

Network News

Voice of the SWAN/IL Network

In this issue:

page 2 **Award Winners**

page 4 **Photos!**

page 7 **Kids Having Fun**

page 9 **Meet Anthony**

page 10 **Youth Retreat**

Network News

is published by the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network and Independent Living Program

Pennsylvania Department of Human Services
Office of Children, Youth & Families
P.O. Box 2675
Harrisburg, PA 17105-2675



#MeetTheKids at SWAN Conference

By Pam Wagner
Manager, Program and Conferencing

The 23rd Annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference was held at the Lancaster Host Resort in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, from June 24 to 26. The theme this year was #MeetTheKids. The conference boasted a record number of attendees: more than 770 participants!

The June 24 kickoff was high energy, with Elijah Morton and Morton's Dance Center giving the audience a taste of hip-hop dance

and what can be accomplished through positive interaction with youth! Elijah is a former foster youth who has discovered and shared the power of healing through dance. He created a dance troupe that is not only well known but also inspires young people to express themselves in uplifting ways!

The SWAN Advisory Committee

selected and recognized the Honorable Eleanor Bush to receive the 11th Annual Outstanding Service to Adoption Award. Judge Bush now presides in Allegheny County as one of the judges for the court of common pleas. She previously served as an attorney in a number of positions supporting permanency and SWAN, most recently as Family



Design Resources' Legal Services Initiative (LSI) training division manager. Her work helped set the pace to train

the many SWAN paralegals around the state, and she also started and expanded the scope of the LSI Warmline.

In keeping with the #MeetTheKids theme, a panel of participants from the media campaign gave an inspiring update of what some of the youth were up

(continued on page 4)

Permanency Conference Award Winners

Congratulations to all our award winners from the 23rd Annual Permanency Conference. You truly are working for Pennsylvania's children.

C
O
N
F
E
R
E
N
C
E

A
W
A
R
D

W
I
N
N
E
R
S



Permanency Conference Award Winners

Permanent Family Recognition

Families selected for this award provide legalized permanency for a child or children in the child welfare system in the form of adoption, formal kinship care or permanent legal custodianship.

Jason and Christine Dickinson, Berks County

Eric and Jennifer Lewis, Lancaster County

Laurie Manley, Montgomery County

Todd and Liz Waits, Allegheny County

Philanthropy Recognition

Individuals, businesses, congregations or organizations selected to receive this award demonstrated a charitable contribution that promotes the permanency of children in foster care.

Sandy Lake Wesleyan Church



Permanency Teamwork Recognition

Teams selected to receive this award exemplify a collaborative effort that promotes the permanency of children with special needs.

Katie Ashman, Project STAR/The Children's Institute

Oressa Campbell, Esq., Pike County

Russ McCurdy, Project STAR/The Children's Institute

Sara Wentz, Wayne County Children and Youth Services

Independent Living Professional Recognition

The individual working in the public or private child welfare agency selected for this award has demonstrated they have helped a youth transition into a successful contributing member of society.

Chris Svec, Wesley Spectrum

Permanency Advocate Recognition

This category recognizes a dynamic individual or organization that does not fit the criteria of the other categories and may include parents, judges, attorneys or other individuals who, through their professional or volunteer efforts, have had an impact on service change, judicial improvement, service delivery or family support either locally or throughout the state of Pennsylvania.

The Honorable John D. Kuhn, Adams County Court of Common Pleas

County Collaborative Recognition

This award recognizes a collaborative effort between a county court and a county children and youth agency that expedites permanency through adoption, formal kinship care or permanent legal custodianship.

Lycoming County Children and Youth Services

Lycoming County Court of Common Pleas

Union County Children and Youth Services

Union County Court of Common Pleas

(continued on page 6)

#MeetTheKids at Summer Conference!

(continued from page 1)

to since the video was made two years ago. Two of the four youth on the panel found permanency, and their families joined them in the presentation. Two of the youth are still in the process of finding permanency and were accompanied by their Older Youth Matching Initiative recruiters.

The panel was facilitated with great fun and sensitivity by Lorrie Deck, director of the Division of Programs at the Department of Human Services.

The youth shared their stories and updated the audience on their journeys; some told how they found comfort and caring in their new homes, and others challenged the audience, as they both want and deserve homes of their own. They all made it clear, as they did on #MeetTheKids, that they have much to contribute to a family and allowed everyone to hear how pivotal attitude is for both youth and caseworkers in finding permanency.

More than 43 workshops were available, and in addition, special programs were held for the children and teens. Thirty teens attended teen care, and more than 65 children participated in child care! Except for their inside game of "Manhunt" during off hours, you would not know they were all in the hotel. They handled themselves so politely and respectfully. It is a challenge to kids when they are "on vacation" to hold onto their manners and good behavior, but these kids made all of us proud.



The awards banquet and the family picnic each hold special places not only for the families and children who come to the conference, but also to the professionals—county and affiliate workers—who each day help children and families find each other and become new families. The mistress of ceremonies for the banquet, Lynne Hayes-Freeland of KDKA-TV in Pittsburgh, commented that her role was so easy as family after family came across the stage, offering humble but insightful thoughts to others about the privilege of serving as parents and about the courage and persistence of the children they parent.

The family picnic on Thursday evening came with plenty of fun—fun food, fun games and good times for all to remember. The kids loved collecting prizes, and most of all they were delighted with elegant face paintings and awesome balloon creations!

Motivational speaker Travis Lloyd was the closing keynote. He not only talked about his life and what has made him the person he is today, but he also shared his poetry, rapping and music. He explored what happened in his life and how he used poetry and music to work through some of his life's most painful moments. During the conference he also went along with the teens on a bowling trip and gave them their own personal keynote address. He made a video of the teens in the SWAN conference teen care program with footage shot from his interactions with them.

Finally, the crowd was moved by the dancing, drama and acts of gratitude from the children and youth as they sang and danced, which as always is a beautiful and emotional closing. It was full of energy and fun and represented all the reasons we do this work! Thanks to everyone who made this event possible!

We hope you join us at the next conference in 2016 in the Poconos! See Page 10 for details.

Kids have fun at the Permanency Conference



Kids of many ages know how to have fun at SWAN's Permanency Conference!



Collaboration is Key!

By Denise Sheffield
Post-Permanency Technical Assistant

While I attended the Adoption Support and Preservation National Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, in June, it became very clear that “collaboration is the name of the game.”

I listened to panels of other professionals from across the country highlight their successful programs, and one theme was constantly repeated: COLLABORATION. Many affiliates in Pennsylvania are already collaborating with other community resources to establish effective Post-Permanency services. Some examples include:

- A family retreat created in collaboration with a local camp facility in its spring and fall off-season, several agencies in the area, and a grant from the local rotary club;
- A mentoring program formed in collaboration with a local university;

- Recreation and respite events held at a local YMCA that provided therapeutic activities for teens while providing a day of respite for the parents;
- An “Adoption Clubhouse” for international adoptees and their parents in collaboration with a local private adoption agency; and
- A “Parent Clubhouse” where parents meet at a local coffee shop, while various affiliates provide resources and educational topics for them.

In today’s world, many grantors are only funding organizations that establish collaborative efforts with other agencies. It is a great time to consider reaching out to other professional organizations to establish meaningful collaborations to meet the needs of our families.

More Conference Award Winners!

(continued from page 3)

Permanency Professional Recognition

Individuals selected to receive this award are permanency professionals working in a public or private child welfare agency, who have actively demonstrated their support and commitment to finding permanency for children in the child welfare system through adoption, formal kinship care or permanent legal custodianship.

Nicolas Landon, Family Pathways

Youth Advocate Recognition

The individual selected to receive this award is a current or former foster youth who has raised awareness about the challenges of

foster care and has demonstrated leadership, innovation and advocacy on behalf of themselves and/or their peers in the system.

Rodney Connors Arrington, Northampton County

SWAN Advisory Committee Outstanding Service to Adoption Award

Recognizes an individual, family, organization, agency or corporation that, through their good works, has promoted a positive perception of adoption by educating the general public about adoption as well as demonstrating a willingness to promote adoption.

The Honorable Eleanor L. Bush, Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas

More fun at the conference



Diligence Pays Off

By Heather Britton
LSI Coordinator

When the SWAN Legal Services Initiative (LSI) Diligent Search Packet was recently revised, LSI paralegals James Hischak of Luzerne County and Kellie Valvano of Lackawanna County, now an LSI coordinator, reported how they used the packet to expedite permanency for four children in care.

In January 2012, Kellie began searching for the father of a seven-year-old girl who came into care two months earlier. She told the Technical Assistants, Administrators and Coordinators (TAAC) Meeting that initially, the mother provided only a partial name for the father and said he was in Lackawanna County prison before being deported to Honduras.

Kellie contacted the prison, the U.S. and Honduran embassies and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, but none could provide the father's contact information. Nearly six months later, the mother reported the name and location of a hotel the father's family owned in Honduras.

The caseworker contacted the family and obtained the father's address. Kellie mailed paternity letters, but the father did not reply. In March 2013, the agency filed for termination of both parents' rights (TPR). Kellie had the motion for publication translated to Spanish and tried to publish notice in a Honduran newspaper, but political barriers prevented her from even knowing whether her request was honored. She did, however, testify to her diligent search efforts at the TPR hearing. As a result, the judge granted TPR and the child was adopted in January 2014.

James Hischak told a similar story of using international resources to help free three young children for adoption. In his case, the children's father was deported to Mexico. James had a current address, but it translated to "the street with no name." He found the location on Google Earth, a dirt road in the

mountains 45 minutes outside of Mexico City. James called the father and arranged for him to sign for the TPR documents at a FedEx office in the city. The father did not show up and did not contact the agency for weeks thereafter.

In the meantime, James learned that he would have to follow The Hague Convention process to serve the father by mail, which could take up to eight months and cost up to \$1,200. Fortunately, the father resumed contact, and James again sent the documents to the FedEx office—for just \$70. This time, the father showed up and provided an electronic signature. At the TPR hearing, James testified the father received proper

notice. Again, the judge granted TPR, and the siblings were later adopted.

These stories highlight the

importance of locating and engaging birth parents early in the life of a case, as not doing so either diminishes or delays permanency. Kellie indicated that judges in Lackawanna County are reluctant to terminate rights on an "unknown father." In the absence of diligent efforts to find and engage birth parents, judges may deny TPR, thereby limiting permanency to goals other than adoption. Judges may also require agencies to begin efforts to locate birth parents at the TPR stage, even if it has been years since placement.

Kellie and James also shared other lessons they learned. Kellie said she now understands how important it is to build relationships and communication with caseworkers, as "teamwork is paramount" to a successful diligent search. James agreed and added that persistence is also key. Paralegals and caseworkers alike should "not give up hope," he said. "You constantly have to try and re-try."

To learn more about the diligent search process and the tools in the packet, please visit:

<http://www.diakon-swan.org/diligent-search/>

Meet Anthony!

**By Helene Kosciolek
Child Specific Recruitment Specialist, Older Child Matching Initiative,
and DiaKINnections Family Finder**

Meet Anthony, a young man who gets it and says, "Family means acceptance and being accepted. I want a family who will celebrate my successes and will support me through bad times. It is important to have someone who will always have your back even if you make a mistake."

Anthony is a handsome and talented young man who is very engaging and has a friendly and outgoing personality. He is a member of the Youth Advisory Board and is a peer mentor at the group home where he used to live. Anthony speaks English, Spanish and American Sign Language. Like a typical teenager he enjoys music, movies and hanging with friends, and he loves to get lost in a good book! He has set high expectations for his future and would like to find a family to support him and help him achieve his goals.

He also has a passion for music and the arts. Anthony was recently featured in a WBRE-A Little Love segment at C.F. Martin & Co., where he had a private tour and learned about the history of guitars. He plays guitar and sings, saying, "Playing guitar is peaceful for me and helps me relax when I'm upset or stressed out."



Anthony currently works full-time at a grocery store. He is also very motivated and has many goals and wants to get his master's degree. "I want to be a therapist so I can help people like I was helped; I want to pay it forward." He would greatly benefit from the support of a forever family to help him through the process of touring college campuses and applying to be a student. Even though Anthony is looking toward college, he wants a forever family who will provide him with a loving home when he is home for the holidays and other college breaks.

He is open to a variety of family dynamics but has expressed an interest in having two parents, with a father. Anthony has a younger sister he would like to maintain contact with once he finds his forever family and also wants to maintain contact with other family members and friends. Placement with same-age peers would be the most appropriate setting for Anthony. He is not yet legally free for adoption.

One final word from Anthony: "Adoption is love. Blood doesn't make a family. We are all family and should love one another."



2015 Older Youth Retreat

By Meghan O'Hare

Child Welfare Resource Center Program Development Specialist

The 2015 Older Youth Retreat was a great success. We had participants from 32 counties across Pennsylvania. This included 89 youth and 46 staff from county and private provider Independent Living programs.

New this year, youth and staff participated in a generational activity. This culminated in a youth versus staff dance-off that will go down in retreat history!

Staff were able to attend two training sessions, one by the Juvenile Law Center and a second from our keynote speaker, Jeff Yalden, who also spoke at our banquet. As always, youth and staff were able to showcase their talents in the activity sessions they participated in throughout the week, which

were highlighted at the activity presentations on Thursday.

Youth were also able to participate in focus groups related to the implementation of House Resolution 4980: Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014. Youth provided valuable feedback regarding normalcy and age appropriate freedoms that will help inform the work being done on the statewide workgroup.

You can find photos of the event at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Pennsylvania-Youth-Advisory-Board/371359021197?fref=ts> and <http://www.independentlivingpa.org/Retreat.htm>.



Permanency Conference Changing Location!



*statewide adoption and permanency network
independent living services*

The 24th Annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference

is moving to the Pocono Mountains next year!
Mark your calendar now and join us:

June 15–17, 2016

**Kalahari Resorts and Conventions
Monroe County, PA**

www.kalahariresorts.com/pennsylvania

Watch for more details in the months ahead!

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.pa.gov**

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

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

SWAN on Facebook – www.facebook.com/AdoptPA

SWAN on YouTube – www.youtube.com/AdoptPAKids

2016 Save the Date

SWAN/IL Winter Statewide Meeting

January 20-21, 2016 – State College