your child reports an online concern! Fear of overreaction is the primary reason many teens do not report online concerns to adults. Help your child problem-solve an effective solution. Require your child to remedy any harm caused.

#### Encourage Peer Leadership

Encourage your child to be a peer leader online.

- Encourage good values in his or her online communities.
- Help friends and others if they are being harmed or are making unsafe choices.
- Report concerns to a responsible adult.

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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.governor.state.pa.us](http://www.governor.state.pa.us).

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## Savethedate

### 2009 SWAN/IL Winter Statewide Meeting

**January 28-29 – Penn Stater Conference Center and Hotel, State College**

### 2009 SWAN/IL Spring Quarterly Meetings

**April 1 – Radisson Lackawanna Station Hotel, Scranton**

**April 6 – Holiday Inn Clarion, Clarion**

**April 7 – Comfort Inn, Pittsburgh**

**April 21 – Central Penn Conference Center, Enola**

**April 27 – Embassy Suites, Philadelphia Airport, Philadelphia**

**April 28 – Holiday Inn Ft. Washington, Ft. Washington**