

network news

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network news

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YOUTH ON THE MOVE

by Darla Henry Family Design Resources, Inc.,
Co-director and SWAN Specialist: Best Practice, Training and Policy

“Youth on the move” means so many things. In the world of child welfare, it can mean youth “aging out of the system” or moving on. Where do they move to? Each year, approximately 20,000 teens age out of the national foster care system. These young people have increased odds for early pregnancy, homelessness, unemployment, mental health needs and criminal activities.



Valerie Pritchett, abc27 news anchor, is mistress of ceremonies at the 2006 Recognition Banquet.

In 2005, with more than 900 adolescents aging out of the system without a permanent family connection, Pennsylvania said, “That’s too much!” Under the leadership of the Department of Public Welfare’s Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network and Independent Living Services efforts began to minimize youth moving on to no one. This renewed focus on older youth is designed to help them develop and maintain adult connections—special people in their lives, shoulders to lean on, someone to borrow money from when financial resources are low, and someone to spend the holidays with.

The theme of the 2006 annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference, Lifetime Connections: Designing Blueprints for Success, demonstrated this commitment. The programs and workshops presented focused on

permanent connections for youth. A cross section of workshops highlighted the independent living program, recruiting resource families, making successful transitions, family group decision making, collaborative working relationships, successful practices for working with a variety of behavioral issues, legal supports, faith and educational programs, post

permanency services for families and state of the art training formats. Participants responded to the passions of Ruth Amerson, a national advocate for creative recruitment techniques, and to the soulfulness of Jaiya John, an adult adoptee who spoke eloquently to the culture and spirit of our children in care.

While 2,065 children in Pennsylvania found permanent adoptive homes in 2005, we still have much work to do before our waiting children journey out into that big world. Will they do it alone? Will we do all that we can do to find older youth a “connection” to another who will provide that safe haven in the storms of life, who will have them to Thanksgiving dinner and who will be a shoulder to cry on when the journey is rough and lonely? Let us all recommit to assuring that our youth are “on the move” to loving connections.

statewide straight talk

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



Throughout 2004, in an effort to increase the adoptions of older children in foster care and to better prepare those youth in danger of aging out of the system without a permanency resource, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) began an ambitious collaboration between two of our programs, the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) and Independent Living Services (IL).

In Pennsylvania, adoption workers believe that all children are adoptable. But the hard truth is that the older a child is; the more difficult it is to find an adoptive resource. Every year, approximately 900 youth age out of foster care in Pennsylvania without a significant adult relationship, permanency resource or adoptive family. Such youth often end up going back into the same situation that caused them to be placed into foster care in the first place, and they often come back into the adult social service system as a result. In 2003, despite our belief that all children are adoptable and the expansion of the population served by SWAN, only 546 youth over the age of 9 were adopted from foster care in Pennsylvania. It was time to do something different. And thus began the partnership between SWAN and IL Services.

But we had our work cut out for us in developing this new partnership. Within each county, workers are often divided by the type of work they do, and as such, adoption workers were giving little thought to IL services for the youth they served, and IL workers were not considering adoption

services for the youth they served. Yet all of the youth served were in the custody of the county agency; technically, each type of worker is working with the same type of kids. Even so, if an older youth had a court-ordered goal of adoption, workers did not feel IL Services were needed as they often felt confident that they would find the youth an adoptive resource. Likewise, IL workers, who work primarily with youth age 16 and over, felt that adoption was not a viable option for these older youth and often did not pursue a permanent connection for this very vulnerable population because they believed that older youth did not want to be adopted.

To begin to change this mindset, in June 2004, DPW invited Dorothy Ansell, assistant director with the National Resource Center for Youth Services and a long time advocate of adolescents in out of home care, to address both adoption workers and IL workers at the SWAN Summer Statewide Meeting. She addressed the importance of permanency planning for adolescents and explained to both populations of workers the importance of lifetime connections, and provided some ideas on how to find those lifetime connections. Additionally, we began training on what we call the "Permanency Continuum" which is outlined as the hierarchy of court-ordered permanency goals as stated in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) and supported by the Pennsylvania Juvenile Act.

The hierarchy for permanency goal options, or the Permanency Continuum, is the same for youth of all ages: return to parents,

place for adoption, place with a permanent legal custodian, place permanently with a fit and willing relative, or place in another living arrangement intended to be permanent in nature.

Since that meeting, SWAN and IL have partnered in all of our trainings, including four quarterly trainings per year and an annual conference. We have also combined our quarterly newsletters and now publish a joint newsletter, the SWAN/IL Network News. Articles in the newsletter are written by both adoption and IL workers and always address not only the need for permanency for this population, but also the need for IL skills so that every youth, whether they are adopted or not, is able to provide for themselves if needed. Additionally, in each issue, we highlight the successful adoption of an older child and the success of a youth who is receiving IL Services.

Since the beginning of our partnership, SWAN has been encouraging referrals for child profiles, child preparation and child specific recruitment for older youth in care who may not have a goal of adoption and may be in danger of aging out of the system without a permanency resource. All three of these services can help to identify potential permanency resources for youth in care, regardless of their court-ordered permanency goal. For instance, an older youth without a goal of adoption who was receiving IL Services, was referred for SWAN child preparation. One of the activities the worker did with the youth was to take him to

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visit his former elementary and middle schools. While there, he was shocked to learn that his former teachers, guidance counselors and coaches not only remembered him, but were glad to see him and ultimately, one of them stepped forward as an adoptive resource for this young man.

Success stories such as this have lead to an increase in SWAN services for this population of children, and the increase in SWAN services correlates to an increase in the number of older youth adopted from the Pennsylvania foster care system. In federal fiscal year (FFY) 2003, 546 children over the age of 9 were adopted from the Pennsylvania foster care system. In FFY 2004, the year the SWAN/IL partnership began, the number of adoptions of children over age 9 increased to 684. **In FFY 2005, 705 children over the age of 9 were adopted which represents an 18.5% increase in the number of adoptions of children over age 9 in the first 18 months of this partnership.**

In addition to increasing the number of adoptions, we have also seen an increase in the number of

SWAN services being provided to IL youth and as a result, an increase in the number of youth discharged from foster care to other types of permanent families, such as permanent legal custodianship families.

In Pennsylvania, 280 youth age 16 and over have a goal of adoption. However, in FFY 2005, SWAN provided services to 423 youth over the age of 16. Although some of the older youth receiving IL Services may not find an adoptive family through SWAN services, they may find the next best thing as defined in the Permanency Continuum, a permanent legal custodian. The child profile, child preparation and child specific recruitment units of service help children to reconnect with their past and identify potential permanency resources that may have been unexplored and helps them to identify new permanency resources that they may not have known existed. Even so, once located, some potential resources are not willing to adopt the child in question. A great many however, are willing to become legal custodians of the youth.

As a result of our efforts, in

addition to the number of adoptions increasing, we have seen a significant increase in the number of older youth discharged from our system to permanent legal custodianship. In FFY 2003, 74 children over the age of 9 were discharged to the care of a permanent legal custodian. **In FFY 2005, the number of permanent legal custodianships of children over age 9 increased to 136, which represents an 84 percent increase in the number of children over age 9 discharged from foster care to permanent legal custodians in the first 18 months of this partnership.**

If we are not able to locate a new adoptive family for youth in foster care who cannot be returned to their biological family, then it is our duty as a system to find them the next best thing, a supportive relationship with an adult who will continue to provide them with guidance, support, advice and a place to spend the holidays once they leave our care.



2006 Permanent Family Award Recipients, Tim and Nancy Shorter and their family.



2006 Permanent Teamwork Award Recipients, Janae Sauder, Loretta Russell and Karen Knodel pose with Nancy Hardy, Deputy Secretary of OCYF.

HELPING YOUTH FIND CONNECTIONS

by Darla Henry, Family Design Resources, Inc.,
Co-director and SWAN Specialist: Best Practice, Training and Policy

Youth living in the child welfare system often have lost contact with persons in their lives whom they have valued and who have valued them. The Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) and the Independent Living Program have a variety of activities that help youth seek former relationships and re-establish those relationships for life long connections.

Child preparation activities involve looking at the attachments for children and youth –“Where am I going?”– with whom they have had relationships throughout their lives. They look at the nature of these relationships and connections. The process of reacquainting youth with these relationships frequently taps into important people in a child’s life who are interested and may be willing to remain a connection for that child.

Life books and/or boxes provide tools to help youth seek information and maintain information about

relationship roles others have played for them. They can also keep important papers or documents (e.g. birth certificates) in an accessible location.

Recently, one of our youth, having spent almost all of her life in foster care, during which she experienced two failed adoptions and residential care, made a video about her life with her child preparation worker. One of the highlights of the video is her reconnection to her grandfather who is living in another state. She was able to visit him on his birthday and documented this important event in her life with pictures. For her, the opportunity to be with her grandfather again provided a powerful link to her biological family—her identity and sense of belonging. She has also reconnected with her first adoptive family and is maintaining relationships with them as she reconciles the death of her mother.

Recently, while playing with my golf league, a woman, upon finding out

that I worked with SWAN, shared that she felt she had been able to reconnect with a child that she placed for adoption 33 years ago. She put information on the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange’s Adoption Medical History Registry and connected with the child’s birth father with whom she had not maintained contact and who lives across the country. She was reassured of being able to provide a connection for her child, now an adult.

With a renewed emphasis on finding family relationships for youth, our affiliates and agencies have developed many activities designed to locate and enhance life long connections.



Valerie Pritchett (left), abc27 News, presents Robin Bassler the Permanent Family Award, who accepted on behalf of the Schoell family.



Valerie Pritchett (right), abc27 News, presents Permanent Family Award to Kathleen Swain who accepted on behalf of Rachel Theissen and Stephanie Merrian.

Youth Transition Conferences: A Move in a New Direction

by Heather King and Teresa Polvinale, IL County Caseworkers, Adams County Children and Youth Services

Adams County Children and Youth Services, in partnership with *It Takes a Village*, have taken Family Group Decision Making to a new level. Family Group Decision Making is a practice that offers families the opportunity to develop and implement a plan to address concerns that children and youth or another referring agency has regarding the family. The meeting emphasizes the families' strengths, which are the driving force in remedying the concerns that are identified by both the family and the involved agencies. The key to this practice is that it is solely the family that develops the plan. Service providers and agency workers have to be invited to the conference by the family and are asked to leave the room while the family develops their plan during "private family time."

Youth Transition Conferences are now being offered as a similar practice to Family Group Decision Making Conferences and are utilized by youth who are transitioning to independence. Youth ages 16-21, who are or have been in out of home placement, or who are planning for their independence, are candidates for this practice. Many of the youth who will be referred for a

Youth Transition Conference have been victims of abuse, witnessed domestic violence, have parents who suffer from mental illness or addiction and have had very little emphasis placed on planning for their future.

Youth are asked to invite family, friends, service providers and anyone else who has a vested interest in their well being to the conference to assist them in this process. The transition conference assists youth with their transition to becoming independent, and focuses on areas including housing, employment, education, life skills and prevention. It is hoped that transition conferences will identify a circle of support that will assist the youth with pursuing specific goals and will make the youth's transition to independence a successful one.

Adams County Children and Youth Services and the Independent Living Program believe that Youth Transition Conferences provide youth another opportunity to have input into their discharge planning and their future. The Youth Transition Conference's purpose is to celebrate the youth's journey in becoming an adult and to prepare for a successful transition to

independence. Other goals of the conference are to identify resources to develop a circle of support for permanent connections, encourage youth to explore their personal interests, increase the youth's confidence in pursuing and obtaining goals and create a youth driven plan, developed by the youth, which will increase the chances of follow through with their plan.

It is hoped that Youth Transition Conferences will ultimately allow youth to begin their journey to adulthood with obtainable goals and a safety net in place to assist them should they need the help. It may also allow some youth to realize that they are not quite ready for all the responsibilities that come with the desired freedom they have longed for!

Heather King and Teresa Polvinale have presented Youth Transition Conferencing at the American Humane's 2006 Conference on Family Group Decision Making in San Antonio, Texas, and the 14th Annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference in Harrisburg.



2006 Permanent Family Award Recipient, Maryann Hall poses with her children.



2006 Permanent Family Award Recipient, Rachel Theissen and Stephanie Merrian poses with their children.

Adoption Night at Williams Grove Speedway is a Huge Success

by Elisa Esh, Director, Resource Family Recruitment, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care Services

On June 30, 2006, as part of the Mitch Smith Memorial Speed Week race, Williams Grove Speedway observed adoption night to raise awareness of the need for the more than 1,300 Pennsylvania children searching for a family to call their own. Twenty-nine sprint cars displayed photographs and contact information of children searching for families. Adoption night was sponsored by Diakon Adoption and Foster Care Services.

Jeff Shepard, driver of the #4J, winner of the race, was joined in Victory Lane by the thrilled child appearing on his vehicle, Tiffany. Elisa Esh, director of Resource Family Recruitment, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care Services, also joined them to thank Central Pennsylvania sprint car fans for their support of the event as well as the adoption cause.

Diakon, who partnered with Berks, Dauphin and York County Children and Youth Agencies, Bethanna, Children's Home of York and

Concern, considered the event a huge success.

“The response to this event by the sprint car community was astounding,” said Esh. “Our adoption fair was crowded throughout the evening and it is our hope that connections were made between families ready to adopt and the available children. Perhaps most importantly, we spread the word about adoption and the high number of children in need of a home.”

Most of the youths whose photos were featured on the race cars attended the race and enjoyed special treats including photographs and autographs with drivers, racing team souvenirs and other prizes. Special gifts including bikes, video game players, DVD players and/or gift cards were presented by volunteers. In addition, the children enjoyed carnival games, magic shows, temporary tattoos and more. Sandy Kline and Mike Zortman, sprint car photographers, took photos of children with their respective drivers and presented them to the youths as a souvenir.

“Not only was this an event designed to get people thinking about adoption

and learn about the need for families, the kids were given so much attention and they felt special. For some of them, this doesn't happen very often and it was very moving to see the genuine joy in their faces,” said Esh. “It is my hope that we can once again witness the joy in their faces when they find a family to call their own.”

Victory lane sponsors for the event, Miller Brothers Chevrolet, The Kevin Gobrecht Memorial Foundation, C&S Lawn and Landscaping, Inc. and American Eagle Outfitters, made possible the vinyl photos of the children which appeared on the sprint cars. Sweeney Signs and Digital Effects designed and installed the photos onto the vehicles.

Participating teams and sponsors donated more than 200 pieces of racing apparel and novelty items which were distributed to the evening's eager crowd. Entertainment was provided by Red 102.3 FM. Adoption night at Williams Grove Speedway would not be possible without the help of many sponsors.

If you are interested in participating in or serving as a sponsor for next year's Adoption Night event, please contact Elisa Esh at 800-723-7038.



Ashley is interviewed by Valerie Pritchett for abc27 News, Val's Kids.



Ned stands in front of Stevie Smith's sprint car.

Notes from the Legal Services Initiative Warmline

by Eleanor L. Bush, Esq.,
Legal Services Training Specialist

Older youth experience many barriers to adoption. For youth who have reached 18, however, the legal process should not be among them. Over the past year, the Legal Services Initiative (LSI) Warmline has responded to several inquiries about adopting a youth who is 18 or over. The callers have wondered whether it is still necessary to terminate parental rights, if that has not occurred.

Pennsylvania's Adoption Act does not require termination of parental rights in order to finalize the adoption of a youth who has reached age 18. Here's the analysis:

Section 2711(a) of the Adoption Act lists the consents necessary to an adoption, as follows:

- (1) The adoptee, if over 12 years of age.
- (2) The spouse of the adopting parent, unless they join in the adoption petition.
- (3) The parents or surviving parent of an adoptee **who has not reached the age of 18 years.**

- (4) The guardian of an incapacitated adoptee.
- (5) The guardian of the person of an adoptee under the age of 18 years, if any there be, or of the person or persons having custody of the adoptee, if any such person can be found, whenever the adoptee has no parent whose consent is required.

Item #1 tells us that an 18 year-old must consent to his/her own adoption, because the 18 year-old is "over 12 years of age."

Item #3 tells us that the birth parents of a child must consent to the child's adoption. Of course, if the parents' rights have already been terminated, then their consent is no longer necessary (Section 2714 of the Adoption Act provides that "consent of a parent to adoption shall not be required if a decree of termination ... has been entered."). Note that this consent requirement only applies while the child is still a minor (i.e., under 18). Logically, if the court does not need the birth parents' consent to adoption of an 18 year-old, then the court should not need to terminate whatever "rights" a birth parent may be considered to have regarding their adult child.

If you are working towards adoption of a youth who has turned 18 or is soon to reach age 18 and would like to discuss this issue further, please contact the LSI Warmline, at lsiwarmline@diakon-swan.org or 888-793-2512, ext. 5376.



Dwindel Toliver and Kim Pearson accept the Faith Based Recruitment and Retention Award for Rejoice Expressions.



Lisa Colautti, Permanency Professional Award Recipient, poses with Nancy Hardy, Deputy Secretary, OCYF.



Lisa Bendezu and co-worker accept the Philanthropy Award for the Academy of Natural Sciences.

The Importance of Permanency Planning for Adolescents

by David P. Kelly, Esq., Staff Attorney and Anne Marie Lancour, Esq., Director of State Projects, American Bar Association, Center on Children and the Law Permanency Barriers Project

The American Bar Association (ABA) Center on Children and the Law's, Pennsylvania Permanency Barriers Project, works to promote safety and permanency for children in care at all stages of involvement with the public child welfare system. While all youth require special attention and have unique challenges, teens and older adolescents in care can be particularly difficult to serve effectively.

Accordingly, work to improve permanency planning and outcomes for adolescents in foster care feature prominently in the Pennsylvania counties that participate in the ABA Permanency Barriers Project. Use of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) as a permanency option for adolescents in care has been a prime focus of this work because APPLA is the least preferred permanency option under Adoption Safe Families Act. The second aim of the project's work with APPLA is to ensure that all planning for the goal includes more than just a plan for where the young person will live. To satisfy statutory requirements, APPLA permanency goals must include a comprehensive array of support services individually tailored to the youth's strengths and needs. Chief among these supports are independent living programs.

We hope our concentrated efforts will reduce the number of APPLA orders in favor of more permanent options. Where the APPLA orders are made, the orders should be tied to plans that are substantive and sustainable. Project work has included extensive training efforts

with advisory boards, judges, attorneys, children and youth workers and supervisors and the service provider community. These efforts help increase awareness and fuel the interests of those already working on the issues.

Some Current Efforts to Advance Adolescent Permanency in ABA Project Counties

Venango County: Although the Permanency Barriers Project is designed to last for two years in most counties, the ABA may extend project work longer where counties have demonstrated a need and commitment. Concern about adolescent permanency planning was one of the primary reasons an extension was granted to continue work in Venango County.

Efforts to address the issue of adolescent permanency began in Venango County with a presentation to the advisory board about permanency planning, independent living services and APPLA as a permanency option for older teens in care. In response, an adolescent subcommittee to the advisory board was formed in the spring of 2006. The ABA project manager in Venango County is working closely with the children and youth services (CYS) Independent Living coordinator to strengthen the current program and identify additional resources. CYS has expressed an interest in starting life skills instruction for foster youth as young as 14 and would like to explore the possibility of offering life skills instruction and independent living services to youth under agency supervision as well.

With the current level of commitment, Venango County has the potential to become a model of adolescent permanency planning and service provision. Judicial commitment and support, coupled with a dedicated and capable agency staff, have created a positive environment for innovation and growth. In addition, the ABA project manager is now working with a community member who hopes to create a transitional living facility for adolescent foster youth in the area.

Berks County: Berks County formed a subcommittee on adolescent issues in January 2006 to explore ways of improving permanency planning for older adolescents in care. Inspired by success with the concept of benchmark permanency hearings in Chicago and the District of Columbia, the committee developed a pilot program specifically tailored to Berks County's adolescent population.

The Benchmark Permanency Conference Pilot Program allows older adolescents the opportunity to participate more fully in planning for their futures. Implementation of the project began this summer. Benchmark conferences are held weekly before the Honorable Elizabeth Ehrlich. Each child will participate in a scheduled one hour conference. At the hearing, the ongoing caseworker, agency worker, child's attorney and other adults assist the child in creating a plan to accomplish his/her educational, career and/or personal goals. A conference agreement will be signed

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by all of the participants at the end of the conference and copies provided as a guide to any outstanding objectives.

Progress of the pilot project will be reviewed. This innovative and proactive initiative reflects the hard work and commitment present in Berks County.

York County: The July advisory board meeting in York County included an overview of adolescent permanency and a presentation by the York County CYS Independent Living staff on services currently available in the county. The county is developing a permanency hearing checklist to be used in case planning for all youth over age 16 and is also designing a discharge checklist for all youth who age out of the system and achieve permanency. Preliminary work toward creating a county-wide resource directory of services specifically available for adolescents was also completed.

Philadelphia: Philadelphia's advisory board focused on adolescent permanency in September 2006. The meeting included presentations by local service providers and introduced the advisory board members to ongoing initiatives, including: the Teen Diversion Program and the Achieving Independence Center. Protocols for adolescent permanency hearings are slated for discussion and the specific permanency options of Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC) and APPLA will be examined and explored as particularly relevant for older youth in care.

Adolescent Permanency in Completed ABA Project Counties

Encouragingly, counties that have completed the project are showing positive trends about youth whose permanency plan is APPLA, the length of time taken to achieve APPLA as a permanency goal and the average number of months from removal to court ordered permanency placement. Changes in policy and procedure, affected through project work, ensure that best practice for adolescent permanency will continue.

In Luzerne, Cumberland and Northumberland counties, where project work has ended, progress was made in each pilot county. Prior to project implementation in 2003, approximately 27 percent of youth in care in Cumberland County had a permanency goal of APPLA. This percentage was reduced to 4 percent when the project ended in 2006. Percentages of youth with APPLA as a permanency goal dropped from 12 percent to 5 percent in Luzerne County. In Northumberland County, the percentage remained at 9 percent despite an increase in the number of youth in care. The reductions in percentages of youth with APPLA permanency goals is a powerful indicator that more preferred permanency options are being pursued and achieved.

The average length of time between removal and court ordered APPLA goals also declined in each county. In Luzerne County, the average time between removal and the ultimate APPLA order was 50 months in 2003. That average was reduced to 23 months at project completion.

Northumberland and Cumberland counties saw reductions of average time between removal and court ordered APPLA goals of 17 and 20 months, respectively. The gains in expediency suggest more aggressive case planning may lead to permanency sooner.

Improvement in counties is due to many factors, none more so than the dedication of those in the field and their openness to change. With the added direction and focus of the ABA project, county stakeholders can collaboratively identify and systematically address factors that cause or contribute to delays in permanency.

Would you like to learn more about how your county can be a part of the ABA's Permanency Barriers Project?

The ABA Pennsylvania Permanency Barriers Project is a free systems and practice improvement project accessible to any county experiencing challenges in achieving permanency for children in care. Although the project can not serve all counties at once, a small number of openings for new counties will soon be available. If you believe your county may benefit from working with the ABA and would like to learn more about the ABA Pennsylvania Permanency Barriers Project, please contact:

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ABA Center on Children
and the Law
740 15th Street, NW
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Lorrie Deck, Director of SWAN, Phyllis Stevens, Executive Director of TAP, Jessica Delgado, Permanency Advocate Award Recipient pose with Nancy Hardy, Deputy Secretary, OCYF.

SHELDON'S STORY

by Sheila Hill, Child Specific Recruitment Specialist,
Three Rivers Adoption Council

Most adoption caseworkers look for successful stories to tell other kids and families. Most of the time we find a great story but sometimes we are not so lucky. Success is defined in many ways by caseworkers, but it always means there is some form of permanence for one of our waiting children. I am one of those fortunate workers who has a great success story. This story is about Sheldon and his family. When I first met Sheldon he was seventeen years old. He had been in the foster care system most of his life and was looking for a permanent family. A few other workers in our office had worked with Sheldon over the years and all of us were impressed by his attitude. He wanted to be adopted and never gave up hope. As caseworkers, we know how rare it is for a seventeen year old to truly believe that a family will be found for him.

While doing child specific recruitment (CSR) with Sheldon, he gave me a list of things he was looking for in a family. I started all

my usual CSR activities: registering him with PAE, creating a flier, having Sheldon create a PowerPoint presentation and preparing for the SWAN matching dessert held at the 2005 North American Council on Adoptable Children Conference (NACAC). I spoke with his caseworker, Miranda Sisolak of Lehigh County Children and Youth Services, who stated that a family was interested in learning more about Sheldon and could I please follow up with that family. I spoke with the family's caseworker and gave them more information on Sheldon and the family wanted to continue with the possible match. The family traveled from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh for the NACAC conference and specifically the matching dessert. I spoke with the family there and they talked to me about his PowerPoint presentation that he had completed with me. They stated that his presentation is what really drew them in because it was Sheldon talking about what he wanted.

After the NACAC conference, movement happened very quickly. We exchanged profiles and set up an interview. Immediately after the interview, we knew this was the family for Sheldon. We set up a visit between the family and Sheldon and the rest is pretty much history. They had a few visits and they all felt it was right from the beginning. Sheldon moved in with Lloyd and Doug in October of 2005 and the family really adjusted to one another and got comfortable. Sheldon was adopted on May 26, 2006, two months before his eighteenth birthday. This story has truly been remarkable and it was wonderful to be a part of the team that made it possible. When it works out so well, it gives you a renewed drive to continue the work we do so that all of Pennsylvania's waiting children will have a success story like Sheldon's.



Shorter family accepts their award and pose with Valerie Pritchett, abc27 news anchor.



Shorter family enjoys their meal at the Permanency Conference Recognition Banquet.

Pennsylvania's Waiting Children

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



Meet Jorge!

Jorge is a bright, happy, young man with a great sense of humor. He enjoys swimming, boating, playing basketball, video games and being outdoors. He likes living in the country and hopes to find his dream family living in a rural setting. Jorge loves riding dirt bikes and would like to own one some day. He is currently taking karate lessons and loves them. Jorge is hoping to find a family who will be open to him having contact with his older sister who was already adopted.

All families will be considered for Jorge. He is legally free for adoption. Families who are interested in making Jorge part of their family may contact the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange at 1-800-227-0225. When contacting the Exchange, please refer to Jorge's PAE identification number, 8695.

PSFPA

Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association *Updates*

by Kathy Ramper, Executive Director, PSFPA

The Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association (PSFPA) has moved and is now located at Diakon/FDR. We are very excited to be in our new location and to be working with a positive and supportive group of people. We are all here to help better the lives of the children and families in the Commonwealth and I can't think of a better way to create "Lifetime Connections" for these children than through teamwork.

Recently, PSFPA held our 30th Annual Conference, on Oct. 19th - 21st at the Holiday Inn in Grantville. This year's theme was "There's No Place Like

Home" and the opening keynote speaker was Lee Marshall. Ms. Marshall is from Alabama where she is the founder of Kids to Love. The Kids to Love Foundation is a non-profit charitable organization that raises money for foster children in Alabama. Ms. Marshall is also an Emmy nominated journalist who also has a passion for music. Ms. Marshall has written several songs dealing with foster care and adoption. For more information about Ms. Marshall, her music or Kids to Love visit her Web sites at www.kidstolove.org and www.leemarshallmusic.com.

During this year's award dinner, held on the evening of Oct. 20th, the following were recognized and received awards:

Foster Parent of the Year

Joe and Nancy Mulraney

Agency of the Year

Clinton County Children and Youth Services

Foster Parent Association of the Year

Lancaster County Foster Parent Association

Caseworker of the Year

Mary Jo Cline Szewczyk, Erie County Children and Youth Services

Community Partnership

Lamar Station, Pennsylvania State Police

Executive's Director's Award

Shelly Brown, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries in partnership with Family Design Resources

President's Awards

Sandy Lancaster, for 7 years of service as PSFPA board member and a foster and adoptive parent.

Charles and Pat Feaster, for more than 30 years of service as a foster and adoptive family and to PSFPA.

Barbara Holtan brought the conference to a close. Ms. Holtan has worked professionally in the adoption field since 1980 and is currently the executive director of AdoptUSKids. Mrs. Holtan has appeared on *Nightline* with Ted Koppel, *Good Morning America* and *48 hours*.

2006

SWAN/IL Summer Statewide

by Steve Eidson, Independent Living Specialist, University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work, The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program

The Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) and Independent Living (IL) Summer Statewide Meeting was held on Tuesday, July 11th, and Wednesday, July 12th, 2006 at the Holiday Inn East in Harrisburg. During the two day meeting, more than 400 participants were able to network with colleagues and attend some dynamic sessions.

Tuesday afternoon, Jane Johnston, Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange division manager, Diakon/FDR, moderated a session, "Finding Permanent Connections for Adolescents in Foster Care." Helping youth develop and sustain permanent connections is an important component for any child, but particularly for those who are currently in IL programs or any who will age out of substitute care, to help them prepare for adult life. Speaking on the program were Alyshea Santos, a youth intern at the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program; Justin Lee, Independent Living Specialist at the CWTP; Pam Wagner from SWAN; Anissa Cameron from the Legal Services Initiative in Delaware County; and Theresa Polvinale from Adams County Children and Youth Services.

Other highlights were Wednesday presentations from Angelo Santore, the IL State Grant Administrator at the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF). Angelo spoke about the draft IL Services Bulletin; the draft IL Practice Standards guidelines and other changes/updates at OCYF.

Todd Lloyd, Steve Eidson and Justin Lee provided training and updates for workers who were going to attend the Pennsylvania IL Youth Retreat at Penn State Mont Alto on Aug. 7th-11th. This year's theme was "Eye of the Storm" and highlights included John Foppe as the banquet speaker, trip to the Gettysburg Battlefield and "An Aging Out" panel from former youth in substitute care in Pennsylvania.

The IL/SWAN Summer Statewide meeting concluded with a presentation from Dr. Claudia Mincemoyer and Dr. Natalie Ferry from the Pennsylvania State University 4-H state offices regarding the "Get in the Act: Workforce Skills Curriculum for Youth" and "Teens as Volunteer Leaders" programs, which are two of the many initiatives that 4-H and Cooperative Extension offer. Other resources and curricula include: Moving Ahead, a training program for youth workers; My Leadership Portfolio; Say Yes to Youth Engagement Strategies; and Get Ready! Get Set! Get a Job! Dr. Mincemoyer stated that 4-H and Cooperative Extension are looking for ways to reach more youth and are interested in working with youth in care. 4-H resources are available for IL programs and to other after-school services at a nominal cost of \$20.00 per year. For information on resources and downloadable materials, you should view www.4Hccs.org or www.4Hafterschool.org.



Lifetime Connections

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

Do you have a favorite type of tootsie pop? Perhaps it is grape, or orange or cherry. When you pick your color from the bag you can close your eyes and anticipate that full wonderful taste of your favorite flavor. But, just imagine, if the wrappers were switched and beneath your beloved cherry wrapper was the disgusting grape you loathe. Would you feel doubly cheated? After all you had not only committed your taste buds to cherry but now had to also settle for grape. Change and settling are two states that are not managed well by the human condition.

Permanency is one of those words that lead new resource families down the “switched tootsie pop wrapper” road. Permanency in itself sounds so strong, grounded and traditional. The word permanency conjures up visions of traditional values, picket fences, holiday photos, high school proms and family moments. Permanency in traditional families is often that. Permanency for hurt children is rarely any of those. The anticipated wonders of permanency are often incongruent with the reality of the experience. When the “wrapper” is peeled away, permanency arrangements are often jeopardized. They may survive but are hindered from thriving. Likewise, the children in them survive but rarely thrive. We must clearly prepare families for the true flavor of permanency arrangements and clarify the images that permanency may hold.

Clarification begins with setting realistic goals for resource families. Making a connection is the family’s

goal. That connection may take years. It may be incomplete. It may only happen on holidays. It may be broken for no reason and then repot itself in the middle of nowhere. It is not predictable but it is essential. The ability to connect, on whatever level for however long, is a lifetime skill. Permanency does not build that connection. It simply takes the chaos out of the playing field.

Resource families build the connection one experience at a time. The blueprint to prepare each resource family needs to include a strong education in how to build connections with children who, for whatever reason, avoid them. The blueprint should include strategies for building community connections to support the family in integrating the child into schools, activities and churches that will expand the plethora of available connecting points for the child. If one child can connect for one moment just one time, he may be able to repeat it again and again. He may be able to build a lifetime of connections but we must realize it may happen three decades from now!

With strong blueprints, honest expectations, realistic goals and committed resource families, connections will happen for each child. When, where and how must be left to the powers bigger than all of us. We should seek permanency but never lose sight of the greater power of the connection between human spirits to heal and support for a lifetime of happiness.

SWAN Advisory Committee

At the Sept. 7, 2006 meeting, SWAN Advisory Members elected Jackie Wilson, Executive Director of Three Rivers Adoption Council, as Chairperson and Helen Blair-Shuler of Montgomery County Orphan’s Court Services, as Vice-Chairperson. Both Jackie and Helen will serve in these positions for the next two years. Congratulations Jackie and Helen!

Lifetime Connections Through the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange and Pennsylvania's AdoptUSKids Initiative

by Jane Johnston,
PAE Division Manager,
Diakon/FDR and Sue Zola, Nurture
Family Coordinator, Diakon/FDR

The Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange (PAE) and the AdoptUSKids Initiative work with families and agencies who want to adopt - from the first phone call expressing interest after watching an AdoptUSKids advertisement through the placement of a child in the home. PAE receives applications from families and sends suggested matches of children to the families and their agencies. PAE also responds directly to questions about the status of matches and will often reassure families about the process of adopting a child.

The following scenario is fictional but represents typical incidents and is intended to help readers understand how PAE and the AdoptUSKids Initiative guide families to achieve lifetime connections.

Raymond is a father sitting in the therapist's office, thinking and talking about the progress his family has made. He remembers the first time he saw the television advertisement, "You Don't Have to be Perfect to be a Foster or Adoptive Parent." Now that his teenage son, Maurice, has been with him for 10 months, he realizes how true the advertisement was. He and Maurice have both struggled and grown significantly during their time together.

Ray remembers making that first call after seeing the advertisement, being both excited and anxious – what questions should he ask? Would he be hounded by the agency until he agreed to adopt? Could he do this? Did he make enough money? What about being single? He smiled as he remembered how silly those concerns proved to be. His first contact was with a very knowledgeable woman who gave him all the information he needed and mailed him a packet of information. She was available whenever he had a question. They talked after he came home from work and sometimes on the weekends. She helped him find an agency to do his home study. Because Ray is of Hispanic ethnicity, it was important to him that his agency understood him and his culture.

Ray, a single Hispanic man, knew that creating a family in a non-traditional format would not be a simple task. He holds many traditional beliefs and values. The training to be an adoptive parent was very helpful, but he still needed someone to talk with about the things that he was learning. He found himself calling the woman he first spoke with about the adoption. She listened and reassured him about the process and the information he was receiving. This was so new and different to him and having a sounding board made the difference for him between continuing the process and giving up.

In retrospect, Ray could see why others told him the hardest part was the waiting. The first look at the Web site www.adoptpakids.org revealed so many kids who needed families. He wanted to take them all home. He was sure he would find his son immediately but began to realize quickly that there was much more to the process than just wanting to be a father and having an instant family.

Filling out the PAE registration form was definitely part of his learning experience. It made him think about his strengths and about which challenges he could handle and which he could not. It resulted in some good discussions with his worker about the children who need families.

Ray remembered the letters from PAE and how they caused mixed emotions. Ray called the PAE coordinators who encouraged him to follow up and advocate for himself as an adoptive parent. Calling the workers, he remembered, gave him a sense that he had some control of the process.

Looking back, the best advice Ray would give is to take advantage of all of the potential resources offered through the network. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Don't be afraid to advocate for yourself. Go to every matching event and talk to the county staff who attend. These are the people you need to really get to know, because they make the final decisions about a child's placement. He remembered that matching events left a strong impression on him. The thoughts of those days flooded back, and he remembered talking to child workers and seeing the posters of the kids who needed families. His strongest memory was of the faces of all those children. Everywhere he looked he saw children who were waiting. And then he smiled as he remembered one of the pictures – Maurice. He was older than he thought his son would be but there was something about him.

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He and Maurice talked with the therapist about the waiting. Maurice was frightened, afraid of being rejected but knowing that he wanted a family. He said he thought no one would want him, really want him. They talked with the therapist about all the homes he had been in and left. The moves convinced Maurice he should avoid getting connected to others. He said he believed 15 was the right age to give up hope.

Then he heard about a man who had asked about him at a matching event. Both Maurice and Ray talked about the challenges of becoming a family. The process was difficult, but the good times got them through the tough times – and the support they got from the professionals and other adoptive families helped them to

continue to have hope. The therapist helped them to see that they both wanted and needed each other and that sticking with it was important. Ray shivered as he thought about the finalization hearing scheduled for this week.

Ray chuckled to himself when he remembered that first advertisement. No, you don't have to be perfect, but you do have to be flexible and committed – and a sense of humor doesn't hurt.

- In federal fiscal year 2005 (Oct. 1, 2004 through Sept. 30, 2005), 2,065 adoptions occurred in Pennsylvania's child welfare system.
- Of these finalizations, 349 were children registered with PAE.

- 14 children were placed in homes that began with a call through Pennsylvania's AdoptUSKids initiative.
- 69 families are in the process of completing family profiles after seeing the advertisement for AdoptUSKids.
- Nearly 350 families continue to be nurtured by the AdoptUSKids initiative as they begin this adoption process.

theideaexchange

Pennsylvania's Waiting Children

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



Meet Elizabeth!

Elizabeth is an active young lady who is always on the go. Whether dancing, cheerleading or swimming, she is a bundle of energy. Elizabeth also enjoys football, basketball, track and field and working out. When it comes to leisure activities, she loves traveling and watching movies.

Elizabeth's active lifestyle is complemented by healthy eating habits. Though she dislikes mushrooms, peas and cooked carrots, Elizabeth enjoys green apples and Italian dishes.

Elizabeth is doing well in school and likes gym class and writing,

especially stories and poetry. She dislikes her science and ecology classes.

An outgoing girl with a great sense of humor, Elizabeth loves making people laugh and revels in being the center of attention. Her favorite colors are purple, pink and green. Her counselor affectionately describes her as "cute."

This young lady has great aspirations for her future. Her plan is to pursue a degree in criminal justice. Elizabeth then hopes to go back to school to achieve her ultimate goal of becoming a lawyer. She dreams of someday helping other children in the child welfare system.

Elizabeth would love a family who is involved in activities in the community like going to parks, sporting events and the movies. She would also like to have pets, but no cats! Elizabeth would thrive with a family who showers her with love and attention while offering support, structure and caring for her needs.

All families will be considered for Elizabeth. She is legally free for adoption. Her PAE ID number is 10348. For more information on Elizabeth, contact the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange at 800-227-0225.

compiled by Carrie Keiser, Program Specialist, SWAN/OCYF

Pennsylvania received TWO National Adoption Excellence Awards!

Pennsylvania's Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) and Pennsylvania Independent Living (IL) Services accepted two National Awards on November 28th in Washington D.C. in celebration of National Adoption Month. SWAN and IL were nominated

and selected to receive a 2006 Adoption Excellence Award in the category *Increased Adoptions of Older Children*. SWAN was also nominated and selected to receive an award in the category *Support for Adoptive Families*. These awards are presented by the United

States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and were established to recognize outstanding accomplishments in achieving permanency for America's children waiting in foster care.

Adoption Bonus Incentive

Congratulations to Pennsylvania on receiving an Adoption Incentive Award for increasing the number of adoptions for fiscal year 2005 above your target. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recognized Pennsylvania for achieving a record number of finalizations, 2,065, in 2005. The Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families will be adding these funds to the media contract to purchase additional air time for our new recruitment commercials targeting foster and adoptive families.

Congratulations Phyllis Stevens!

Phyllis Stevens, Executive Director of Together As Adoption Parents, Inc., represented Pennsylvania when she accepted a Voice for Adoption award on November 14th in Washington D.C. She is the recipient of the Drenda Lakin Continuing Service to Adoptive Families award. This award is given each year to honor a state, nonprofit organization, or individual whose programs provide valuable adoptive family support after adoptions are finalized. She was nominated by SWAN for this award.

2007 Permanency Conference

The 15th Annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference, "United we Stand," will be held **July 11 – 13, 2007**, at the **Eisenhower Conference Center in Gettysburg, Pa.** The conference serves as a forum to educate, train and support participants to prepare children, older youth and families to move through the child welfare system towards permanency. This conference is designed for resource families, kinship care providers, permanent legal custodians, independent living workers, legal professionals, permanency professionals, child welfare workers and others with a vested interest in providing permanency services for children and adolescents. We look forward to seeing all of you and the families you serve there!

Justin Lee Joins Independent Living Project Staff

The Independent Living (IL) Project is pleased to announce that Justin Lee, formerly the interim executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters in Montgomery County, has joined the staff at the Child Welfare Training Program. Justin worked at Big Brothers Big Sisters for five years and was the IL coordinator, supportive housing director and director of development during his tenure. He's been active in the development of the Youth Advisory Board process in the state and has been a member of the steering committee for the Pennsylvania IL Youth Retreat.

Please welcome Justin in his new role at the University of Pittsburgh and the IL Project!

Radio Disney and AdoptUSKids

Radio Disney and Simon Malls joined together to present a mom-friendly, family-targeted, mall-based event focused on health, wellness and safety issues during the back to school time frame (July 29 – Sept 16, 2006). The AdoptUSKids' adoption campaign was selected as one of the featured issues, as well as two other Ad Council campaigns. This unique, interactive experience offered an entertaining approach to health and wellness discovery. Radio Disney created fun learning experiences for families through various skits performed by the Disney team in "The Ad Council Theater" at more than 80 malls across the country. The tour began on July 29th. Radio Disney has also made a commitment to support the AdoptUSKids PSA campaign with donated airtime for ads.

National Youth in Transition Database

The United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is proposing to add regulations that will create the Chafee National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) that will require states to collect and report data to ACF on youth who are receiving independent living services and the outcomes of certain youth who are in foster care or who age out of foster care. This proposed rule implements the data collection requirements of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-169) as incorporated into the Social Security Act.

DPW/OCYF, as well as many other states and national agencies, have commented on the proposed NYTD regulations. To view a draft of the regulations, please visit:
<http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/pdf/06-6005.pdf>.

Pennsylvania Heart Gallery

Wonderful news! Families have been identified for 22 of the 52 children featured in the Pennsylvania Statewide Heart Gallery. The Heart Gallery continues to travel throughout Pennsylvania to bring attention to these amazing children and motivate prospective parents to adopt.

When the exhibit is in your area, please invite your families to come and see these incredible portraits. The exhibit has already traveled to Altoona, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Erie, Wilkes-Barre and Philadelphia. For a current schedule of the exhibit, visit www.adoptpakids.org.

Waiting Child Segment comes to the Northeast!!

Attention workers in the Northeast! WBRE, Channel 28, a Wilkes-Barre NBC affiliate, has agreed to partner with SWAN for a waiting child segment. The segment will be called "A Little Love" and will air Mondays during the 5 p.m. newscast. SWAN is very excited about adding WBRE as one of our television recruitment partners. To schedule your waiting children for a news segment, contact Desiree Weisser at 717-772-7011.

Together As Adoptive Parents

Together as Adoptive Parents (TAP) Inc. hosted a "Blue Balloon" Day in front of a local Wal-Mart. In order to bring attention to the more than 1,300 children and youth who are in the foster care system in Pennsylvania and do not have an identified family, TAP's goal was to pass out 1,300 blue balloons and at the end of the day, TAP had passed out more than 1,000 balloons.

November National Adoption Month

Check out some of the National Adoption Month Celebrations

- November 1st, Lehigh County celebrated by honoring one family, one child and two professionals by presenting them with awards during a National Adoption Day ceremony.
- November 14th, Westmoreland County held a matching dessert, which was a collaborative effort between public and private agencies, and on November 17th, there were 15 finalization ceremonies with an adoption celebration afterwards.
- Three Rivers Adoption Council, located in Pittsburgh, celebrated National Adoption Month in the following ways:
 - The Art Installation Shoe Project
The shoe project used children's shoes to represent waiting children in Allegheny County. Throughout the month of November you could visit the Children's Museum, The Discovery Pavilion at the Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium, and Oxford Center to see this beautiful piece. ACBA produced a video that will show alongside this art project at each venue. The video highlighted Dr. Sturdivant, Judge Clark, Dr. Baker of the Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium and Jane Warner of the Children's Museum as they discussed the need for families for waiting children in Allegheny County.
 - Which shoe fits you? Education Symposium
In conjunction with the Shoe Project, the Children's Museum hosted informal talks and information sessions Thursday afternoons in November. On November 2, 9, & 16, from 2:00-3:30 pm, individuals talked with representatives from various organizations about the many options for getting involved in a child's life.
 - Heart Gallery
The Heart Gallery returned to the Allegheny Courthouse Rotunda. Throughout November these fabulous photographs of waiting children were on display along with the video production illuminating the great need for families in Allegheny County.
 - Art Installation
The Court House also displayed a large installation of artwork made by the children who come through its doors.
 - National Adoption Day – November 18
As always National Adoption Day was the highlight of the month. Nearly 100 families had their adoptions finalized. The bookmobile was on hand at the courthouse, and each child received extra special gifts. Each adopted child received a large gift bag filled with new, age appropriate toys, books and educational materials. This year the Courts Services for Children held the first National Adoption Day Gift Drive during the months of September, October and November in an effort to fill those gift bags to the brim.

New Advertisement Campaign for SWAN

SWAN produced a new media campaign designed to recruit adoptive and foster families. Three new television commercials and one new radio commercial were developed. The first television commercial debuted during "A Home for the Holidays," sponsored by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption on December 22 at 8:00 p.m. on CBS.

Governor 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.

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SWAN/IL Winter Statewide Meeting

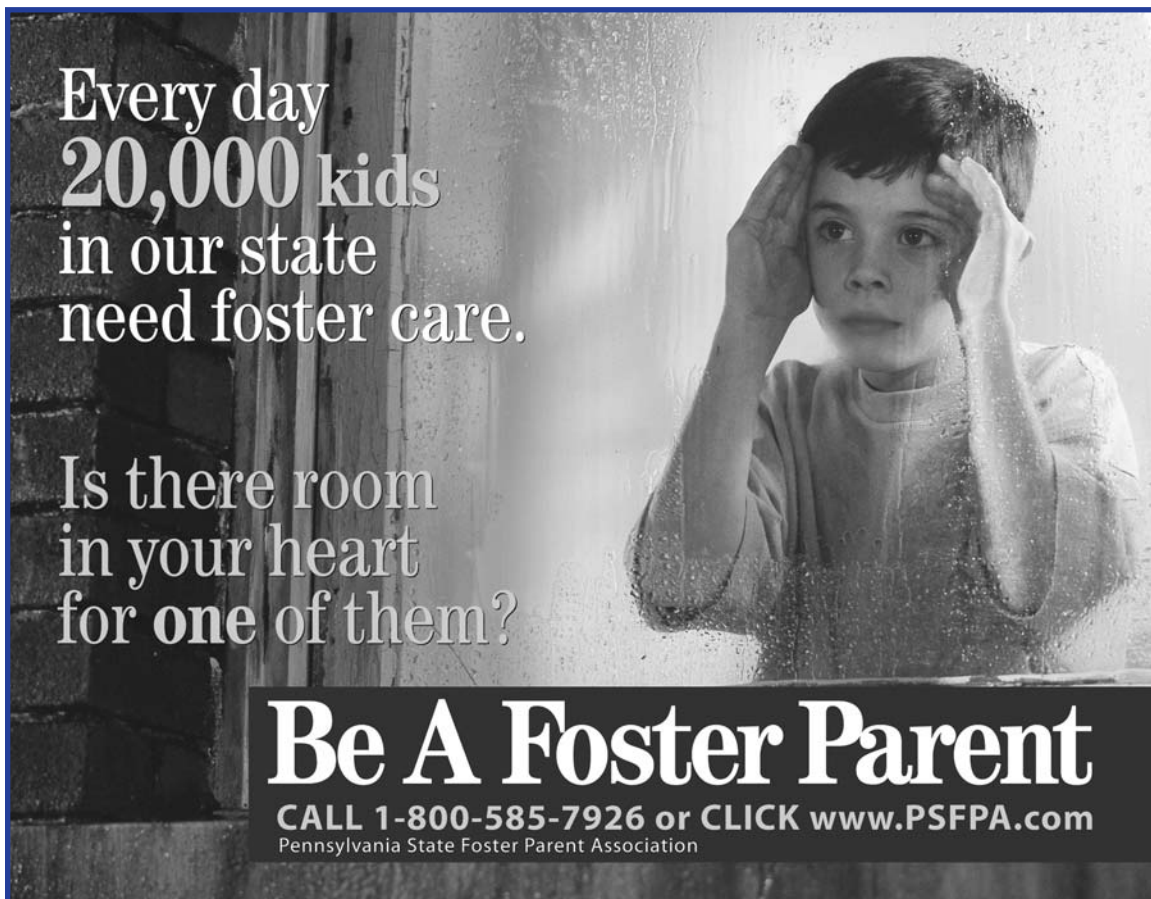
January 24-25, 2007

Penn Stater, State College, Pa.

2007 15th Annual Permanency Conference, "United We Stand"

July 11-13, 2007

Eisenhower Conference Center, Gettysburg, Pa.



Every day
20,000 kids
in our state
need foster care.

Is there room
in your heart
for one of them?

Be A Foster Parent
CALL 1-800-585-7926 or CLICK www.PSFPA.com
Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association