

Network News

Voice of the SWAN / IL Network

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Network News

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Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare
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P.O. Box 2675
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The Changing SWAN LSI Prescription for Legal Support

by *Natalie Witt-Washine*

Over the past two years county children and youth agencies have engaged in a paradigm shift in how their SWAN Legal Services Initiative, LSI, paralegals support them. The change is due perhaps in part to individual counties obtaining additional paralegals but is also a likely product of the counties simply reconsidering established practices of using paralegals in important but narrowly defined roles. This much is clear: early indications show both an enhanced and likely more efficient use of LSI support.

The Lycoming County liaison for the two paralegals who currently support that county is Kay Carpenter. Her thoughts about how a SWAN LSI paralegal supports a case from its inception until the time a child is about to exit care were telling. "Personally, I feel this practice is very effective. It leads to consistency across the board and [to] the paralegals maintaining an excellent knowledge of the case."

Jeni Nash-Harvey, a SWAN LSI paralegal who has provided legal support for LSI in Lycoming County

for over two years, believes the county agency has had improved outcomes in resolving paternity-related issues. According to Jeni, it helps that "we pretty much have as much information as the caseworker," which streamlines not only the ability to conduct diligent searches, but also the preparation of petitions and how permanency reviews are managed as well.

Liz Foulds, the second SWAN LSI paralegal in Lycoming County, mentioned the benefits of supporting a case through its entirety when termination of parental rights becomes necessary. "You know all the facts, you can write an effective termination petition." It was Liz who summed up how start-to-finish support also impacts her own professional development, "I don't think I would be as well rounded a paralegal! [without it]."

Perhaps the evolution of the SWAN LSI program in Westmoreland County best captures the transformation that's taken place. From its initial link to the Adoption Legal Services Project, ALSP,

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Moving Forward with Concurrent Planning

As discussed in the last edition 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.

Concurrent planning will be used for all dependent children in out of home placement. Effective 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.

In this edition, I will focus on the first four

core components. The remaining core components will be covered in a future edition of the *Network News*.

1. Full disclosure to all participants in the case planning process

Full disclosure is a respectful and candid discussion that begins when the child is placed into out of home care and continues throughout the life of the case. The discussion is offered to the parents and child

as well as other team members and stakeholders such as extended family, resource families, relative caregivers, attorneys, guardians ad litem and service providers. The discussion should be consistent with the principles of strengths-based and solution-focused casework practice.

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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.

PSRFA Conference: "A Work of Heart"

By Kathy Ramper,
PSRFA Executive Director

The 35th Annual Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association, PSRFA, Conference, "Resource Families...A Work of Heart," was held on October 20-22, 2011 at the Best Western Premier, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

This year we were privileged to have Paula Kyle, author of *On the Edge of Unthinkable*, with us throughout our entire conference. From beginning to end, through her opening keynote, trainings and closing remarks, Paula shared with us her touching story of her life as a foster child. Other highlights were our store, auction and raffle. Between the three we raised \$6400 for the PSRA scholarship fund.

Thank you to the conference planning committee for all your help. You are very much appreciated.



Save the date for next year's conference, October 18-20, 2012.

I found the following article on the New Hampshire Foster and Adoptive Parent Association website. I felt it was worth sharing. The author is unknown.

"If you have ever looked at the nondescript design of a three dimensional holographic picture and allowed your eyes to gently focus deeper into the depth of the pattern until a hidden picture emerges, you will have an idea of what foster parents do. They are, somehow, able to look beyond the

illusion (presented to them in the form of a traumatized family) each time they accept a child into their home. They have, long ago, looked into their own hearts and found that there was enough love there to be shared. They look beyond the circumstances of the child and his family and see many of the gifts and lessons these individuals bring with them. They don't always see the full picture in the beginning, but, when they open their hearts, slowly the picture emerges from the background. (continued on page 4)

The PSRFA awards banquet was held on Friday, October 21, 2011.

Congratulations go out to our award winners:

Agency of the year - **Children's Home of York**

Resource family association - **Erie County**

Resource family - **Carrie and Ralph Burlingham**

Community partnership - **Senator Lisa Baker**

Caseworker of the year - **Carl Pontious**

Youth advocacy and leadership - **Taron Harris**

President's Award - **Sierra Marshall**

Executive Director's Award - **Tom and Ann Rose**

PSRFA Conference

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They have learned how to look in a way that the good qualities in the families they work with, like the holographic picture, will unfold and become visible.

"Those who are never too busy to stop for the love of a child remain forever young."

Indeed, if this is the case, resource families have found the fountain of youth!

On behalf of the Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association and myself, thank you for all you do for our children and families. 🙏



What a face! Foster dad Bill Frain proudly shows off little Jorden.



Fun at the PSRFA Conference!

From the left, MaryEdna Sunkel, PSRFA administrative assistant; Barb Forshey, PSRFA board member; Elaine Newkirk, PSRFA president; Kathy Ramper, PSRFA executive director; Judy Carey; and Sandy Fenstermacher, PSRFA board member.

SWAN is Full of Surprises!

*by Brenda Lawrence,
Diakon/FDR, SWAN Prime Contractor*

How would you describe the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network? While SWAN as the network stands for anyone involved in helping a child find permanency, many partners in SWAN understand only parts of SWAN, and it is usually those areas of SWAN with which they have the most experience. I find it interesting to ask someone who joins the SWAN prime contract as staff or as an affiliate - "What fact or idea about SWAN were you most surprised to learn?" Their answer most often is, "I did not realize how extensive the SWAN contract and services are."

Many folks may know all about the units of service. Services provided through SWAN are available to all children in out of home care with any permanency goal. Some people may be surprised to know that SWAN has 80 affiliate agencies located across the state that serve all counties.

Network partners often do not realize that the Legal Services Initiative, LSI, program is part of the SWAN prime contract. They may know some counties have an LSI paralegal but do not realize the scope of the paralegals' activities nor do they know LSI paralegal support is provided in most of the 67 counties.

Many of our SWAN partners are aware of the LSI Warmline, but may be surprised to know that the Warmline responds to legal inquiries from counties, courts, affiliate agencies, families and youth. Act 101-related calls are channeled through the Warmline as well.

Another area known, but underestimated, is the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange, PAE. Many are not aware that PAE services and activities are also part of the SWAN prime contract. When agencies agree to schedule

PAE training, they are often surprised to learn the range of services our children in out of home care can receive. Additionally, the Pennsylvania Adoption Information Registry, PAIR, is managed by PAE.

The SWAN Helpline (800-585-SWAN) has been part of the SWAN contract since 1997, so it is likely many of our network partners are aware of the direction and support it provides to families interested in foster care or adoption. But it doesn't stop there; many folks are pleasantly surprised to discover the SWAN Helpline information and referral specialists also respond to families who are looking for post-permanency services. In addition to an extensive array of services from pre- to post-adoption, the SWAN Helpline serves as the main hub for calls regarding concerns or complaints of service delivery from agencies and families – assuring quality service to the network.

Most recently, I was surprised and delighted by the enthusiasm of a network partner who applauded our ongoing collaboration with Independent Living, IL, services. She said the collaboration between SWAN and IL to support the older youth is one of the best ideas in the network!

There you have it – SWAN- a network full of surprises with many more to come!



SWAN
..a lot more
than you think!

SWAN LSI Paralegal “Prescription”

(continued from page 1)

paralegal support in Westmoreland County has changed considerably over the years. A part time paralegal position with the ALSP eventually morphed into a full time position. Both supported the termination side of cases. Today, Westmoreland County prides itself on receiving support from multiple SWAN LSI paralegals, all of whom provide legal support throughout the life of the case.

SWAN LSI Northwest Coordinator Melissa Eller reflected on the change in practice, “...we tried several combinations of job duties between the three and four paralegals before they began working on cases from the moment of placement.

This seems to be the best system for Westmoreland County and the four paralegals.” Melissa points out that the current arrangement is also a buffer in the event of caseworker turnover. “Having a paralegal assigned to a case from the beginning to permanency provides stability for the case.”

Recently, I spoke with SWAN LSI paralegal Sarah Distefanis about the changes in Westmoreland County. Sarah, one of the more tenured paralegals in the program, gladly retraced the changes that have occurred over the years. She recounts the leap to having one paralegal support a case from intake to case closure. “The program evolved once again in June 2010, when the three paralegals in Westmoreland were placed on a rotation in which a paralegal is assigned a case from the

time of inception, with the same paralegal assisting with a case from the shelter care hearing or filing of dependency until finalization.”

I asked SWAN LSI paralegal Jennifer Gelet to think about the approach of having one paralegal assigned to a case from start to finish. Although Jennifer’s role in Montgomery County is to primarily support termination



Jennifer Gelet, Montgomery County SWAN LSI paralegal, in action

proceedings, she’s also had the opportunity to significantly assist on the dependency side in her county. Jennifer has seen a few cases where her front-end support cases ended up receiving additional support from her on the TPR side of the equation. Her endorsement

that “a more complete and deeper understanding of the case” is possible by supporting it throughout its life was given with the caveat that some TPR cases pose rather daunting challenges for those new to preparing for them.

There is every reason to suspect that this practice change will only gain more traction in the future. Several compelling reasons for why can be cited. Many county liaisons are keenly aware of the comprehensive and ongoing LSI training that all paralegals must complete. A SWAN LSI paralegal is primed through this training with an understanding of the essential laws that are relevant to navigating through the full spectrum of child welfare legal support. This legal foundation helps set the stage for turning

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SWAN LSI Paralegal “Prescription”

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an expanded practice role into a purpose that’s extremely fulfilling.

Additionally, more paralegals feel an increased level of engagement with their cases. Moreover, child welfare legislation passed over the course of the last few years, such as Fostering Connections and Act 101, has created a new niche for the legal support needs in counties. With SWAN LSI paralegals now supporting some of these specialized needs, the allure of one person to provide legal support for a child throughout their time in foster care becomes a matter of pragmatic necessity. The future shape of LSI support may reflect the following sentiments for an ever growing number of counties—one paralegal, one case. This will provide a continuum of legal support from the time of a child’s placement in substitute care until either termination of parental rights or a form of permanency is achieved. 🌱



SWAN LSI paralegal Liz Foulds, Lycoming County

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

*by Desiree Weisser, Program Specialist
Office of Children, Youth and Families*

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month in Pennsylvania. Each April, the Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance (PFSA) in partnership with the Office of children, Youth and Families, holds events designed to raise public awareness about the issues of child abuse and to encourage Pennsylvanians to report suspected abuse to our toll-free child abuse hotline, ChildLine and Abuse Registry.

This year, PFSA will host a Child Abuse Prevention Month Opening Event at the Harrisburg Hilton on April 3, 2012 from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. It will include a breakfast, a keynote speaker and an award presentation of the Michael A. O’Pake Memorial Award for Media Public Service.

The keynote speaker is Regina Brett, author of the New York Times best seller, *God Never*

Blinks: 50 Lessons for Life’s Little Detours. Tickets for the event are \$25 and can be purchased by calling PFSA or visiting their website.

Additionally, 2012 will be the fifth year PFSA will sponsor *Painting for Prevention*, where families across the commonwealth create murals. The murals will be completed in Lancaster on April 17 at the Lancaster YWCA, in Berwick on April 21 at the corner of Third and Lasalle Streets and in Clarion on April 26 at the Clarion mall. The Berwick mural will be our first outdoor “permanent” mural on the side of a building. Everyone is invited to attend these events! More information on Child Abuse Prevention Month and these events can be found at PFSA’s website, www.pa-fsa.org, or by contacting them at 1-800-448-4906.

StatewideStraightTalk about Concurrent Planning

(continued from page 2)

Some examples of issues to be discussed with parents and children include:

- The circumstances that led to the agency's involvement and that led to placing the child in out of home care;
- That foster care is temporary and is not designed to be permanent;
- That foster care has emotional and developmental impacts on children and it is imperative that the child be returned to the family as soon as possible or that another legally permanent family be found for them as soon as possible;
- The legal rights and responsibilities of the parents and the child;
- That it is important for them to identify relatives or other significant adults who may be considered as a permanency resource and participate in the case planning process so that if it becomes necessary to place the child in out of home care that the child may be placed in the best possible environment with people they know;
- The permanency planning timeframes;
- The identification of the primary and concurrent goal and the plans to achieve both goals;
- The support services available to help family and child;
- The changes needed and the expectations of the agency and court; and
- That if the agreed upon goals are not met, the alternative plan may become the primary permanency plan and the focus of permanency efforts for the child.

Issues to be discussed with resource families include:

- That foster care is temporary and is not designed to be permanent;
- The permanency planning timeframes;
- The identification of the primary and concurrent goal and the plans to achieve both goals;
- The legal requirement to search for relatives who would be able to care for the child (if a non-relative placement);
- Licensing requirements, training and responsibilities of the resource family (for kin, relative, PLC homes);
- Their legal rights and responsibilities including their rights under the PA Resource Family Care Act (Act 73 of 2005);
- The support services available to help resource families; and
- What the child's primary permanency goal is, i.e., reunification and that they are expected to support that goal while being open to becoming a permanency resource should reunification efforts fail.

Documentation of Full Disclosure must be contained in the child and family record, and it is recommended that all parents and youth receive the above information in writing.

2. Family search and engagement

The early determination of paternity and early identification of family members and kin is critical to identifying possible resource families among the child's relatives and can greatly assist in developing a feasible concurrent plan, including permanency with a relative.

Identifying and locating relatives and kin is an ongoing process that begins during the initial screening or intake process and continues through the life of the case. It is recommended that as much information as possible on all family members and kin be obtained during the initial screening or intake (continued on page 9)

"Newly identified family members and kin are a valuable resource in locating more family members who may also be considered as a permanency resource for a child..."

StatewideStraightTalk about Concurrent Planning

(continued from page 8) process so that in the event it becomes necessary to place a child into out of home care the non-custodial parent and other family members may be included in the Family Service Plan (FSP) and/or Child's Permanency Plan (CPP) and may serve as placement resources for the child. Such early identification of relatives and kin may also help to prevent placement into the child welfare system.

As family members and kin are identified, they need to be engaged immediately while the caseworker or the SWAN Legal Services Initiative (LSI) paralegal continues to search for additional family members or kin. Those identified family members/kin are a valuable resource to locating more family members who may also be interested in participating in the concurrent plan and/or being considered as a permanency resource for the child. Family search is an ongoing process that extends beyond the requirement of notifying all known relatives of a child's placement within 30 days. The diligent search for relatives, kin and permanent connections, and the engagement of those located, should be ongoing throughout the life of the case.

There are several resources available to support locating and involving relatives and kin including:

Family Finding

PA has developed a curriculum based on Kevin Campbell's Family Finding. A six day training offers an overview of the Family Finding model including Discovery, Engagement, Planning, Decision Making, Evaluation and Follow up on Support. This training is available through the PA CWTP and all CCYA should ensure that their staff is trained on the Family Finding model.

Accurint

The Department of Public Welfare (DPW) has contracted with Reed Elsevier's Lexis-Nexis® to provide all CCYAs access to this online person locator and research tool. Among other things, an Accurint search can assist with locating parents, relatives and permanent connections for children in out

of home placement. Accurint is one of several valuable tools that can assist workers in the diligent search process.

Diligent Search Packet

The SWAN LSI created the Diligent Search Packet to aid CCYA in the search process. The SWAN LSI Diligent Search Packet is available online at no cost at: <http://www.diakon-swan.org>. In addition to information about Accurint, the SWAN LSI Diligent Search Packet contains other information and instructions on how to perform searches to locate family members and kin. Diligent search is the foundation to locating family members and kin and should be an ongoing continuous process throughout the life of the case.

SWAN LSI

OCYF has provided SWAN LSI paralegal support to many CCYAs. SWAN LSI paralegals are an excellent support system who can use Accurint and perform diligent searches to locate family and kin thereby freeing the CCYA caseworker's time to engage in other practice related to the case. It is not the responsibility of the paralegals to engage family members and kin located, but rather to provide the information obtained through the diligent search process, such as the names and contact information of the family and kin located to the CCYA caseworkers, so that they may begin to engage those individuals who have been identified in the permanency process.

3. Family Group Decision Making/Family Conferencing/Teaming

Family Group Decision Making/Family Conferencing

Once family members and kin have been identified and contacted, the agency may wish to proceed with a family group conference to help finalize the permanency plan for the child.

Family group conferencing can be a useful tool in the concurrent planning practice. Many counties have implemented Family Group (continued on page 10)

StatewideStraightTalk about Concurrent Planning

(continued from page 9) Decision Making (FGDM) as a key family engagement strategy to bring families together to meet with the agency, extended family members, service providers and other significant individuals in their lives who can support them in making the best decisions for children in out of home care. For children in out of home care, FGDM can be used to help identify the best out of home placement and the best permanent home.

Once the FGDM meeting has occurred and resources have been identified as possible placement or

permanency resources for the child, the county agency should follow the procedures outlined in the Child Placement with Emergency Caregivers Bulletin # 3140-04-05/3490-04-01 and ensure that appropriate services are provided such as family profiles, child profiles, child preparation and other permanency related services.

Teaming

Although FGDM may not be appropriate for every case, the agency is expected to engage the family in permanency planning and in the development of the FSP/CPP. In those cases where FGDM is not appropriate or possible at the time of placement, the agency should continue to make efforts to engage the parents, child, relatives and kin so that a future FGDM may be held.

Until such a time as a FGDM can be held, family team meetings involving the child, parents, extended family, kin, agency staff, resource parents and other stakeholders should be held to develop the most appropriate concurrent plan.

A family team meeting is a gathering of family members, friends, community specialists and other interested people who join together to strengthen a family and

provide a protection and care plan for the family's children. The family team meeting is often the forum that is used to help the family craft, implement or change the permanency plan. The team provides an alliance of support for the family and facilitates the family's participation in decision-making regarding safety, permanence and well-being for their children.

Teams should include all available family members, the county caseworker and supervisor, any contracted service providers,

health care providers, educational partners, child/youth and parent advocates, or anyone else who is integral to the case. When applicable, team members should also include behavioral health professionals, spiritual leaders, substitute caregivers, private providers,

residential facilities, juvenile probation and others as identified. Collaboration among team members from different agencies is essential. Team composition should be competent and have the right balance of personal interest in the family, knowledge of the family, technical skills, cultural awareness, authority to act, flexibility to respond to specific needs, and time necessary to fulfill the commitment to the family. Collectively, the team should have the authority to act and ability to assemble supports and resources on behalf of the child and the family.

4. Child/family visitation

The quality and frequency of visitation is a key factor in contributing to the timely permanency of children in out of home care. Foster children who are visited frequently by their parents are more likely to have high well-being ratings and are more likely to adjust well to their foster care placement than are children

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"Foster children who are visited frequently by their parents are more likely to have high well-being ratings and are more likely to adjust well to their foster care placement than are children who have infrequent or no visits. "

StatewideStraightTalk about Concurrent Planning

(continued from page 10) who have infrequent or no visits. Frequent visitation has consistently been found to contribute to the successful reunification of children placed into out of home care.

The frequency of visits in concurrent planning is based on the unique needs of the family and child rather than on arbitrary policy guidelines, and all visits should be held in a family-friendly setting. Visitation should be as frequent as possible, with a minimum of one visit every two weeks, with at least weekly visitation whenever possible for all families with a goal of reunification. The FSP and CPP should detail the current visitation plan as well as clear plans to provide more frequent and meaningful parent-child contact as the case progresses towards reunification.

Successful concurrent planning and visitation requires collaboration between the agency, the resource family and the child's family. Resource families need to understand their role in concurrent planning and visitation, including that at times, they will be asked to supervise visits and/or have visits in their home between the child and his/her family.

Visits may be supervised or unsupervised. Not all children in out of home care require supervised visits. Agencies must assess whether or not supervised visits are needed and if so, provide a child- and family-friendly place for the visits to occur. Whenever possible, visits should occur in the family home unless there are specific reasons not to do so. The location of visits should permit privacy and interaction and be only as restrictive as required to protect the child. Visit locations

may include the parents' home, the foster parents' home, parks, restaurants, family centers, recreational activities, etc.

In cases where visitation is supervised, prior to reunification agencies should plan to transition from supervised to unsupervised visits. This transition may include the use of "mentored visitation." Mentored visitation is planned in advance with the parent's consent and is attended by an adult who is available to intervene as needed but whose primary role is to be a discreet participant who models correct parenting while allowing the parent the opportunity to practice their parenting skills.

In addition to regularly scheduled visits, parents should be encouraged to participate in all of their child's activities including extracurricular activities, medical appointments, sporting events, educational activities and meetings. In no case is a parent's participation in these activities to be viewed as a regular visit; participation in these extra-curricular activities is in addition to, not instead of, regularly scheduled visits.

Hopefully, these identified core components will help to increase permanency outcomes for children in out of home care in Pennsylvania. Agencies seeking assistance with any core component can contact any member of the Technical Assistance Collaborative. Members of the collaborative include the Office of Children, Youth and Families, SWAN, the Child Welfare Training Program, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts and the American Bar Association Barriers to Permanency Project.



Advice from an Alumnus of the Child Welfare System

by Chris Nobles, Youth Ambassador
Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program

It goes without saying: working with older youth is a difficult task. Aside from the typical rigors of growing up, such as school, social pressures, budding positions in the workforce, *drama* in all its forms, the unique experience of interacting with the system adds a few extra challenges to the mix.

Thankfully, there are professionals who specialize in being the locus for that added interaction, professionals who do all they can to make the interactions smooth and do their all to help. These are facts I appreciate in hindsight as a recent alumnus of the system. Understanding that older youth are going through a great deal and will always need a hand is certainly important. *Everyone* needs a hand. Even those who have made it their job to lend a hand, need a hand. So here's the best I can offer you, a few tips as you move forward working with older youth.

Talk to me

Moving through the system, especially as an older youth, can be very lonely. You are surrounded by many people, but rarely ever the same set of people. As a worker, you may be the only steady face in the picture and the only constant voice. So use it. Even if it means for one day being unable to get to all nine million tasks that make up the youth's case, just *talk* to them. Even if they won't talk back initially, they may just be in shock. Trust me, realizing my workers were just people too took some time but made them far more relatable. Humans helping me out, rather than just another automated arm of the system I'd fallen into.

Listen to me

The nature of the situation can often leave a youth without that *someone to talk to* that everyone needs. It can be difficult to pick up on the "I need someone to talk to" signs, but an obvious one is when the youth starts talking. It may be a fret about something

unimportant. It may be slightly irrational. It may just be a need to vent. What the youth is telling you when they start talking, is that if this minor frustration is what they're coming to you with, then it's a minor frustration they feel like you can help with or at least make a satisfactory ear to vent into. If a straw can break a camel's back, then removing one might just be what's needed to keep it intact.

Dream with me

Ask a youth what they want to be, if they could be anything at all. And when the youth replies *doctor* or *basketball player* or *singer* or *dancer* or *astronaut* or *President of the United States...* don't shoot them down. Take that as a goal, and help them toward it. This isn't sowing false hope, though.

I once heard an example from a professional who is certainly good at what he does: "If a youth wants to be a pro basketball player, then that's a good thing. It means they need to get into an activity in high school. They need to graduate. They need to look at and get into a college and keep their grades up there to keep playing. And they're going to want to do all of it, because they want to be a star. If they don't make it? Then they accidentally got a diploma or two." Every step toward that dream goal will be a step in a positive direction, so there's no harm in dreaming with the youth and helping make that dream as real as possible.

This isn't an exhaustive list, of course, but three major details to the method of interacting with older youth that I feel has the greatest impact. I could point out that the greatest factor may come from the heart, and from the heart of the worker being in the right place to help out the youth who so need it, but you're already in the field and taking the time to read this. So you already know that. 

Racing for a Home in Northeast Pennsylvania

*By Christine Swank,
SWAN Regional Technical Assistant*

Wilkes-Barre Racing Inc. is a non-profit corporation that organizes, promotes and conducts athletic activities to raise money and awareness for foster care and adoption.

Rich Pais, executive director, and his wife Julie knew they wanted children, and adoption was the means by which they grew their family. They are adoptive parents of a daughter and son, adopting both internationally and locally in northeast Pennsylvania.

When asked, Rich noted he had done an Ironman Race in Lake Placid, New York, in 2007 and felt he wanted to do something "bigger." He realized there are a lot of races or other events for a variety of causes, but none for adoption. He also recognized that families were needed for waiting children more so than dollars.

And so Wilkes-Barre Racing came to be. Rich has regularly partnered with Frankie Warren, also an adoptive parent, of "WMGS

Magic 93" radio station, and Ryan Leckey, reporter for WNEP Newswatch, to advertise events that promote adoption and foster care needs in northeastern Pennsylvania.

Steve Kepic of the Times Shamrock Newspaper, also an adoptive parent, joined in creating another wonderful partnership that benefits waiting children and youth in the region. The Times-Shamrock, Citizen's Voice newspaper runs a "Child of the Week" feature. This is a full color page article devoted each Wednesday to the waiting child being featured. In addition to the many events and media outlets that bring adoption and foster care needs to the attention of the general public, over \$8,000 in awards and gifts were provided to foster care and adoption organizations in northeastern Pennsylvania in 2010. For a listing of events held in 2011 and those slated for 2012, visit www.wilkes-barreracing.com.



Julie Pais, foreground, with her children Drew, 5, and Maria, 8, in the background.

A Christmas Dream Come True

by Jennifer Casner-Hockenberry, LSW, PAE Coordinator
and Stefanie Huber, LSW,
Lehigh County Office of Children and Youth

As is often the case with the children registered with the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange, PAE, one routine follow up from the PAE coordinator to a Lehigh County caseworker revealed a wonderful Christmas story.

Stefanie Huber shared a joyous transition for one young man. Josue turned 21 on December 25, 2011, Christmas Day, a day that would be a celebration for many but would mark an end to life as this young man knew it. Josue was about to age out of the foster care system, a system that had cared for him and met his needs for practically all of his life. The clock was ticking, but his worker didn't give up and pursued every avenue afforded to her.

Like many workers, she felt an emotional connection, sense of protection and ethical obligation to the young man on her caseload. But it wasn't an easy feat and required some extended effort. Pulling on all of her resources, Stefanie used the services of an affiliate, Northwestern Human Services, to revisit a respite provider with whom Josue had a positive experience. Once approached, the respite caregiver agreed to become Josue's foster father, and after discussing Josue's transition out of care, began to consider becoming a permanent connection. Once the foster father was on board as a possible permanent connection, Stefanie went to work to assure supports were put in place to



maintain the placement.

Stefanie has been an IL worker for seven years and has sometimes struggled with how to transition older youth, but over the years she has become familiar with resources for children with severe disabilities. She was familiar with and pursued services for the foster father

through a program called "Life Sharing," which is adult care for persons in the Intellectual Disabilities, ID, program (formerly know as MH/MR). Though Stefanie did most of the legwork, she credits Josue's placement to the support of many. Specifically, she indicated that the Lehigh County court judges and masters were instrumental in advocating with ID offices to obtain a consolidated waiver to provide Josue with the necessary transitional services.

The consolidated waiver is money awarded through the state for those with intellectual disabilities. This funding will provide all necessary services for Josue for the rest of his life if he so chooses. She said, though it was not always easy, she trudged through all the paperwork and attended numerous "system's coordination" meetings to develop a long term plan for Josue. The system's coordination meeting is a meeting where all of the department heads look at the best route for a child to transition into adult care and holds each system accountable to provide necessary (continued on page 15)

Lessons Learned from the Field

by Steve Eidson, M.Ed.
and Justin Lee, PPA

As part of the SWAN/IL Fall Quarterly morning session, which highlighted ways to implement provisions highlighted in the Independent Living, IL, Services Bulletin, panels of IL professionals, affiliates that work with older youth, and the youth and alumni themselves shared what their counties and programs are doing to improve outcomes and services for older youth and young adults.

Panels were held across the state in each region. Regions shared specific information about their programs, including best practices, challenges with implementing programs, youth and alumni feedback and advice for anyone looking to implement new programs in their communities. The discussion was clearly focused on the social work practice level, especially, how can we impact the child welfare system in our “front line” work?

Panelists highlighted programs such as apartment labs; transitional and supportive housing; driver’s license and after-school supports; foster and resource parent recruitment that encourages families to provide homes for older teens; innovative use of SWAN units of service, especially child preparation with family group decision-making and transition conferences; teens mentoring

and teaching other youth; the use of trial discharge, and programs to support youth in care until age 21.

Perhaps, the quote from Pam Lessman in Fayette County best sums up the panels. She described her program as one in which IL youth mentor and teach their peers: “Our youth want to experience things first-hand, learn in settings that are real to them and share what they’ve gone through with others, especially younger youth. We listen to them about what they need and try to empower them as we help prepare them to transition to lives out of the child welfare system.”

In the southeast, Chris Nobles, a youth ambassador for the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program, shared the importance of support while transitioning to adult roles and responsibilities. Chris remarked, “It’s really important that you form a strong relationship with youth. We may seem to have everything together, but the stress of balancing school, work and living in your first apartment can be overwhelming. It’s good to have someone to talk to about everything. Otherwise, we might just shut down and not be able to handle it all.” 

Christmas Dream Come True

(continued from page 14) services to the young adults who are caught between the child and adult systems. The coordinated efforts are what truly helped Josue find and maintain a permanent connection.

Persistence truly does pay off. Once the waiver was awarded, Stefanie could breathe easier, knowing Josue would have a wonderful home and a permanent connection with little to no change to his daily life. Stefanie said his home is perfect for him, and his dad takes Josue everywhere with him. He is learning how to cook and has begun taking pride in his accomplishments and new skill sets. He loves living with the foster dad, who is very mellow

and patient with him. He can continue visits with his brother and sister as his foster father is committed to maintaining that connection for Josue. Though the foster father has already raised his own sons and wasn’t in “the market” to raise another, through his connection with Josue, the persistence of a caseworker, and the collaboration of systems, the foster father felt empowered and able to offer stability to Josue. While Josue has not been adopted, permanency and consistency for his life is established, and his worker couldn’t be happier with the outcome—an extra special Christmas gift for this deserving young man!



Sweet Story of Success: Cameron and Ruggero

*By Elizabeth White, OCMI CSR Specialist
Diakon Adoption and Foster Care*

Cameron's story does not have a happy beginning, but do not let that stop you from reading, because it does have a happily ever after. Like so many children in the foster care system, Cameron was born into unfortunate circumstances. In the short amount time he has been alive, Cameron has experienced more loss, neglect and abuse than most people will experience in an entire lifetime. At just three weeks of age, Cameron was very sick, and it was determined that his birth parents were not able to provide the care that he needed. Due to severe social issues and a prior history with the child welfare system, Cameron's birth parents were unable to care for him, and he was removed from their home and placed into foster care.

When Cameron was three weeks old, he was placed with an experienced foster family who had fostered and adopted several children with various special needs and disabilities. Cameron immediately became an integral part of the bustling household, and he was adopted by this family at the age of three. Over the next five years, Cameron was able to live as a typical child. He had parents who loved him, siblings to play with, and what seemed to be a safe and secure home. In January of 2006, Cameron's world was suddenly turned upside down when his adoptive father died unexpectedly. As a result of this traumatic loss, Cameron's adoptive mother sank into a deep depression and became unable to care for Cameron and his four siblings. Sadly, this unfortunate turn of events led to all five children being placed back into foster care in November of 2007.



Over the next several years, Cameron lived with six different foster families, several of them being pre-adoptive, and continued to experience even more abandonment and loss because each move meant leaving family, friends, teachers, pets and personal possessions behind. Cameron had counseling services and multiple supports in place to help him cope and grieve; however, none of these things were taking the place of what he really needed—a forever family and permanent place to call home.

Cameron was referred to the SWAN Older Child Matching Initiative, OCMI, in November of 2010 in hopes of locating a permanent resource. At the time, he was 12 years old and living with a foster family who was committed to him, but not interested in adoption. Cameron's OCMI recruiter immediately got to work providing the intensive Child Specific Recruitment, CSR, services and by January of 2011, an interested family had come forward for Cameron.

Ruggero Scarabello is a single man who moved to the United States from Italy in 2005. Ruggero had wanted to become a father for as long as he could remember but realized the limitations he may encounter due to his alternative lifestyle. He began researching the types of children available for adoption in the United States and quickly learned of the great need for families willing to adopt older children from the child welfare system. This became Ruggero's focus, and he decided to become a certified adoptive and foster parent.

Ruggero made his initial inquiry about Cameron in January of 2011, after seeing Cameron's information on the Pennsylvania (continued on page 17)

Benchmarks! Benchmarks!

by Charity Brailier and Deb Thomas

When SWAN began in 1992 there were no benchmarks and no means of implementing standardized permanency practice across the state. In 2001 a CQI (Continuous Quality Improvement) committee was convened to address the issue. The committee was comprised of county workers, affiliate workers and SWAN staff. After a year's work, the benchmarks for each unit of service were developed and nine affiliates were selected to pilot their use for six months. The benchmarks were then introduced to the network in 2002. Having benchmarks allowed for standardization of service delivery, clarification of roles and responsibilities within each unit of service and evaluation of practice.

Much has happened in the last nine years. In 2003 SWAN services were expanded to include children and youth with any permanency goal. In 2006 SWAN began a partnership with Independent Living Services, bringing the needs of Pennsylvania's older youth to the forefront. Permanency initiatives such as Family Group Decision Making and Family Finding affected practice. The use of technology, including Accurint and other search engines, the LSI Diligent Search Packet and social networking sites present new frontiers for Child Specific Recruitment, CSR. Legislation such as Fostering Connections and Act 101 add requirements to service delivery.

Cameron and Ruggero

(continued from page 16) Adoption Exchange. Over the next several months, Ruggero was provided with extensive information about Cameron and was prepped by Cameron's entire team on how best to parent a child with special needs. Finally, after months of preparation and much anticipation, Ruggero and Cameron had their first meeting and there was an immediate connection right from the beginning. Ruggero and Cameron spent the next several weekends together, and Cameron moved into Ruggero's home on July 23, 2011. Cameron's adoption was finalized on February 22, 2012.

All of these require us to update the SWAN benchmarks.

The work on benchmark revisions began at the quarterly Unit of Service, US, meetings in May 2010, starting with CSR and Child Preparation. Work has continued since then, gathering input from the affiliates at the US meetings, incorporating feedback into the benchmarks and then presenting them again at US meetings for further refining. When this phase of the work was completed, the CSR and Child Preparation benchmarks were reviewed by the CQI committee specifically to get county involvement in the process. Further revisions were made following the CQI review of the benchmarks.

The revised versions of the CSR and Child Preparation benchmarks were presented to the network at the fall 2011 quarterly meetings, giving counties and affiliates one last opportunity to provide feedback before the benchmarks go to the state for approval.

Work continues on the other benchmarks. Family Profile, Placement and Finalization benchmarks will soon be ready for CQI review. We are looking for more county representation on the CQI committee. If you are interested in representing your county during the benchmark revision process, please contact Deb Thomas at dthomas@diakon-swan.org.



Cameron's road to permanency has been a bumpy one, and there are still are obstacles that continue to get in the way; however, he now has a loving and committed father who is willing to stick with him through the good times and the not so good times. Ruggero and Cameron are two very different people who have come together to form a family and a story that is uniquely their own. As the months and years go by, their family will change and evolve, but they, without a doubt, will always have each other. 

Tools for Your Toolbelt

*by Tami Swartley and Christine Swank
SWAN Regional Technical Assistants*

The Adoption Coalition of Lancaster County, ACLC, presented a one day seminar on October 7, 2011 for parents and social service professionals. The day began with a session titled "The Impact of Exposure to Violence on a Child's Developing Brain." The session focused on the influence of the violent images our children are exposed to through media or experiences of violence in our communities. Linda Crockett, director of education and consultation at Samaritan Counseling Center, was the presenter.

Participants chose from one of two tracks for the afternoon sessions. The first was "The Impact of Prenatal Alcohol Exposure on the Family," which provided an overview of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, FASD. Dr. Mary DeJoseph and her son Stephen highlighted their own personal accounts. Dr. DeJoseph works with the New Jersey/Northeast FASD Education and Research Center.

The second training was two mini-workshops. The first was "The Bully Anti-Venom," which introduced the topic of bullying, ways to advocate for children who are being bullied and ways to confront a child who is using bullying behaviors. Tina Shockey, parent educator for COBYS Family Services, was the presenter. "Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders," ASD, was given by Nicole Matero, senior program specialist with Pennsylvania's Bureau of Autism Services. This session covered the warning signs and characteristics of children and adolescents with ASD and offered strategies for working with these unique individuals.

More than 100 took advantage of the training. ACLC is composed of the following agencies: Bethanna, Bethany Christian Services, COBYS Family Services, Pressley Ridge, Families United Network and Lancaster County Children and Youth. 

AFCARS Shows Children in Foster Care Decline

by Mike Kovacevic, SWAN Research Manager

According to data submitted by states as of June 2011, the number of children in foster care in the United State on the last day of the federal fiscal year, FFY, continues to decline. In FFY 2005 approximately 511,000 children were in foster care, compared to 408,000 children in FFY 2010; this is a reduction of slightly more than 20 percent. The total number of children has declined from 800,000 in FFY 2006 to 662,000 in FFY 2010, a 17 percent decline. As might be expected, the number of children waiting for adoption has also declined. Waiting children has decreased 21 percent, from 135,000 children in FFY 2006 to 107,000 children in FFY 2010.

Adoption of children in foster care has not exhibited this same trend. There were approximately 2,000 more children adopted in

FFY 2011 (53,000) as in FFY 2006 (51,000). When looking at adoption as a percentage of waiting children, 37 percent of waiting children were adopted nationally in FFY 2006 compared to 50 percent of waiting children in FFY 2010.

FFY's 2008-2009 had higher numbers of waiting children adopted (55,000 and 57,000, respectively) than in FFY 2011; however, the percentage of waiting children adopted in FFY 2008 was 44 percent, lower than in FFY 2010, while the percentage of waiting children adopted in FFY 2009 was identical to FFY 2010.

Source: AFCARS data, U.S. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth and Families



Pennsylvania Celebrates National Adoption Month

*by Christine Swank
Regional Technical Assistant*

National Adoption Month event summaries are courtesy of SWAN's regional technical assistants, SWAN LSI coordinators and paralegals and SWAN Matching Committee.

Pennsylvania knows how to celebrate! National Adoption Month in November was a flurry of activities, including awareness and matching events, proclamations, brunches and dinner celebrations, religious services, family fun fairs, Laserdome fun and most importantly finalizations! The state once again offered funding to assist with National Adoption Month activities, and in 2011 a record number of requests were received. A total of 26 requests from coalitions, collaborative groups and agencies were funded to help with their special events. The festivities began in mid-October and continued throughout November. SWAN prime contract staff, including LSI paralegals, regional technical assistants and PAE coordinators played an integral part in organizing and supporting many of the events.

National Adoption Month Events October

"Fall in Love" Adoption Awareness event at the Jewish Community Center in Wilkes-Barre, organized by **Children's Service Center, Catholic Social Services and Wilkes-Barre Racing**. Ten local northeast agencies and the SWAN program were represented. A total of 75 people attended with more than half looking for an adoption agency to work with. Advertising support came from Rich Pais, Wilkes-Barre Racing.

The 4th Annual Adoption Awareness event at the Laserdome in Manheim. Hosted by **Diakon Adoption and Foster Care and the SWAN Older Child Matching Initiative**, OCMI, participants enjoyed unlimited laser tag, Halo 3, laser concerts and a "haunted walk."

November

Adoption Day Celebration at **Northumberland CYS**. Ten children and their families finalized on November 2. A program

in the main courtroom was open to the public and included remarks from guest speaker Judge Saylor and CYS Administrator Karen Miller. Face painting, craft table, balloon creations, refreshments and adoption awareness materials were provided.

"Connecting the Dots," the second annual Adoption Awareness and Matching Event hosted by **Children's Aid Home of Somerset and Somerset CYS**. The event was a family carnival theme, including bounce house and magic show. Eight agencies were represented and 12 families attended. Several families who attended had been thinking about adoption and were reported to be happy for the opportunity to speak with agency representatives.

Adoption Day Recognition, hosted by **Children's Service Center of Wyoming Valley**. Recognition of families who have adopted and offering prospective families an opportunity to network with those who have.

Orphan Sunday at the **Salvation Army Children's Services of Allentown**, was an adoption awareness event held at Calvary Fellowship Church in Downingtown. Highlights of the event included an information booth, adoption display, video display and information on foster care, adoption and support services. Salvation Army staff were on hand to present the program.

Adoption Celebration Dinner, sponsored by **Lycoming CYS**, Williamsport. This event celebrated and honored those families who adopted in 2011. Judge McCoy, court staff, CYS staff, SWAN LSI staff (continued on page 20)

Pennsylvania's Adoption Celebrations

(continued from page 19) and others were on hand to share their kind words and support.

Adoption Day, hosted by **Lawrence CYS**. Four children and their families finalized their adoptions on November 10. Refreshments, special treat bags and gifts went to adoptive children and families. A photographer was on hand to take pictures of the finalizing families. A Chinese auction was held and a display table showcased past adoption day events. Local businesses and philanthropic organizations helped fund the event. SWAN LSI paralegals in Lawrence County played an instrumental role in planning this event.

A National Adoption Month event was held by the **OCMI and Family Pathways**.

Fall Adoption Event hosted by **Capital Region Adoption Coalition** included adoption awareness and a matching event. Awards were given, and various activities were offered by participating agencies. A bake sale at the SWAN fall quarterly in Enola helped raise some monies for this event.

An Adoption Awareness Reception was hosted by the **York Area Adoption Coalition**. A reception was held in the café in the York County Office of Children, Youth and Families. Door prizes and gift bags were given to adoptive families.

The "Care 'N Share Event" was hosted by the **Salvation Army Children's Services of Allentown**. This highly advertised event saw attendees from Harleysville, Lansdale, Souderton and other surrounding areas. Community members learned about foster care and adoption, met other prospective adoptive families and learned about support services, including SWAN. Included were personal testimonials from adoptive parents.

2nd Annual Adoption Awareness event hosted by **Wyoming CYS** at the Tunkhannock Library Community Room. Current and past foster and adoptive families, community members and local affiliate agencies were invited. The SWAN regional technical assistant, PAE coordinator and LSI paralegal

assigned to Wyoming CYS were instrumental in planning this event.

Allegheny CYS hosted a National Adoption Day celebration. Attendees were greeted with a welcoming ceremony celebrating all who adopted in 2011 and honoring those who adopted in past years. Speakers presented topics on what adoption signifies, how children are impacted and the need for adoptive families. Entertainment, a balloon artist and a photographer were on hand, and local media covered the event.

7th Annual Matching Event was hosted by **Montgomery County Human Services**. The event is dedicated to recognizing National Adoption Month and focuses on matching their waiting children and families.

Delaware Valley Adoption Council hosted its 1st Annual Adoption Awareness Event. Families from the community were invited to learn more about adoption and the need for adoptive families. Presentations were provided to prospective families about general adoption information and the approval process, available waiting children, resources for adoptive parents and debunking common myths about adoption. Local adoption agencies had displays and were on hand to answer questions.

An Adoption Day Celebration Brunch was hosted by **Luzerne CYS** at the Quality Inn. The guest speaker for the event was Congressman Marino, and Senior Judge Clinton Smith from Lycoming County was honored.

Pittsburgh's Every Child, Inc. hosted a Family Resource Fair and Family Fun Day. The event featured family-centered activities and access to resources that benefit children and families. Resource topics included healthy discipline methods, positive parenting, creative play and many others.

Bucks County CYS hosted its 1st Annual Adoption Awareness and Matching Event for waiting and pre-adoptive families, professionals, county agencies and provider agencies. SWAN LSI paralegals helped plan this event.



Family Pathway's National Adoption Month Celebration

*By Eva Morter,
Program Manager for Placement and Permanency*

More than 30 families, 13 agencies and three waiting youth attended a matching event on November 10, 2011 hosted by Family Pathways and the Older Child Matching Initiative, OCMI. This matching event was held at Monarch Place in Butler and brought together agencies and families from the western region of the state in recognition and celebration of National Adoption Month.

Many families had the opportunity to speak directly with the children's representatives and learn more about potential matches. Three youth from the OCMI created and delivered presentations. Other featured exhibits such as Journeys of Life and Eric Guy were available to support waiting families in their pursuit of permanency. Family Pathways would like to express gratitude to all who attended and looks forward to hearing updates on matches made.



Pennsylvania's National Adoption Month celebrations sparked a lot of interest.



Ron is an energetic 16-year old. He loves to fish and has caught many different kinds of fish. He likes to play football and his favorite position is wide receiver. He particularly likes the Steelers and his favorite player is Hines Ward. Ron's favorite subject in school is science and he also likes art.

Ron would do well in a two-parent, experienced family who can keep up with him and give a lot of unconditional love. He would also like a dad who could take him fishing and maybe teach him to hunt.

All families will be considered for Ron. He is legally free for adoption.

Contact:

Russ McCurdy Project Star

412-244-3083

rum@the-institute.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—1-800-585-SWAN

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

Office of Children, Youth and Families

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

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

SWAN/IL Spring Quarterly Meetings – Scranton-March 29 — Clarion -April 4 —
Monroeville-April 5 — Enola-April 17 — Philadelphia-April25
— Ft. Washington-April 26

SWAN / IL Summer Statewide Meeting, July 17-18, 2012, Lancaster

Permanency Conference, July 18-20, 2012, Lancaster

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