

Network News

Voice of the SWAN / IL Network

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Network News

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Survival Skills

By Barb Huggins, Youth Quality Improvement Specialist
Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center

I find myself speaking about my past a lot, and with my personality this is very helpful. I don't often get to talk about what I am currently going

through. People are excited to hear that I am working and that I graduated from Arcadia University in 2009. They are genuinely encouraging when it comes to sharing about my advocacy work. However, it's a little harder to talk about the internal stuff that I currently deal with; the stuff that

carries with me from my extensive time in care.

Even though my experiences are minor compared to many of the stories you hear, I still have quite the baggage. Here is some self-talk that runs through my head: "One step at a time... day by day...feared things first...follow a to-do list...compartmentalize that pain...you

can do it...you can't do it...will I ever get over it?...your story wasn't as bad as others...what happened to you was wrong...your feelings are valid...your

feelings are not valid...you are special...you are not special...I'm a survivor...I feel so fragile...be productive...be functional...mind your finances...you are beautiful...you are awesome...you suck...you can do this...how can I do better?...how do I make it through this?"... and on and on and on.

This is how I self-talk. The way you self-talk

may look different. It is how I get up in the morning, it is how I get my work done and it is how I plug along.

Some days I feel so honored to be a former foster youth, and other days I just wish the baggage would dig itself a hole and disappear. It leaves me feeling drained and fragile. Yet, something inside (continued on page 4)



Barb Huggins



Moving Forward with Concurrent Planning

As discussed in the last two editions of the *Network News*, Pennsylvania is moving forward with concurrent planning. Concurrent planning is a process of working towards one legal permanency goal (typically reunification) while at the same time establishing and implementing an alternative permanency goal and plan that are worked on at the same time to move children more quickly to a safe and stable permanent family.

The Concurrent Planning Policy and Implementation Bulletin was released by the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) in May and has an effective date of July 1, 2012. As outlined in the Bulletin, by July 1, 2015 all children entering foster care with a goal of reunification will have a concurrent plan for permanency established within 90 days of their placement; effective January 1, 2016 all children who were already in out-of-home care will have a concurrent plan for permanency, regardless of their court-ordered permanency goal. Although all county children and youth agencies (CCYA) are required to implement concurrent planning for all children entering out-of-home care by July 1, 2015, implementation may begin earlier.

There are eight core components to Concurrent Planning that all counties must have in place to successfully implement this new permanency practice.

The Core Components of Concurrent Planning are:

1. Full disclosure to all participants in the case planning process;
2. Family search and engagement;
3. Family group conferencing or teaming;
4. Child/family visitation;
5. Establishment of clear timelines for permanency decisions;

6. Transparent written agreements and documentation;
7. Committed collaboration between child welfare agencies, the courts, resource families, service providers and other stakeholders; and
8. Specific recruitment, training and retention of resource families.

In this edition, I will focus on the last four core components. The first four core components were covered in the previous edition of the *Network News*.

Establishment of clear timelines for permanency decisions

Substitute care placements are intended to be temporary; the child must have a permanency goal established in a Child Permanency Plan (CPP) and sanctioned by the court. Permanency hearings must occur every six months with proper notification to the parents/caregivers. (PA Juvenile Act, Section 6351 (f) (9)).

Section 103 of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requires agencies to file petitions to terminate parental rights when a child has been in out-of-home care 15 of the most recent 22 months. Pennsylvania implemented this requirement by adding Section 6351(f) (9) of the Juvenile Act which reads as follows:

“...if the child has been in placement for at least 15 out of the last 22 months or the court has determined that aggravated circumstances exist and that reasonable efforts to prevent or eliminate the need to remove the child from the child’s parent, guardian or custodian or to preserve and reunify the family need not to be made or continue to be made, whether the CCYA has filed or sought to join a petition to terminate parental rights and to identify, recruit, process and approve a qualified family to adopt the child unless:

- The child is being cared for by a relative best suited for the physical, mental and moral welfare of the child;
- The CCYA has documented a compelling reason for determining that filing a petition to terminate

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Who Do I Contact?

*By Brenda Lawrence
SWAN Program Administrator*

For many years whenever new initiatives or changes to the network are announced, you've probably heard - "if you have any questions about this, please contact your SWAN regional technical assistant." As the network has grown and changed, so now has **where** you—both counties and affiliates—need to go to get more information and **who** to contact to get your questions answered.

County Support

As you probably already know, SWAN regional technical assistants, RTA, are assigned to all counties, even the few that have no SWAN Needs-Based Plan and Budget assigned. For many years the RTA's were the only SWAN contact you needed and the only one you had. The RTA's visit counties at least quarterly and make many phone calls and email contacts to support county use of SWAN NBB dollars, as well as service referrals, certifications and withdrawals. RTA's also assist with submitting the CY 890's, collaborate with Independent Living services at the county level and discuss and facilitate concerns about completing the units of service, as well as providing or setting up SWAN training about practice or portal issues.

Since 2009 counties also have SWAN Legal Services Initiative, LSI, coordinators and Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange, PAE, coordinators assigned to help support their needs. The LSI coordinators share supervision of the LSI paralegals placed in the counties. As counties frequently need to adjust the flow of their legal work or if they have a specific question about a legal process, the LSI coordinator is the person to be contacted about that. However, the LSI warmline is the place to call or email for specific legal questions.

You will find contact information for the SWAN LSI coordinators on the LSI page of the SWAN website. You can also contact the LSI Warmline with any legal questions by email at lsiwarmline@diakon-swan.org or toll-free at 888-793-2512.

The PAE coordinators also work closely with county caseworkers to assure children and older youth with goals of adoption are receiving all

necessary services to help them find permanent resources. PAE coordinators also provide training to both counties and affiliates to assure all understand the continuum of resources and services available to the children who are waiting for permanency. If you don't know how to contact your PAE coordinator, you can always call 888-793-2512 and choose the option to locate them by name, or press 0 and the administrative assistant will give you their name and contact information.

Affiliate Support

Affiliates – who do you call? The SWAN RTA's are still your primary contact for referrals, invoicing, contract compliance and to arrange practice-related training. You can also ask for support from the PAE coordinators to better understand how to deliver a complete Child Specific Recruitment referral, including knowing about the matrix for waiting children. You may contact the PAE data analysts for questions about the CY 130's, CY131's and Pennsylvania Adoption Information Registry registration forms (all of which are related to matching activities), the Resource Family Registry and the Act 101 registry. You may reach them at 800-227-0225 and then choose the option that pertains to your question to be connected to the right person.

Helpline

The SWAN Helpline is available to both the counties and affiliates – just call 800 585-7926 (SWAN). The Helpline's information and referral specialists are critical to helping families reach you when they begin their process to become resource families. This is also the place where families with approved adoption family profiles who have questions about children listed on www.adoptpakids.org can call to learn more about that child through the "seamless system." The seamless system serves an important role to help keep families engaged on their road to becoming adoptive resources. As county and affiliate workers are often away from their desks and telephones, we recognize that you cannot always respond to families as quickly as the families would like. The Helpline can serve as

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The Look on a Child's Face

*Bethany Leas
Supervisor of SWAN Services, Project STAR*

The look on a child's face when they are proud of themselves is one that is priceless. Yet that feeling of pride does not come naturally ...it is one that is grown within a loving, permanent family.

I reference this feeling because on the morning of Saturday, March 24, 2012, I watched my three-year-old daughter beam with pride as she spun around like a ballerina for her very first dance recital rehearsal. Watching her and knowing that I was heading to our sixth annual Growing Families Through Adoption event, I became just a little emotional because our event truly symbolizes the hope that every child will get to feel what my daughter felt on this morning. Our event represents the possibility of a family for every child, and in the past five years, over 40 matches have been made.

The day was quite busy ...24 agencies, 37 families, 20 staff volunteers and many, many mini cheesecakes were on hand to make the day a success. The event started with Bob Brinker, our guest speaker, who discussed the importance of healthy male role models in children's lives. At the conclusion of the speaking presentation, the John A. Wilson Award was given. This year, the award

ceremony was very close to many of our hearts. The award was given to Project STAR's former manager of placement services, Cathy Pahel. It was wonderful to have Cathy recognized for the 14 plus years of service she has given Project STAR, and not many staff members left the presentation with a dry eye.

The event then moved to the matching area where the 24 agencies from all over the state spoke with prospective families about the children that they are eagerly waiting to add to their families. Although we typically send our surveys to agencies a few weeks after the event, this year we received word the following Monday that two matches were already in the works!

It was a day where you could look around and the only thing that you could see were good people who were there to make a difference in the world in which they live. Events like these are the catalysts for creating a permanent change in the lives of children and families. Days like these are the days that lead to a priceless moment of pride for one of our more than deserving children.



Survival Skills

(continued from page 1) of me keeps me going, keeps me climbing that mountain.

There is something special inside all foster youth that keeps us going. We survive, we strive, we lift, and we throw down. We keep our head up.

Former foster youth already have survival skills. Move over Bear Grylls! Some of these survival skills are really hard to turn off because they have served youth very well. Here's a life example: one of my personality traits is that I'm a pleaser. It served me well as a survival tactic because it made working with foster parents and caseworkers easier. They naturally liked me and I was considered low maintenance. It has served me so well that I have wrapped my self-worth up in my ability to please or assimilate. It has also made me loyal to a fault.

If I can't make a relationship work it is because I wasn't able to please enough. I wasn't good enough or there was ultimately something I was doing wrong.

I worked very hard to gain my foster parents' love, acceptance and approval. That is not something you can simply turn off.

As youth transition out of care, they are going to have lot of emotion. These young adults may move from surviving in one system to surviving in another. If you are no longer in a situation where you are simply "surviving," you need to grieve because you don't have the time to acknowledge it while you are experiencing it.

I attend therapy on a pretty regular basis, and I talk constantly about how I am feeling. The act of figuring this out has made me more forgiving of my faults. The self-talk I listed comes from years of negativity from the people around me, so in grieving I'm learning how dead wrong they are. I'm a survivor and I know that all foster care alumni are too.



The New Spirit of the Heart Gallery

By Nic Landon

Northwest Recruiter, Older Child Matching Initiative

Smiling for
the camera
are

(top to
bottom)

Destiny,
Jamie
and Taylor



we were scheduled to visit had been cultivating a negative attitude and when initially meeting people would try to shock them.

Diane came prepared with camera, different lenses, lights and other items. She easily spoke with each youth and appeared comfortable. She took the time to answer all their questions about her tools.

Diane kept the conversation moving, breaking only to suggest a pose or different location. The girls were comfortable and enjoyed the experience,

even my last girl, who despite having prepared herself for the

photographs, continued to half-heartedly insist that she

“hated” having her

photograph taken, that she

looked “awful,” and the

resulting photos would

turn out poorly as a

result. Diane played

along, continually

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Let me first encourage everyone to make use of the SWAN volunteer photographers. The results have been tremendous.

When I first began as an Older Child Matching Initiative recruiter, I was hesitant about taking pictures of the youths I worked with. I’m not photogenic and have tried to keep my distance from cameras. As such, I’m not a particularly good shot, and my photographic abilities are limited to the “treatment facility” images that we all recognize, loathe and occasionally resort to in desperation. Despite my best efforts, I was never able to successfully wrestle with the alchemy of light, shadow, subject, etc.

The first SWAN volunteer photographer I contacted was Diane Maxwell, who had not yet participated with a recruiter. She was personable and kept referring to her rules and responsibilities to be certain that she was doing everything by the book. In order to calm my anxieties, I spoke to Diane about how to appropriately interact with the youth. We spent the better part of a day together, and in the process photographed three of the teen girls I work with.

As Diane followed me to our first location, I was nervous as to how she would speak with the girls, and if she would get too personal. I was anxious, too, as to how the girls would respond to Diane. The last girl



The Carnival of Love

By Jennifer Casner-Hockenberry
PAE Coordinator

The "Carnival of Love" has been the theme for the CHOR (Children's Home of Reading) matching event hosted annually in February for the past three years. It has a proven success record and this year was no exception. The event was well attended by 17 affiliates and 23 families, and a prospective match for a sibling group of three was made. The pre-adoptive family is a single mother who has adopted in the past and who is currently a foster to adopt home with CHOR.



Ashley and Nelson Membreno, a newly approved family, attend the Carnival of Love.

Jennifer Casner-Hockenberry, south east PAE coordinator, spoke with many families, affiliates, and attendees during the event, including Ashley and Nelson Membreno. The Membrenos, a newly approved family in December 2011, chose to attend the CHOR event after a caseworker contacted them. Ashley indicated this was the first matching event she and her husband had attended in an effort "to try to get to know people."

Ashley shared her experience that the matching event was more relaxed than she expected, stating, "I liked that it was

informal." She went on to share a stereotype many people have about matching events, stating, "My mom said that it would be like an auction, so I was nervous about how it would be, but it was nothing like

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Spirit of the Heart Gallery

(continued from page 5) reassuring the young lady. The resulting photographs did not show an awful looking teen girl who hated having her photograph taken; rather, it showed a pretty young lady who enjoyed being in front of the camera.

Everyone appeared to enjoy the shoot, including my apotogenic self, who was captured by Diane's camera at the insistence of one of the girls. The resulting photograph shows me sitting on top of a jungle gym, watching Diane take pictures at the swing-sets. I've since hidden it lest anyone suspect that I'm having too much fun.

Diane edited the photographs and by the end of the week made them available to me on a secure online

gallery. Dozens of great photos were taken during the shoots, and choosing the best was difficult. Eventually, and with some input from the youths, the best were selected.

My initial experience with a SWAN volunteer photographer was fantastic, and it put a rest to my worries. Subsequent collaboration with the SWAN volunteers has continued to impress. Each photographer has been generous with their time, wholly appropriate while working with the youth, and the resulting images are truer reflections of the children than my occasional mug shots, even the best of my mug shots, ever achieved.



Carnival of Love

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that at all! We would definitely come to another event. You can look through the internet, but it doesn't give you a chance to put an agency and face together. It lacks the human contact. I don't know if there is anything more emotionally charged in life than children - the matching event gives a human element to such a life-long decision."

Among the many families and affiliates attending the event was an Antietam High School teacher, Alex Krick. Alex cheerfully announced he was attending the event to promote the play "Annie" for which he was the assistant director. The musical production was performed on March 30 and 31 at Mt. Penn Primary Center and was produced by Antietam Musical Productions. The most interesting focus about the local musical was that Antietam partnered with the Children's Home of Reading to promote their production.

The partnership was a result of a cast member's mom, an employee of CHOR, who suggested Antietam should team up with CHOR to talk about the upcoming show and, of course, also highlight adoption. The idea took off and the partnership was solidified. Alex stated, "We hope to raise awareness about adoption through the partnership and get the message out into the community through theatre."



Alex Krick, "Annie's" assistant director, and Maryann Cicale, adoption supervisor at the Children's Home of Reading.

To further publicize the event and adoption awareness, the musical production group was highlighted along with the Children's Home of Reading's adoption program on March 15, 2012 on BCTV (Berks County TV). Four students from the high school who played major roles in "Annie" were present and sang songs and answered questions.

Alex was also present to answer questions about the play and the school's partnership with CHOR in spreading the word about adoption. The production company treated CHOR foster families and children to a free preview of the play on March 28.

CHOR set up and manned a display table at each of the showings of "Annie" to answer questions that families or individuals had about adoption. Flyers were available for the waiting children currently receiving CSR services through CHOR.

Hats off to CHOR for another successful matching event and the community effort to spread, not only "The Love," but awareness about adoption!



The carnival-themed event featured games, popcorn, hotdogs, candy and prizes to entertain the children and engage the families.



StatewideStraightTalk about Concurrent Planning

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- parental rights would not serve the needs and welfare of the child; or
- The child's family has not been provided with necessary services to achieve the safe return to the child's parent, guardian or custodian within the time frames set forth in the permanency plan."

If a child cannot safely return home, then the CCYA must make reasonable efforts to find the child a permanent home. Unless the child falls within one of the three exceptions listed above, TPR petitions must be filed.

When a child has been in out-of-home care 15 of the most recent 22 months, the CCYA must file or join a petition to terminate parental rights (TPR) (PA Juvenile Act, Section 6351 (f) (9)). The 22 month time frame is calculated from the date the child enters out-of-home care. In order to petition the court for TPR, the 15 months in out-of-home care do need not be consecutive; if there are interruptions in placement such as when the child returns home, those time periods may not count as part of the 15 months. Fifteen months only applies to the time the child is in out-of-home care. Fifteen months of actual out-of-home care time can accrue over a 22 month period to trigger the requirements of this section. A month is defined as 30 days.

Permanency should be achieved for a child within 12 months of out-of-home placement. If permanency has not been achieved for the child by the time a child has been in placement 15 out of the most recent 22 months, the court must determine at a permanency hearing whether the CCYA filed or has sought to join a petition to TPR and to identify, recruit, process and approve a qualified family for the child unless one of the three exceptions apply. After the initial fifteenth

month determination, the court must make the determination regarding TPR and the agency's attempt to provide a permanent family for the child at each permanency hearing that takes place after the initial fifteenth month court determination.

Timelines, including federal and state mandates and a schedule of anticipated court hearings should be shared with family members of the child's parents and other permanency team members including kin who are actively participating in Family Group Decision Making/Family Group Conference (FGDM/FGC)/Teaming and concurrent planning efforts related to the child's permanency. These timelines are also an important component of Full Disclosure and must be shared with the child, the child's family and the resource family.

Transparent written agreements and documentation

The Family Service Plan (FSP) and CPP specify the actions and activities of all involved parties. If FGDM/FGC is utilized, the plan developed by the family and accepted by the CCYA, including the identified concurrent plan, should be incorporated into the FSP and/or CPP.

The concurrent plan for another permanency option is required by The Concurrent Planning Policy and Implementation Bulletin to be included in both the FSP and CPP format. The CCYA responsible for the completion of the FSP and CPP must, in conjunction with the parents or legal guardian, child and substitute caregivers, identify both goals and both plans, including the objectives and tasks to be taken by all accomplished. The plans must meet the needs of the child and the family, including the emotional,

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Who do I contact?

(continued from page 3) a bridge to remain in contact with the families when you cannot.

The Helpline's other important role is to serve as the first point of contact for families seeking post-permanency services. This aspect of the Helpline allows families to request services without first going through a county or affiliate office. Please remember to let your families know this service is available and what services are offered. The Helpline also researches the internet and current periodicals for up-to-date resources about adoption and permanency.

Families may simply call and ask the Helpline staff for information or for referrals. Agencies can call, too, to take advantage of Helpline's expertise and wealth of information.

So there you have it! SWAN's ways to help you and your work has expanded just as SWAN's services have expanded and evolved. Please remember to use all the different contacts and varieties of services you need to help bring more children to permanency and to help more families help them reach it.



Statewide StraightTalk about Concurrent Planning

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psychological, physical and educational needs of the youth.

The CCYA must ensure that parents are fully advised of the FSP and CPP and both permanency goals and plans contained therein, of their responsibilities and of the limited time period to achieve the specified actions in the plans. The FSP and CPP should clearly document the steps that must be completed by all parties, including the CCYA, in order for the child to safely return home. The parents must be told that if they do not accomplish the steps outlined in the FSP for CCYA to safely return the child home, then the concurrent plan will prevail.

Committed collaboration between child welfare agencies, the courts, resource families, service providers and other stakeholders

Ongoing committed collaboration between the CCYA, the courts, the resource families, service providers and other stakeholders is key to successful Concurrent Planning.

The Courts

The court's overarching role in concurrent planning is to determine that the primary permanency plan and the concurrent plan are appropriate and are established in a timely manner. The court also reviews the status and appropriateness of these plans at all hearings, which may occur as early as the dispositional hearing.

The CCYA should first present a thorough discussion of the primary permanency goal and the progress made toward achieving that goal to the court and all involved parties. The CCYA should then present the concurrent plan for permanency and the progress made toward achieving that goal in court for all parties. The CCYA must ensure that the information presented in court is sufficient to enable the court to discuss concurrent planning with the parents, and to enter both goals and plans into court orders at permanency hearings, with a clear distinction between the primary permanency plan and the concurrent plan.

Resource Families

Pennsylvania statute and policy require the CCYA to locate relatives and kin and give them first consideration as caregivers when a child enters care. However, for some children, placement with a relative

or kin caregiver is not possible and they need to be placed in a non-relative foster home.

Creating a teaming approach with planned contact between the child's family and resource parents (both relative and non-relative) has shown that children return home sooner, have more stable placements, experience better emotional development and are more successful in school. Children in foster care have a more positive experience if their birth parents and resource parents work together to assure that the children feel loved and comfortable in their out-of-home placement (<http://www.nrcpfc.org/cpt/component-eight.htm>).

The CCYA should facilitate the relationship between the child's family and the resource family to enhance placement stability and expedite permanency, including coordinating and collaborating with the contracted service provider. While rare, it is recognized that there are instances where the resource family should not be closely involved with the child's family. Any situation that would prohibit the resource family from taking an active role in the concurrent plan or permanency process should be clearly documented in the record and addressed with the child's family and resource family.

Service Providers and Other Stakeholders

Collaboration between the CCYA and the providers they use to provide out-of-home services and other social services is another key to successful concurrent planning. CCYA will need to meet with their service providers and other stakeholders to ensure that they understand concurrent planning and are able to implement the changes needed. For instance, private foster care agencies that have contracts with the CCYA to provide out-of-home care will need to ensure that their resource families receive training about concurrent planning and understand that it is expected that the role of the resource families will be expanded to include interaction with and mentoring of the child's family. Private agencies and residential facilities should be engaged in the concurrent planning process and participate in the teaming or case planning. For children who are dually adjudicated both dependent and delinquent or who receive shared case responsibility services, the juvenile probation office should be involved in the concurrent planning process. The CCYA needs to identify all stakeholders involved in the child and family's life and engage them in the process.

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StatewideStraightTalk about Concurrent Planning

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Specific recruitment, training and retention of resource families

The specific recruitment of resource families for concurrent planning is a critical component to successful concurrent planning. In an effort to keep children who require out-of-home care in their home communities and schools, agencies should strive to recruit resource families from the same geographic area from which the majority of children in the CCYA's care live. Additionally, agencies should actively recruit resource families who are willing to provide care to sibling groups.

Resource families need initial as well as ongoing training and support. Resource families will need to be educated about foster care, the grief and loss children in foster care experience and how to manage it, concurrent planning and their role in the permanency process. Concurrent planning resource families should be trained and dually approved to both foster and adopt in order to reduce the number of moves a child experiences in foster care.

Each CCYA is expected to utilize kinship families in accordance with existing statute and policy whenever

possible. The early use of kinship placements can ensure permanence for children if they are unable to return to their families of origin. When kinship placements are not an option, it is expected that CCYA will utilize other resource families that will provide the child with the best chance of being returned to their family of origin or remaining with the resource family on a permanent basis.

The CCYA must support and encourage resource and kinship families to be involved and included in working directly with the biological parents to teach skills and to communicate the children's needs whenever possible. Resource families should be active participants in the FGDM/FGC/Teaming meetings, the development of the FSP and CPP, and court hearings whenever possible.

This is a very exciting time for child welfare in PA! The successful implementation of concurrent planning for all children in out-of-home care should lead to a reduction in the amount of time children spend in out-of-home care by helping each one to achieve permanency in a timely manner. If you have any questions about concurrent planning, please feel free to contact me directly at lodeck@pa.gov.

Characteristics of the children waiting the longest for a permanent family

By Mike Kovacevic

FDR Research and Quality Assurance Manager

Recently Jane Johnston, PAE division manager, conducted a mini-evaluation on the characteristics of the children who have been waiting the longest for permanency. This information was compiled using PAE CY 890 form data. The initial sample included 105 children who had waited from 85 to 183 months. The sample was later pared down by using the CY 130 form data to assess child characteristics. Seventy-two children (69%) from the original sample had completed CY 130's.

When observing demographic data about the children, a variable "special needs" was created. This variable was indicated as "yes" for any child who had at least one special need indicator checked in the data system. Of the children in the sample who had been waiting the longest:

- 38% have histories of neglect,
- 32% have multiple placement histories,
- 29% have siblings,
- 28% have abuse histories,
- 26% have mental health diagnosis

When predicting the children who will be in the system the longest, the presence of neglect in combination with three or more of the following characteristics resulted in a 1 in 5 chance the child will have difficulty achieving permanency: abuse, mental health problems, multiple placements and the presence of one or more siblings.

The children with completed CY 130's were compared to all waiting children (n=1,751 children). The sample decreased based on these children who had CY 130's completed (n=836). An analysis between the group of longest waiting and all waiting children results in the following observations:

- Gender plays no role in waiting (55.2% for longest vs. 54% for all),
- Race has a small influence (41% African American for longest vs. 36% for all),
- Placement in residential facility is a significant indicator (23% for longest vs. 6% for all).

While further research is needed, it is important to examine more fully the role placement has in preventing children from finding permanency.

A Family for Stephanie

By Marcia Moll and Sarah Merkel, Lehigh County

Success Story

Stephanie is a friendly 13-year-old girl who has been looking for permanency for a long time. Her smile and laugh are infectious. She loves to listen to music and her favorite singer is Justin Bieber. Her room is adorned with Justin Bieber posters, and she even has a Justin Bieber toothbrush. Stephanie also loves visiting with her brother, who is placed with a separate family. Stephanie is a very engaging, energetic young woman who is thrilled that she has found her forever family.

Since being placed with her forever family in December 2011, she has excelled and progressed in many ways. Stephanie has recently begun to participate in hip hop dancing, which she loves. She has also opened up to her adoptive family about her past, present and her hopes for the future. Stephanie has learned to trust this adoptive family and refers to them as "mom" and "dad." In many ways, she is a typical teenager who looks to her parents for acceptance and permission. She feels comfortable and secure in her adoptive home. The biggest changes in Stephanie rest on the assurance that she has a loving, stable family who will always be there for her.

All of these feelings were not a part of Stephanie's previous life. Prior to December 2011 when she was placed with this adoptive family at age 13, Stephanie experienced at least 11 placements and suffered rejection, ridicule, abuse and neglect. Stephanie was insecure, quiet, and certainly lacked confidence in herself as well as trust in others. Stephanie, however, never was without her wonderful smile and sparkling eyes. The multiple placements led to her strong desire to be accepted and loved while also increasing her distrust in adults.



Stephanie with her new parents, Lisa and Michael

In August 2011 an incredibly persistent family was interviewed for Stephanie. They had inquired about her several times and never lost hope that they could be her "forever family." In September 2011 Stephanie first met this family. All professionals involved agreed that the process needed to move slowly for Stephanie's positive adjustment and for the family to be certain they could accommodate her needs.

The family drove two hours one way to visit Stephanie and eventually, eight hours on a weekend for overnight visits. There was no doubt that the family was committed to Stephanie. They also participated in visits with her extended family—something that was very important to Stephanie, as well as weekly family therapy sessions. All of this showed Stephanie the deep commitment they had to her. As the visits progressed, both Stephanie and the family expressed a strong desire for her to move in.

After a hearing in December, Stephanie was transferred from the group home where she was living to the home of the prospective adoptive family. What a Christmas present for Stephanie and the family! During a home visit with the family around Valentine's Day, a card was shared with the staff that Stephanie had given to her new mom expressing her love for her and signing the card with the family's last name as (continued on page 12)

What Post-Permanency Services Can Do

By Sue Zola

SWAN Post-Permanency Technical Assistant

This is a story about a family who first “met” their new daughter ten years before they were able to bring her home. This is a story about what years in an orphanage can do to a child. This is a story about how post-permanency services kept this family together.

The family in this story attended a presentation at their church about the need for families to adopt children living in an orphanage in Ecuador. At that time they did not have the financial resources to adopt any of the children, but in 2001 they saw a little girl featured in a newsletter who they knew God was calling them to adopt. They were sure the little girl was meant to be their daughter. For the next ten years they worked on bringing their “daughter” home. It wasn’t until 2011 that they could finally travel to Ecuador. The little girl was now a teenager, and the family spent five weeks getting to know her.

While the family had received a few videos and emails about their daughter before they met her, they weren’t prepared for what years of living in an orphanage can do to children. When they returned home with their new daughter, they quickly realized that they had a language barrier to deal with as well as significant behavioral, emotional and cognitive concerns.

The reports they received from the orphanage told them their daughter entered the orphanage at the age

of two after being abandoned by her family. She lived in the orphanage for the next 14 years. There, her issues were handled with medications and restraints, including being locked in her bedroom.

The family reached out to Helpline and asked for post-permanency services. When the post-permanency worker first met this family, they were at the end of their rope. Not only were they in crisis, but the parents even questioned their decision to adopt their daughter, wondering if they had the skills or the competency to help her.

The post-permanency worker got to work. First, a child psychologist was identified to evaluate all of the youth’s significant amounts of medication and was able to eliminate many of them.

The worker helped the family get an in-depth psychological evaluation to assess the teenager’s developmental capacity. After the youth’s developmental level was identified, the worker helped the family to better understand their daughter’s toddler-like behaviors. Resources were located to help the family deal with the language barrier. Now, not only did their daughter learn English, but the parents learned Spanish.

A family based therapy team was established to help the family understand permanency issues that affect children who spend time in out-of-home care.

(continued on page 14)

Stephanie’s New Family

(continued from page 11) hers. Stephanie also shared she had had a test in school that day and that she hadn’t done very well on it. The important question her parents asked her was “did she feel she had done her best,” to which Stephanie replied “yes.” They then responded to her that that was all that mattered - the actual grade was not important. When Stephanie got her grade, she stood amazed and announced that she’d gotten a 92%!

Stephanie also shared with all of us that she had recently begun to take a hip hop dance class and would be able to participate in a St. Patrick’s Day parade with her dance class. Learning this news, she had already called all of her new extended family members and asked them if they would come to see her in the parade. This visit confirmed for the professionals involved what we had all expected—

Stephanie’s best interests were paramount to this family, and Stephanie felt truly accepted and loved.

Stephanie’s adoption was finalized in June 2012. Stephanie is an amazing young woman who has overcome many obstacles in her life and has made incredible progress. Stephanie is very proud of herself and her family.



To Ascend: A Former Foster Youth's Journey

By Ciarra Karnes, Former Youth Ambassador

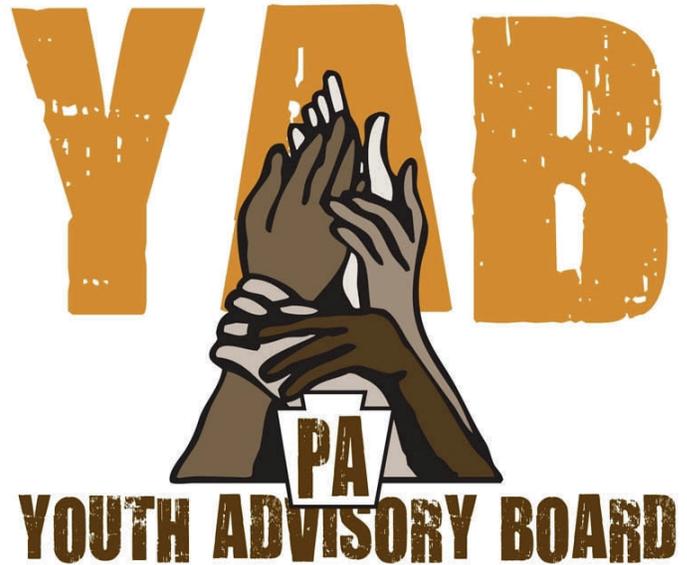
I would like to start off by sharing a quote from *The Shack* by William P. Young. "Pain has a way of clipping our wings so we cannot fly." That holds true for anyone who experiences a hardship, but it does not have to be that way. Through all of my hardships in life, the two most important things were having someone believe in me and someone offering me helping hands.

I was born in New Castle, Pennsylvania, on May 25, 1991. I am the sixth out of a total of nine children. My siblings and I all shared one bedroom in a trailer, and every day of my life with my parents was a challenge. My parents suffered with drug and alcohol abuse.

When I was around six years old my father's mother was granted informal custody over me. I moved in with my grandma, and she truly changed my whole life. She taught me that it is okay to trust. She showed me what love really felt like, but most importantly she told me that I was worth it and that I was capable of doing anything that I wanted. I lived with my grandmother up until I was 16 years old. My grandmother fell and broke her hip, and my uncle decided that she needed to be put into a nursing home, leaving me with no place to live.

I went back to live with my mother but it did not work. My mother would physically abuse me and my father was still incarcerated. I was eventually placed in foster care with a family I knew. They were great in the beginning but then started to treat me like I was worthless. The foster mother would not let me leave my bedroom unless I was going to school or work. When I was home I had to sit in darkness in my room because I was a waste of electricity. The foster family ended up kicking me out of the house. I was then sent to live with another woman who had occasionally taken care of me throughout my childhood. As soon as she began receiving subsidy payments, she started calling me Cinderella and designated me as her maid. This is when I began to bounce around. I would stay with friends and family when I could, but for the most part I slept in my car.

Through all of this I finished high school with the help of my guidance counselor pushing me to reach my potential, and the voice of my grandmother telling me that I could do anything that I wanted. I won the Horatio Alger National Scholarship during my senior year in high school and was accepted to Slippery Rock University. I am now a junior psychology major,



with a triple minor in nonprofit leadership, communications and women's studies. I am a Jumpstart mentor on campus and a secretary in the student life office. Additionally, I am an AmeriCorps worker who plans projects to get students involved and aware of the issues that are all around us. I now have the privilege of being a youth ambassador. I am going to use the experiences in my life, good and bad, to help children and families in the system.

Once again, the two principles that I believe helped me to overcome everything I experienced are: having someone believe in me when no one else did, including myself, and having helping hands reach down to make sure that I still reached my potential.

I would like to repeat the quote that I shared earlier, "Pain has a way of clipping our wings so we cannot fly." Pain has the power to clip our wings and not allow us to reach our potential, but if we make sure to always offer helping hands and believe in people who are experiencing hardships pain will not win. Everyone can fly, and everyone should fly. No matter their age, ethnicity or where they live.



Kim and Bob Plus 9

Adoption: Embracing a Life-long Job

*By Jennifer Casner-Hockenberry
PAE Coordinator*

Meet Kim and Bob Travis – a central Pennsylvania family who has adopted four children and planned to adopt their fifth in June 2012.

The Travis' have four biological children ranging in age from four to 13 years, a houseful to say the least. Nevertheless, with a natural inclination to parenting and a genuine love for children, the Travis' felt they had more to give and could offer stability to other children, so they decided to open their home to the foster care system in 1999. It has been a journey with no looking back.

While many foster families seem to have a lot of turnover with foster children, Kim reported, "For whatever the reason, all the kids we get seem to stay!"

When asked how she feels about that, she candidly replies, "It's just who we are and what we do – we really feel as though we are called to do this!" Kim further explains her philosophy, "When we get a call from our caseworker, that is the call we are supposed to get and that is **our** child for as long as the child needs to be with us."

Only once did Kim tell the caseworker she needed to think about it and call her back. When Kim approached her family about the call, she said, "My children reminded me, 'Mom, our philosophy is, if that's the call we get, that is the child we take!'" and the story unfolds.

To date, the Travis' have been foster parents to a total of eight children. Of those, four are currently adopted, one is in the process of finalization, and

three children were successfully reunified with their biological families. Of the three children who reunified, Kim explained that though the process can be difficult, ultimately she feels good about each of the reunifications. She believes actively participating in the visits between the children and their biological families helped not only transition the children back into their biological home, but also helped the Travis' with the transition of the children they had come to love. Kim explains, "Although we will always miss them and it's sad for us, it's been a good experience and best for the children."

The first of their adopted children arrived in 1999 as a sibling group of two sisters who were only two and three years old. The placement ultimately ended in a foster-to-adopt situation, and by 2002 Evelyn and Ashley, then five and six years old, became an official part of the Travis family.

The Travis' original intent was to do foster care and help reunify the girls with a biological relative, but since the girls were already with them for three years when termination of parental rights occurred and the family member was no longer a viable resource, Kim said, "We couldn't imagine having them move again and change families, because at that point, they had already become a part of our family – three years was a long time."

The Travis' did offer to allow the biological father to send cards and communicate with the girls; however, (continued on page 15)

Post-Permanency Services

(continued from page 12) An attachment specialist met with the family to assess their needs and family dynamics, while also meeting with the other team members to identify their strengths and challenges in dealing with the family's needs.

The parents soon learned to become advocates with the school district for special education services. The family attended – and continues to attend - the S.T.A.Y (support and training for attachment and youth) support group's monthly meetings. Throughout all this time respite services were provided.

After six months of services the family now knows they are going to survive. Their commitment to their daughter saw the parents through some really rough times, and the post-permanency services gave them the skills and knowledge they needed to regain their confidence and believe they could parent their daughter. The teenager's tantrums have significantly decreased as the family learned how to communicate better and how to enjoy each other's company. Now, they are all on the road to building their forever family together. 

(continued from page 14) so far he has never taken advantage of this opportunity. Kim says, "The girls are wonderful and are currently 15 and 16 years old." Ashley, the older of the two, is a delight despite some developmental delays and special needs. Evelyn, the younger girl, is very proud of her adoptive status and uses her experience to mentor children in the foster care system.

In Kim's words, "Evelyn is a really neat kid and has a very mature attitude about it all." Kim actually tracked down Evelyn's family through Facebook about a year ago, hoping to get a jump start on her children's technological curiosity and provide the connections they may want to know about their biological family.

When Kim shared this with Evelyn, much to her surprise, Evelyn replied, "God placed me in this family and I am happy with that." But, the option is always there because the Travis' are very open with their children and entertain their questions about adoption as they arise. Kim said she is very comfortable answering questions any of the children pose as it is a daily conversation, it seems, with one or more of them.

After Evelyn and Ashley, the Travis' took a two year break, meaning they didn't adopt any of the children they fostered. Instead, they were able to help facilitate successful reunifications with their families. Then came Melissa, a bouncing 10-month-old baby girl. Melissa's placement was also a temporary placement with a goal of reunification. However, after two years of attempted reunification, her parental rights were terminated. Given their philosophy, the Travis' didn't question the opportunity and made Melissa a permanent part of their family when she was three years old.

The Travis' not only have a heart for children, but for the biological families of the children as well. In order to make the transition easier for the biological



L to R: Johannah, Evelyn, Ashley, Melissa and Rachael—some of the Travis' children

mother, the Travis' entered into an informal agreement where they send the mother photos twice a year and allow her to send presents for holidays and birthdays.

Before Melissa's adoption was finalized, the Travis' biological son turned 18, leaving home to enter the military. Franklin County quickly took advantage of the open space, and shortly thereafter another little girl entered the picture.

Jo was supposed to be a short term foster placement as the Travis' were her third foster home in four months. Jo was only five years old and moved from home to home due to behavioral issues that were seemingly insurmountable for other foster families.

The Travis' recognized the behavioral issues as a result of grief and loss and created a safe place for her to work through the emotions consistent with a five year olds' ability. Initially, a family resource was identified for Jo, but after it fell through, the county approached the Travis' to see if they would be interested in adoption.

The Travis' embraced the idea and agreed to move forward. However, the process was not an easy one, (continued on page 16)

Kim and Bob Plus 9

(continued from page 15) because a family member appealed the termination of parental rights. Having some experience under their belts, the Travis' sat through two appeal hearings and forged ahead with the home study in case Jo would become free for adoption.

Though the process was a bit unnerving at times, the Travis' never wavered in their commitment and faith in the system. While the healing process still continues for Jo, she is thriving and doing well with the assurance of the Travis family behind her. Jo is the only Travis child who chose to pick out her own name, keeping Jo, her nickname, as part of it, and in October 2010 she officially became Johannah Lynn Travis! Kim said, "Jo is brilliant and could tell the story of her placement with exact dates and every detail."

It's hard to imagine how the Travis' manage their lives with so many children. Mrs. Travis reports they have a large extended family and a married daughter who is a wonderful support system to help with the children when needed. Kim matter-of-factly states, "We are not in this alone."

In the last few years, the Travis' have found out more about supports in the SWAN network and about the tax credit, which Kim said has helped tremendously. She understands there are a lot more resources today than when they first adopted. However, the Travis' solicit help from their own personal and family support systems most of the time because, "I don't want my adopted children to be sent to different places than my biological children. I never wanted them to feel as though they were different. Not that I am opposed to using it in the future if needed, and it's nice to know it exists, but we haven't felt the need at this point."

To further accentuate their commitment to making their children a priority, the Travis' home school each of them, something they started with their oldest biological child. This decision hasn't always made foster parenting easy, since foster children are required to attend public school. For that reason, the Travis' prefer to host younger children. Only once did they encounter an issue with homeschooling when Jo became of primary age. Not to be discouraged, the Travis' were able to get a court order for her while in foster care because they were progressing toward adoption.

Kim indicates they were so grateful for the waiver because Johanna was struggling with being the only child in their home to attend public school while the other children were homeschooled. Kim credits the guardian ad litem as a wonderful resource who helped petition the courts to allow Johanna to be homeschooled. Kim believes the home school experience is a safe environment for her children to not only learn but also to heal.

When asked, "Do you think you are done?" Kim laughingly replies, "I don't know. The youngest of our biological children will turn 18 in December, so we will just have to wait and see!"

Bob jokingly declares that when their oldest turned 18, "We could have been done!" Kim quickly adds that her husband is her greatest support system and "so much on board" with all the adoptions. "When Bob was asked about adopting our current foster child, who has significant special needs, he replied without hesitation, 'Yes, it isn't a choice!'" Kim elaborates, "It's going to be an adventure! Between the two of us, we just make it work. I believe each of our children have been placed here for a reason and very few people know our children are adopted. They are just all my kids!"

Her advice to prospective adoptive or current foster families: "Being an adoptive or foster parent requires flexibility. First of all, each child and/or case is very different. Sometimes long term cases leave in 10 days, while short term placements turn into permanent adoptions. It is not black and white, and you need to roll with the punches. I have had sleepless nights with worry when the county has said a child may reunify, but I rely on faith and trust that the agencies working with the children are trying to do the best they can. I take it one day at a time and rely on the knowledge that everyone is working toward the same goal – creating a safe and permanent home for the child."

Many thanks to the Travis family who have exemplified creating a safe home for their four biological and soon to be five adopted children—a testimony of commitment, faith and unconditional love. Move over, *Jon and Kate, Plus 8*, the next reality show just might be "*Kim and Bob plus 9!*"



Kinship for a Teenager

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

Since she was 16, my granddaughter would say, “mom-mom, when I turn 18 I’m coming to live with you.” I would say, okay, you can come. I only half believed that this would ever happen. Again, when my granddaughter Sierra turned 17 I heard, “mom, mom when I turn 18 I’m coming to live with you.” On my granddaughter’s 18th birthday I heard, “mom-mom, I’m coming to live with you.”

Two months after she turned 18 she got her driver’s license. One week after that she asked if she could borrow my van, the next thing I knew she was driving up with my van full of her bedroom furniture. I had never seen so much “stuff.” It took four trips for her to move in all her things.

I was so happy that a year before I made a decision to take two small bedrooms and turn them into one large bedroom. When she finally finished moving things in and making her bedroom into *her* bedroom, I went to take a look. I was shocked to say the least. There were Lil Wayne posters all over the wall, Rolling Stone magazines on the floor, 50 or more photos she had taken of herself in strange positions with girls and boys, photos of just her tongue. All the bright colors were replaced with dark colors and zebra stripes.

I asked her if she needed more closet space. She said, no, that one pile of clothes that were on the floor were her clean clothes and the other pile were her dirty ones. My daughter was standing next to me waiting to hear what I would say. I said, oh.

I am a very organized, conservative Christian. This is how my husband and I raised our birth son and four children that we adopted from the foster care system. My youngest daughter, who is 24, and her



Phyllis Stevens with her granddaughter

son live with us, and if you walked into either of their rooms, you would see bright colors, happy family pictures, a basket for dirty clothes and everything else either hung up or folded neatly in drawers.

Now was my chance to put into practice what I have been telling adoptive, foster and kinship parents for years. Accept the child for who they are, pick your battles and be consistent.

I told my granddaughter that for now, the only thing that I would ask her to do is to pick up after herself. Don’t leave clothes, hair dryers, fingernail polish, Q-Tips, etc. lying around the house (which she was doing). She said “okay, can I borrow the car?”

Silly me, I assumed she would be back that night. She did not come back nor did she call. My two daughters made it a point to remind me that I would never have allowed this when they were growing up, even at 18. I tried to explain to them that she (my granddaughter) was raised differently than they were. One sure way for her to rebel is for me to treat her like a two-year-old.

When she returned home the next day, I asked her if we could talk. I told her that when she went out she had to come home at a reasonable time (bad choice of words) and that she had to call or text who she was staying with if she was going to stay out all night

(continued on page 18)

Kinship for a Teenager

(continued from page 17) in case of an emergency. I also told her that I would trust her until she proved to me that she can't be trusted.

For months she came and went as she pleased, treating our home as a hotel. She would eat, sleep and shower. She would only do things around the house like clean or walk the dog when asked. She was staying over at girlfriends' houses a lot!

One day she asked if she could get gauges put in her ears. I said yes - not sure what I was saying yes to. I thought they were some type of earring. I found out later that it was a type of "earring," but this earring would allow a person to make their earlobes very large.

I never questioned her staying out all night because I told her that I would trust her although I felt that something was not right. I started to pray, "Lord, take care of my granddaughter and keep her safe."

My husband and I had planned on going away together long before she came. As the time approached for us to leave, I said to my granddaughter, several times, that I did not want her to stay out all night while we are away for safety reasons. She promised me, several times, that she would not.

Trusting this, my husband and I headed out and arrived at our destination, spending a wonderful day doing nothing on the beach. To my horror, at 4:00 a.m. the next morning (we had been gone only 24 hours), we were awakened by the familiar tones of our cell phone. It was my daughter informing me that my granddaughter's boyfriend just called to say that my granddaughter was on her way to the emergency room with pains in her chest and back.

I asked if her mother was with her, and my daughter said yes. Knowing that my husband and I would not be able to get back into the United States in a hurry, I told my daughter to let me know her diagnosis as soon as she heard anything. I texted my granddaughter to let her know I was praying for her and did just that, falling on my knees I began to pray.

To my relief, my daughter called back within the hour to let us know that she may need to have her gallbladder removed. Thankfully, she was sent home the next day without surgery. But that did not ease my concern about my granddaughter.

I spent the rest of the vacation dreading the conversation that I needed to have with her when I returned. She had proven to me that she could not be trusted. The burning thought was that she had stayed out all night at her boyfriend's house the day I left.

Confident in the fact that I had a solid rapport with my granddaughter, I approached her with my concerns. Though it was not a traditional approach by any means and certainly nothing my own children were accustomed to, it worked for me. Somehow, allowing her the freedom to make choices, how-be-it not so good ones, it seemed easier to set boundaries than when she had first arrived.

I am convinced that our children, even as young adults, need time to experience "Love and Logic," time to experience pain, but nonetheless, I am certain if I would have started our relationship off with insisting, "No you can't do that!" or "No, you can't go there," it would have built a wedge between us very early on.

Allowing my granddaughter to suffer the consequences of mistrust actually helped me clearly demonstrate the need for boundaries and trust in a relationship. While I realize every child is different and my granddaughter's situation is unique, her ability to set boundaries and understand consequences remains consistent with many of the children in our system. Sometimes, we need to let them make decisions on their own and trust that despite the direction they choose, the desire for change must come from within and cannot be forced through external manipulation. In some untraditional yet crazy way, it worked for us and I am grateful I trusted her to come to that conclusion on her own and created the right moment to "set those boundaries." Through her own experience and own free will, she was ready to receive my instruction, grateful for boundaries, and now we're on the same page, ready to move forward with our relationship.

Yes, her bedroom walls are still covered with Lil Wayne posters and her clothes are still all over the floor, but now she comes home at what I think is a reasonable time and never stays out all night. You see, she trusts me and wants me to trust her. That's what relationships are about.





Jesse is **ENGAGING**, *sensitive*, funny and **athletic**.
He plays **BASKETBALL** and **FOOTBALL**.

Jesse is smart and enjoys most of his school subjects.

He has a long list of “favorite” activities:

Riding ~~go-carts~~ and bikes—*fishing*—listening to music

—playing **card games**, pool and videogames

Jesse receives special education services to support positive behavior. He is outgoing and caring.

Jesse is eagerly awaiting placement in a permanent home, school and family. He is legally free for adoption and wants to maintain connections with his birth siblings.

For more information about Jesse, please contact Julie Denlinger at
717-397-5241 or jdenlinger@pressleyridge.org

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—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

Pennsylvania Adoption Information Registry—www.PApair.org

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

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

SWAN Facebook page—[Join the conversation](#)

2012 Savethedate

Fall Quarterly Meetings

October 4—Scranton October 10—Clarion October 11—Monroeville

October 17—Philadelphia October 18—Ft. Washington October 24—Enola

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