

Network News

Voice of the SWAN / IL Network

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Network News

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LSI Paralegals Start to Finish Approach for Pennsylvania's Children

*By Heather Britton,
SWAN LSI Coordinator*

The learning curve never ends. The wisdom of that decision has resulted in more effective communication, fewer court delays, higher quality work product and increased accountability, not to mention greater job satisfaction.

Ten years after Legal Services Initiative paralegals (LSIP) first began working in Montgomery and Dauphin counties, both counties decided their paralegals could be even more effective by following cases from intake—or at least dependency—to permanency. Many more counties across the state, including Lawrence and Crawford in the west, have also made the switch. Lawrence County, like Montgomery and Dauphin, started

assigning LSIPs to cases from intake to permanency, including adoption, in 2012.

When the LSIP first began in Montgomery and Dauphin, they completed diligent searches and prepared legal documents for termination of parental rights (TPR) cases. As the counties gradually added more paralegals, they each worked on different aspects of cases.

Since the paralegals have moved to a "start to finish" approach, the biggest improvement is increased efficiency, in part due to the paralegals' exceptional case knowledge. By the time parental rights are terminated, the paralegals have helped search for birth parents and kin, prepared

If your county is considering having paralegals work from intake to permanency, counties that have already made that change highly recommend it. Montgomery County Office of Children and Youth Director Laurie O'Connor reflected, "We're such a legally driven system that I cannot believe we ever operated without the level of legal support we currently have," especially given the frequency and volume of changes to the law.

Legal Service Initiative paralegals can help counties navigate those changes by contacting the LSI Warmline at 793-2512 or by email at lsiwarmline@diakon-swan.org and other network resources. Dauphin County Children and Youth Services Solicitor Maris McClellan also encourages counties who have not yet made the switch to do so, but she cautioned that "it is not going to be a week or two of transition activity. It is a whole, long process." However, she said, "Counties should do it. The benefits are so great."

(continued on page 6)

From the Department of Human Services

By Carrie Keiser, Director,
Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network



Over the last couple of years, Pennsylvania has seen an increase in the number of children in out-of-home placement who were placed in formal kinship care settings. With that increase comes the responsibility to ensure formal kinship caregivers receive the ongoing services, resources and training needed to support their commitment to the child.

In an effort to better meet the needs of formal kinship families, the SWAN Advisory Committee surveyed them to determine what types of training and support they felt they needed. A total of 978 responses were received from formal kinship families across the Commonwealth.

The survey was created in SurveyMonkey®, and an email containing the link to the survey was provided to all county children and youth agencies and to private foster and adoption agencies. Agencies were encouraged to share the survey electronically and if that was not possible, to print the survey and send it to their families and ask them to complete it. The survey consisted of 12 questions, which included,

- What Category Of Resource Family Are You Considered?
- How Did You Become a Kinship Resource Family?
- How Many Years Have You Been A Kinship Resource Family?
- Do You Feel the Initial Training Received Was Adequate?
- Do You Receive On-going Training?
- Do You Feel You Have Adequate Support?
- What Types of Additional Supports Do You Feel Are Needed?
- Are You Kept Informed of Available Community Resources For Future Issues That May Arise?
- Do You Have Contact With Birth Parents?
- Does Your Area Have A Kinship Support Group?
- Does Your Area Have An Adoption Support Group?
- Are You Aware of SWAN Post-permanency Services?

The results of the survey were surprising to the SWAN Advisory Committee as it was generally believed by some members of the committee that Pennsylvania needed to provide specialized training to formal kinship care families. However, the majority of families who responded to the survey (89%) felt that the training they received was adequate, and 45% continued to attend trainings as needed.

77% of the respondents felt that the support they received was adequate. Although 144 of the 978 respondents stated that they could benefit from more support, only 13 individuals identified the type of support they felt they needed.

What is notable about the results is that 62% of the formal kinship families surveyed were not aware that SWAN offers post-permanency services including case advocacy, respite and support groups, although 202 of the respondents felt that a support group would be beneficial, and at least one person identified advocacy as a needed beneficial support. To address this issue, the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) will share the results of the survey with county children and youth agencies and remind them that SWAN post-permanency services are available to formal kinship families at no cost to the county agency and that training of all formal kinship providers should include information on SWAN post-permanency services and instructions on how to access the services. SWAN post-permanency brochures have also been developed for the county agencies to share with their staff and resource families.

During the March SWAN Post-Permanency Unit of Service meetings, discussions were held about revising the current SWAN post-permanency brochure as well as the current reauthorization process for post-permanency services. Soon, the SWAN prime contractor will present these recommendations for OCYF to review, and any changes will be shared with the network.

Keep in mind, SWAN Post-Permanency services are designed to provide parents with a continuum of support services to ensure their success as permanent families. They are family driven and family requested services and as a network we need to continue our efforts to make sure not only just formal kinship care families are aware of the SWAN post-permanency services offered through SWAN, but also any adoptive or PLC families as well.

What We Need to Do

By Brenda Lawrence, SWAN Program Administrator

Jane Johnston, PAE Division Manager

“It wasn’t until I was living out of my car with my kids that I realized I was going down the same road as my parents. I decided I had to turn my life around. I went to live with a former foster family of mine. My kids went into foster homes. It took me a year and a half to consider myself steady and stable with a job and housing.”

This is from Michelle Nauman, a graduate of Pennsylvania’s child welfare system, who from between the ages of two to 18 lived in 28 foster homes, six group homes and a few detention centers. Michelle was interviewed by Anne Reeves in November 2014 for an article in PennLive. Fortunately, her story has a happy ending because she has a stable relationship living with her fiancée and two children, and she now works as a youth advocate for Family Design Resources.

We would hope that her story is unique but we are not sure that it is. According to reports from the Department of Health and Human Services and based on reports from Pennsylvania between 2009 and 2012, 3,520 children exited our child welfare system through emancipation. These statistics clearly indicate that most of the children who exited came into care after the age of 12. And we know, based on various research, that these children are more likely than peers not raised in foster care to have no place to live. Frequently, they leave care without a high school diploma, spend at least one night in jail and have children at an early age.

We also know that children registered with the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange (PAE) are typically older children, that is, 85% of children actively seeking a permanency resource through PAE are more than 10 years old. We also know that 70% of the children who exit care after being registered with PAE and seeking a permanency resource do obtain permanency.

Finally, we know that very few of the children exiting care through emancipation were registered with PAE. On average fewer than 25% of the children leaving care through emancipation were registered with PAE.

So what we know is that children without a permanent resource are much more likely to have a negative outcome and in the past six years about 4,000 children in Pennsylvania left care without a

permanent resource. Most of those children were never registered with PAE, and most became known to the system or entered care after the age of 12.

During the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network/Independent Living (SWAN/IL) Spring Quarterly meetings in 2014, we posed this problem to the SWAN network. Though responses varied, we heard that for older children, awareness of the importance of permanency is lacking—sometimes by the child, sometimes by the caseworker and sometimes by the courts.

We struggle with trying to determine how to best help all those involved understand what the Casey Permanency Roundtables teach us: the gold standard of permanency is reunification, adoption or legal guardianship. Anything less than those three outcomes places the child at risk of becoming a negative statistic.

We know what we should do—but often we don’t do it. Here is a reflection about change from Jennifer Rodriquez, executive director of the California Juvenile Law Center and former foster youth, drug addict and prostitute. She says that how we see children defines how they see themselves.

Our challenge is to see only the greatest potential in these children and to provide them with the very best opportunity to achieve that potential. Direction for how to work most effectively with older youth can be found in Nauman’s words, “I try to help them think about making good choices. They want out of the system, but the real world is completely different from what they imagine. It’s a huge reality check for a lot of youth who think they know everything. It hits them really hard.”

Lights! Camera! Action!

*By Melanie Rehrig, M.S. Supervisor of Permanency Services
Diakon Adoption and Foster Care*

To celebrate National Adoption Month, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care held its third Annual Fashion Show and Matching Event at the Topton campus on November 8, 2014. Sixteen youth between the ages of 11 and 17 who were receiving SWAN Child Specific

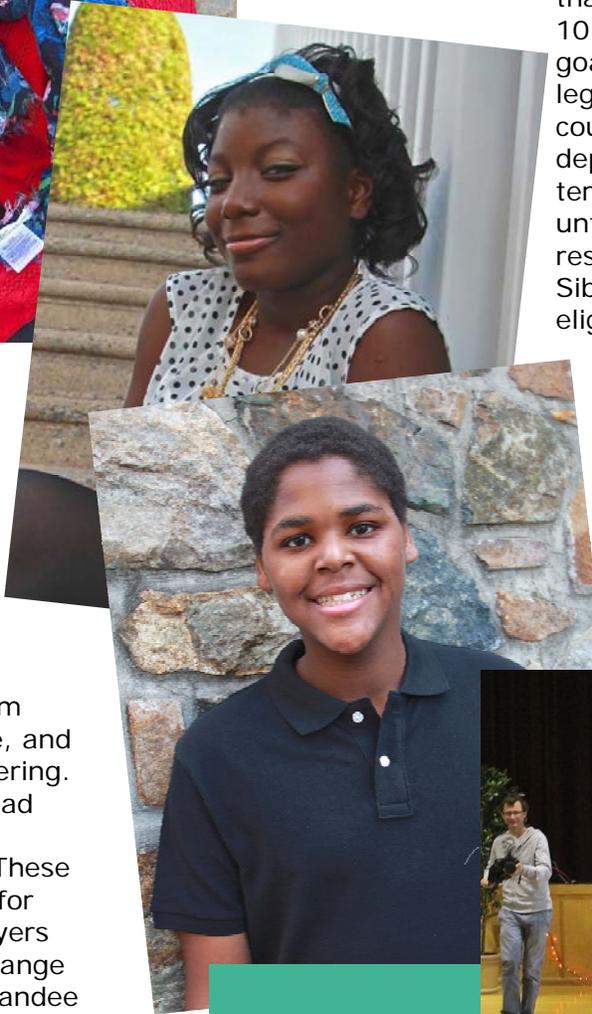
Recruitment (CSR) or SWAN Older Child Matching Initiative (OCMI) services participated in the fashion show. Fifteen agencies and 28 families also attended this event.

Before the fashion show, youth received hair and makeup from students at METRO Beauty Academy in Allentown. The youth enjoyed both interacting with the cosmetology students, some of whom were not much older than they were, and receiving this much-deserved pampering. After their makeovers all 16 youth had their photographs taken courtesy of Brandee Krycia of Art by Brandee. These professional headshots will be used for recruitment purposes, such as for flyers and the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange website (www.adoptpakids.org). Brandee also captured photos of the youth modeling their two new outfits on the runway, making them feel even more like stars.

Those attending enjoyed a delicious catered lunch provided by Dori Martin Catering in Fleetwood. Youth were overheard raving about the food, though the fan favorite was clearly the Swedish meatballs! DJ Outlaw of Majik DJ Entertainment in Reading provided music for the day's festivities, much of which was personally requested by the youth themselves. This music

helped to create a fun and relaxing environment, which was especially important to the youth who were understandably nervous due to the size of the crowd. At the conclusion of the fashion show, the youth released their built-up anxiety and energy by hitting the dance floor and showing off their moves.

The SWAN OCMI program is a free program that serves children over 10 who have a primary goal of adoption and are legally free, unless the court that determines dependency will not terminate parental rights until an adoptive resource is identified. Siblings groups are also eligible, as long as one child is 10 years old. The children must also be (continued on page 5)

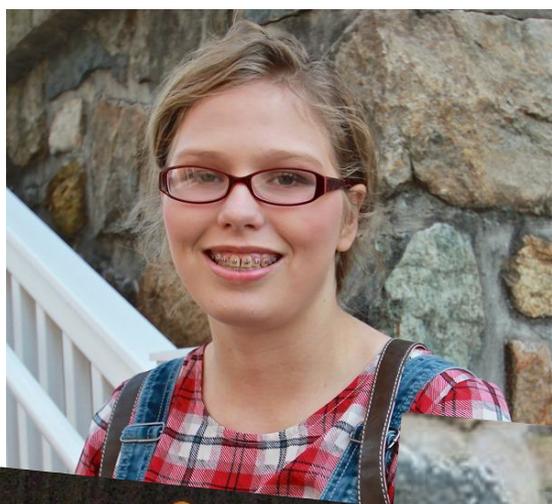


**Fashion
Show
High-
lights**

Lights! Camera! Action

(continued from page 4) registered with the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange or be eligible for registration. During the 2013-2014 fiscal year, 41 matches, 31 placements and 16 finalizations occurred.

If you would like to learn more about the SWAN OCMI grant, please contact Melanie Rehrig, OCMI supervisor, at rehrigm@diakon.org or 610-682-1527.



On the runway!

LSI Paralegals Start to Finish Approach

(continued from page 1) dependency and permanency review on petitions, as well as various motions. They have also attended most, if not all, of the child's hearings.

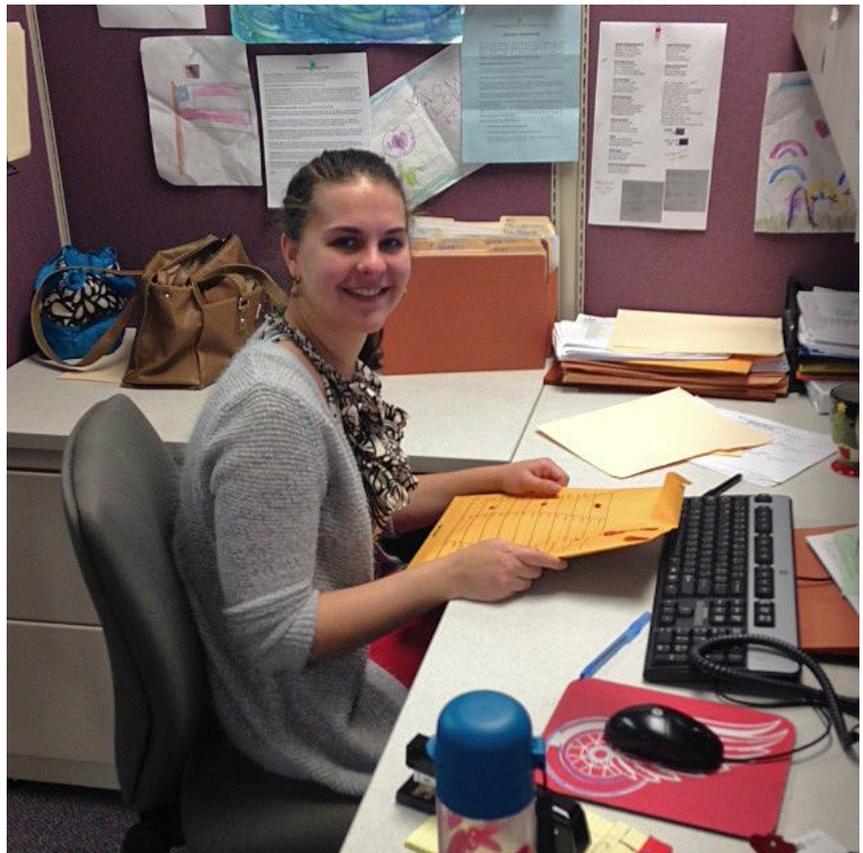
In the words of Montgomery County Office of Children and Youth (OCY) Solicitor Eric Cox, Jr., "Day to day, I can call up the paralegals and they just know it."

Montgomery County Caseworker Brice Johnston agreed: "The fact that you get an assigned paralegal on each case is very good for continuity. The paralegals have been in court, they know the family, and they know the history." Johnston works primarily with older youth and said the paralegals' continuity is especially helpful in resumption of jurisdiction cases, as well as those where children return to care.

Dauphin County Children and Youth Services (CYS) Solicitor Marisa McClellan also said this newer approach, combined with the use of consistent legal teams, resulted in a "huge improvement in the continuity of a case. We noticed that cases started to get expedited." The backlog of termination cases was gone within six months after paralegals and attorneys started to work together on cases throughout the legal process.

In many counties, caseworkers are organized into units and do not follow cases from beginning to end. In addition, as solicitors do not work solely on child welfare matters, they are not always available. Montgomery County OCY Director Laurie O'Connor reported the paralegals' thorough case knowledge resulted in "less duplication," which is "much better for the caseworkers and, ultimately, our kids and families."

The paralegals also benefit from this consistency. Montgomery County LSIP Dawn Wales said she likes working from intake to permanency because she knows what happens to each child on her caseload from the moment he or she enters care. She can track how many times each child has moved, and she knows whether her cases are moving toward reunification, adoption or another permanency goal. Wales continued, "Having a case from the start makes it easier to draft the petition because you know why the child came into care and, with each permanency review, you know how the parents are doing [and] whether they're



Lauren Nonnemaker, paralegal from Montgomery County

meeting their goals."

In early 2013, the Honorable Stephen J. Barrett of Montgomery County set out to increase transparency and clarity for families involved in dependency court. He explained, "People were showing up to court and not understanding why they were there. Hearings were much longer because everyone was exploring what was going on *at the hearing.*"

The Montgomery County LSIPs helped implement Judge Barrett's vision by assuring expectations were detailed clearly in court documents. They worked more closely with the caseworkers, and as a result, the solicitors now make very few changes to court documents before they are filed.

Judge Barrett also observed that "OCY has gained credibility" as a result of the increased transparency. "The parents now know why they are involved, because it is in writing" and they can "focus on what they need to do."

Director O'Connor noted that caseworkers "not only have more time to focus on their cases, but (continued on page 7)

LSI Paralegals Start to Finish Approach

(continued from page 6) they also feel more confident when they walk into the courtroom that everyone understands what has been reduced to writing." The clarity and level of detail in the emergency, shelter care, dependency and permanency review petitions drafted by the LSIPs has been "good for everyone involved," said Judge Barrett. "It's incredible how much time is being saved."

The paralegals' skill in drafting court documents carries over into later stages of the case, too. Solicitor McClellan observed that Dauphin County

now has significantly fewer contested involuntary TPRs because of the paralegals' efforts to improve the pleadings. "That TPR petition is the keystone," she said. McClellan added that the number of TPR appeals has also gone down because of the strength and clarity of the TPR allegations. She reported, even when parents have appealed, Dauphin County "has not yet lost on one of these new TPR formats."

Equally important to increased efficiency are the paralegals' efforts to facilitate communication between the parties before, during and after court. They assure that agency solicitors, unrepresented parents, parents' attorneys and guardians ad litem (GAL) alike all have the documents and information they need before each hearing.

Because of the increased communication prior to hearings, "we have a lot more agreements,"

Solicitor Cox said, and "only 20-30% of the court orders need *in court* changes now."

Solicitor McClellan's experience in Dauphin County is similar: "Because [the LSIPs] have the same team start to finish, the rapport that they develop is so important."

Caseworker Johnston also noticed the LSIPs "are very concerned about what happens to children on their caseload. I often get emails from the paralegals asking about the children we placed."

Even when they're not preparing for court, the paralegals want to stay informed about the status

of their cases. Solicitor McClellan agreed saying, "There's always ownership," including "knowing who to send subpoenas to, who is on the exhibit list, and who the witnesses should be. All of that is from knowing the case, and that makes it a lot easier on the attorney."

LSI Coordinator Cantarella and LSIP Wales also observed an increase in the number of Montgomery County children returning home. Although

anecdotal, Wales suspects that the paralegals' efforts to provide parents with clearer expectations in pleadings and in court are contributing to more reunifications.

The paralegals thrive on having more meaningful case involvement, largely because it also allows them to use their knowledge and skills to their full potential. Director Laurie O'Connor got the idea to (continued on page 8)



Dawn Wales, paralegal from Montgomery County

It's Adoption Month !

*By Chris Swank, Technical Assistant
Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network*

November was National Adoption Awareness month. Pennsylvania's county and affiliate agencies stepped up again to bring awareness to children and youth in need of adoptive families throughout the Commonwealth.

The response to the state's adoption awareness funding grants was record breaking with a total of 39 proposals! Last year saw 26 proposals. The

total amount of funding requested was also record breaking - \$93,001.22. While not every proposal was funded at the level requested, all parties were awarded funds with the \$50,000 available.

Several county and affiliate agencies held their first ever adoption month events. These included Columbia, Mercer and Venango County Children and Youth Services and Northern Children's Services. In all, seven collaborative groups or coalitions, 17 county agencies and 15 affiliate offices held events.

Awareness was brought to communities through many venues. "Adoption day" proclamations, brunch and luncheon celebrations were held. Many events had the theme of "Giving Thanks" and honoring past and present adoptive families. Family fun and adoption awareness could be found at ice and roller skating parties, bowling alleys, adoption fun fairs and carnivals. (continued on page 9)



LSI Paralegals Start to Finish Approach

(continued from page 7) have paralegals work from intake to permanency from a SWAN newsletter. She knew she had "really great and competent paralegals on staff" and it would be a good time to make the change. Almost three years later, she realizes "this new model has professionalized the role of our paralegals in the eyes of their casework peers because they are now true partners."

Solicitor Christina Terebelo agreed, saying the paralegals are "like having an 'extra me' who has thought of things I may not have considered with regard to possible options and consequences – what the judge might be concerned about, how it might look in court, and what witnesses we might need. They've been really, amazingly helpful to me."

As a paralegal, LSIC Cantarella had worked on child abuse expunction hearings for nearly a year when Montgomery County made the switch. She said, "It was like a whole new job, honestly, and the love of my job definitely increased."

Her colleague, LSIP Lauren Nonnemaker, also appreciates the chance to be more involved throughout the life of her assigned cases. "When I

get to know a case," she said, "I almost feel like I know the families and I get attached. It's a motivation [to work hard]. It makes you feel like you're not just sitting and typing, but you're really accomplishing something."

Lawrence and Crawford counties agree

According to Ongoing Supervisor Marcia Earl, the county made the change "mostly for consistency," and "to allow the LSIPs to gain a better understanding of the totality of a case."

Crawford County CYS started its paralegals working from intake through TPR and adoption in October 2014. Solicitor Gabrielle Pierce said they decided to make the change so that "someone familiar with the family and issues would be available from the start to finish" because, as elsewhere, the caseworkers change throughout the life of a case.

LSIP Christine Klingensmith particularly appreciates the collaboration between caseworkers and paralegals, "each respecting what the other has to offer and both believing in [timely permanency] for the child."

It's Adoption Month

(continued from page 8) The youth took center stage at the fashion show, hosted by Diakon Adoption and Foster Care and the SWAN Older Child Matching Initiative.

Some notable themes and venues to spread awareness included parades, exercise and college football games. Adoption Connections held a "Light up a Life" parade, Delaware Valley Adoption Council had an adoption float in Hatboro's Christmas parade, Every Child hosted a 5K/1K family fun walk, and Salvation Army hosted a "Fit for Family Zumba, Insanity and Yogathon!" Monroe CYC had an adoption display at East Stroudsburg University's home game against West Chester. Look for the SWAN cheerleaders next year!

Once again, the efforts put forth by everyone involved in planning and hosting of these wonderful events made for another successful Adoption Awareness month in Pennsylvania.



The Salvation Army's Fitness event for adoption awareness



Salvation Army myth-busting posters

Armstrong County Adoption Day

Armstrong County Children, Youth and Family Services (CYFS) held an Adoption Day Celebration on November 15, 2014, at the Belmont Banquet and Ice Skating Rink in Kittanning, Pennsylvania.

Prizes, food, free skating and information on adoption and foster care were all features of this event. About 60 people attended to discover more about opportunities to become adoptive or foster parents in Armstrong County.

Armstrong County Commissioner Bob Bowers attended the event as did CYFS Administrator Dennis Demangone. Agencies represented and providing information to those interested in adoption and foster care were: Adoption Connection, Adelphoi Village, SWAN, Family Pathways and The Bair Foundation of Pittsburgh.



Adoption Day 2014 in Armstrong County

Teaming Up for Awareness, Recruitment

*By Chris Swank, Technical Assistant
Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network*

Pennsylvania State Representative Tara Toohil (R-Luzerne) and Lorine Ogurkis, a local attorney, teamed up to hold an adoption awareness event about the need for foster and adoptive families in Luzerne County.

Both are familiar with the foster care and adoptive process. Rep. Toohil's parents fostered 42 children, and she has an adoptive sibling. Lorine and her husband are adoptive parents, and she is a member of the Advisory Board for Luzerne County Children and Youth.

Lorine had noted that it was through her role on the advisory board that she recognized the great need for resource families, particularly those that are bilingual. She and Rep. Toohil are friends, and the planning for the event came easily. Lorine reached out to the SWAN PAE coordinator and regional technical assistant for Luzerne County to help support the event.

On July 23, 2014, the "Raising Foster Care and Adoption Awareness" event was held at the

Hazleton One Community Center in Hazleton.

The event offered information on foster care and adoption, a discussion led by Rep. Toohil and Lorine, activities for children, entertainment and refreshments.

Local foster and adoptive agencies that participated were: Luzerne County Children and Youth Services, Catholic Social Services, Loftus-Vergari and Associates, Wendy's Wonderful Kids, PA Court Appointed Special Advocate, Families United Network, the Casey Foundation and SWAN.

The event was well attended and 12 families signed up to go through the foster parent process.



More Adoption Month Photo Fun!

Diakon's Wilderness Center

By Katie Juliana
Child Specific Recruitment Specialist

The Wendy's Wonderful Kids program at Diakon Adoption and Foster Care is committed to the Dave Thomas Foundation's motto "unadoptable is unacceptable." Embodying this adage requires new and inventive ways to match waiting youth with waiting families. This past October, the Harrisburg Wendy's Wonderful Kids site sponsored an outdoor matching event for Pennsylvania youth and families at Diakon's Wilderness Center in Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania.

The wilderness center serves at-risk youths through community-based treatment, vocational training, counseling and mentoring services using outdoor-based programming. The center was selected as a matching event venue for its unique resources, including creative team building exercises and specially trained staff to run them. Team building activities created a stress-free setting for older youth and families to interact in a structured but organic environment. Once the group got to know each other by working together to complete the team building activities, the event culminated in completing a high ropes challenge!

One of the team building activities at the beginning of the day involved each person using a differently sized piece of pipe to pass tennis balls down a line of people using only the pipe pieces! Such tasks require a lot of communication, teamwork and problem solving, which are all qualities youth and families need to build a successful relationship. And just like in a family, when the activity was frustrating, the group needed to come



together and make a different plan.

Several other team building activities were completed in the morning, and groups were organized to ensure each youth had the opportunity to work with each family. Many of these activities were so unique, they are difficult to describe for this article!

After a healthy lunch prepared by the center staff, came the most anticipated part of the day – the ropes course! To prepare for the crisp fall day, waiting youth, families (and caseworkers!) put on their warmest layers. You could feel the adrenaline and excitement in the air! After a

discussion about safety and explaining how the harnesses worked, everyone was ready to go!

The high ropes obstacle chosen was able to support many people at the same time, which allowed the group to participate together. There were several different sections and two (continued on page 12)

For more information about:

Diakon's Wilderness Center, please visit:

<http://www.diakon.org/youth-services/>

For more information on **Wendy's Wonderful Kids**, please visit:

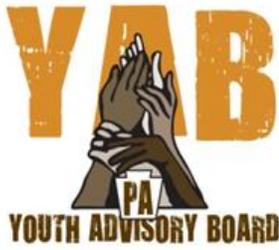
<https://www.davethomasfoundation.org/what-we-do/wendys-wonderful-kids/>

To contact any of the four **Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiters** in Pennsylvania visit:

<https://www.davethomasfoundation.org/what-we-do/wendys-wonderful-kids/program-sites/?>

New Resources from the Youth Advisory Board

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



The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is very busy this time of year. Youth leaders are working on a workshop for resource parents called "Fostering Older Youth: The Teenage Experience." Their goals for this workshop are to recruit resource parents who are willing and able to foster older youth, in addition to resource parents walking away with an understanding of what it is like for older youth to be in the system. The workshop will be youth-facilitated and incorporates many youth developed activities! The YAB hopes to begin providing this workshop in late fall.

The Normalcy and Developmentally Appropriate Freedoms (DAF) guide, which was developed last year, is in its final editing stages and will be ready for distribution soon. The DAF guide discusses normalcy and freedoms for older youth in care. Some of the requests the YAB is making in this guide include: creating a more normal childhood experience for those youth in care, using DAF to support stability and use resources that encourage the conversation.

The resources mentioned in the DAF guide, such as the *Teen Success Agreement**, help with the dialogue between youth, caseworkers and resource parents about establishing what is appropriate. It enables youth to have their voice heard, and for them to be at the table. YAB is very eager to discuss normalcy and DAF with agencies and providers because they feel that it is crucial to the success of youth in care.

The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board has one common goal, that youth use their unique experiences to create positive change within the system. There are many ways to give youth different opportunities to achieve this goal. The following is a list on how you can get your youth involved:

Ways to get started with the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board

- Encourage your youth to submit their artwork or poetry to be displayed on the Youth Advisory Board Facebook page!
- Have your youth participate at a local or regional YAB meeting.
- Your youth can attend the Older Youth Retreat which is held on the University of Pittsburgh's Johnstown campus!
- Invite alumni youth members to your life skills classes to talk about their experiences with independent living and the Youth Advisory Board.
- Incorporate Youth Advisory Board achievements into your life skills classes or make connections to case planning.
- As a youth becomes comfortable within the YAB they can participate in panels and learn how to safely share their story.

**You can find the Juvenile Law Center's Youth Fostering Change guide, "Teen Success Agreement" at:*

<http://jlc.org/youthfosteringchange>

Diakon Wilderness Center

(continued from page 11) different paths, which made the course challenging, but allowed the group to support each other as they completed it. Though many of the participants were nervous, all who attempted completed the course, and several returned to try it again! Joy was evident on the faces of the youth and families as they completed the day, and many were sorry to see it end.

In describing their experience at the matching event, one of the youth wisely stated, "I enjoyed the ropes course. When people are scared, they

open up." Families seemed to have a similarly positive experience. Dan and Gina Willard-Concepcion of Diakon said, "The youth were awesome. I think today was the most fun we have had all year." As a result of the day's events, one match occurred, suggesting that providing opportunities for youth and families to interact organically can create the basis for potentially life-long connections.

PSRFA Conference a Resounding Success

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

The 40th Annual Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association (PSRFA) conference was held on October 23 – 25, 2014 at the Holiday Inn, Grantville.

We had the privilege of celebrating 40 years of “Families Helping Families” with the return of a couple of our past presidents, Bill Bert and Charlie Hallman. It was great hearing all the stories of conferences past and how dedicated everyone has been to keep PSRFA up and running to be able to help our families.

Our awards banquet was held on Friday night, with congratulations to the following:

- **Foster Parent Association of the Year**, Adelphoi Village;
- **Caseworker of the Year**, Paul Johnson;
- **Foster Care Youth Leadership Award**, Melvin Harr;
- **Foster Family of the Year**, Lorie Wagner.

Other highlights included our store, in addition to the annual auction and raffle ticket sales in which we raised over \$ 6000.00 for our scholarship fund.

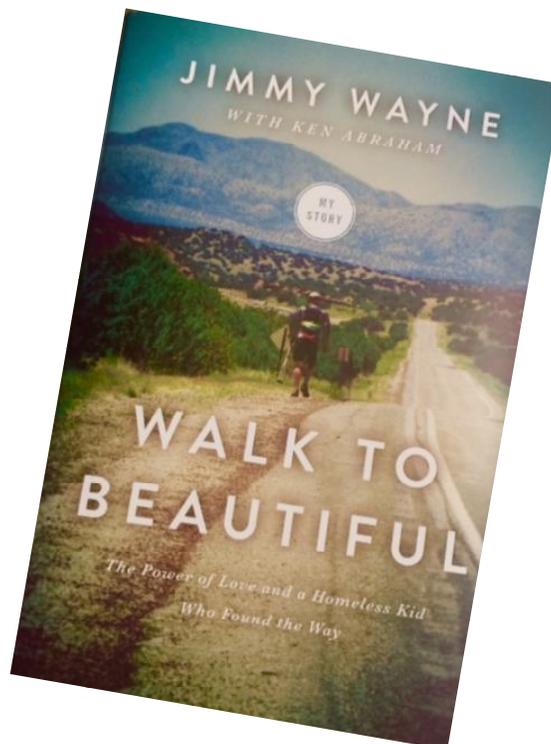
Thank you to everyone who helped make this a success. Please save the date for this year’s conference. October 15 – 17, 2015, Holiday Inn, Grantville.

I’m hoping all of you received your book

“Walk to Beautiful” by Jimmy Wayne! I would love to hear your thoughts, and if you would like to, please send a picture of yourself with the book so I can forward it to Jimmy.



Melvin Harr, winner of the Foster Care Youth Leadership Award.



klramper@psrfa.org

“Take me out to the ball game” is back! On May 9, 2015 PSRFA hosted a night out with the Harrisburg Senators in honor of May being Foster Care month. A good time was enjoyed by all.

As always, thank you for all you do for the children and families.

Pennsylvania resources

Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange—www.adoptpakids.org

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

Independent Living—www.independentlivingPA.org

SWAN Helpline—800-585-SWAN

Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association—
www.psrfa.org

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

Office of Children, Youth and Families
Pennsylvania Department of Human Services—
www.dhs.state.pa.us

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

SWAN listserv through Google Groups—Joe Warrick at
jwarrick@pa.gov

SWAN Facebook page—www.facebook.com/AdoptPA

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