

Network News

Voice of the SWAN / IL Network

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Network News

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Neither Rain, Nor Power Outages...

By Pam Wagner

SWAN Program/Conferencing Manager

Outside the New York City post office an inscription reads, "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." I think this same dedication could be attributed to those who attended the 22nd Annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference.

The night before the conference began, a terrible storm ripped through Lancaster. It didn't last long but in its wake power was lost to much of the area, including the Lancaster Host, home to the 2014 SWAN/IL conference. As a result, power was out from 7 p.m. on Tuesday evening until after 9 a.m. on Wednesday so we had no water, no electricity and no air conditioning. It was a very long night.

A less hearty group might have packed it in and gone home. But the attendees and SWAN/IL staff stayed! In general people remained in good spirits and weathered the conditions quite nicely. Eventually the electricity returned, and so did all those essential things we take for granted. People got showers, the

portable toilets were removed and we all cooled down.

I think the attendees and staff stayed and endured for the same reason the post office perseveres. It is the importance of connection! The post office realizes the importance of the work they do in keeping all of us connected. While many things have changed since that inscription was carved in stone, the importance of talking with one another and keeping informed is still very much the same.

In watching the events unfold I admired the dedication of all those involved. The attendees, SWAN/IL staff and the hotel personnel never lost faith that the conference would happen. They realized that coming together as a group for a few short days in the summer is important, and we weren't going to give up without a fight!

The conference did happen, and it started off with a wonderful keynote address by William Kellibrew, a young man who faced horrific events and yet persevered. Over 700 of us attended this 22nd annual SWAN/IL conference. In addition, 55 family members

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Permanency Conference Award Winners

Congratulations to all our award winners from the 22nd Annual Permanency Conference. You truly are working at "Finding Futures" for Pennsylvania's children.



Permanency Conference Award Winners

Permanent Family Recognition

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

Thomas and Anne Lavelle, Allegheny County,

Terry and Gloria Kshir, Tioga County

Mida Gilbert, Adams County

George and Crystal Dufour, Allegheny County,

Mark and Daniele Mellott, Franklin County,

Philanthropy Recognition

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

The Robert C. Hoffman Charitable Endowment Trust

Permanency Teamwork Recognition

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

Melanie Rehrig, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care

Gillian Morford, Bethany Christian Services

Melissa Senick, Berks 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.

Pam Lessman, Fayette County Children and Youth Services

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.

Jamari Lyzette Hernandez-Sodano, Lehigh County

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.

Jocelyn Hontz, Lehigh County Office of Children and Youth Services

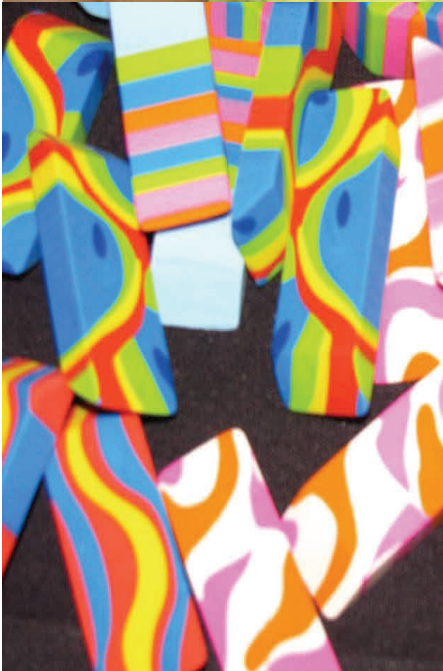
SWAN Advisory Committee Outstanding Service to Adoption Award

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.

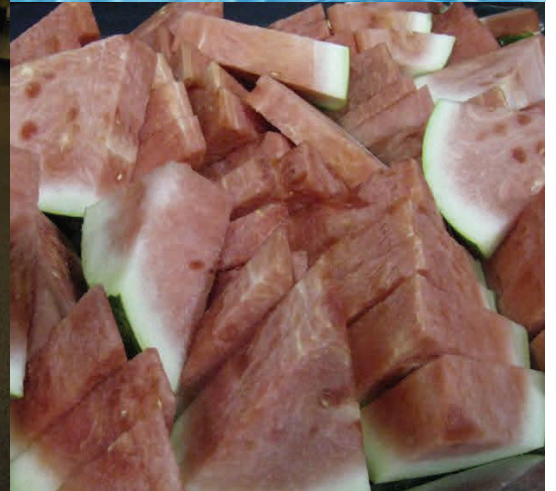
Sandra E. Gallagher



Kids have fun at the conference too!



Scenes from the Permanency Conference



Empty Seats

By Chris Nobles, Youth Quality Improvement Specialist
Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center

November is a great month. Fans of changing leaves, refreshingly brisk breezes, time changes and *food* often find November to be their month. It's a comfort month. We can stay inside, we can watch the colors, and from beginning to end we're able to enjoy treats which are best shared with those we love.

The sugar rush of the end of October takes a bit to wear off, and we spend the intervening weeks between one holiday and the next thinking on and discussing what we'll be eating and who we'll be sharing it with.

November, as you are hopefully aware, is also National Adoption Month. Certainly you'll be reminded at least once about how many children require homes, and, in the spirit of thanks, how much we should all appreciate the ones we have. We know. We do this work because of what we know, we do this work because having a home is extremely important; we know that a place to be to share these comfort times, and all other times, is a basic human right.

We know about all of that. So I am not here to belabor that point.

I instead want to highlight, as an alumni of the foster care system, the generosity I have seen in recent times during this month of awareness and comfort. I have noticed in my own life a gentle culture shift that is absolutely

worthy of mention and cannot be overstated by the swell of pride it produces. The work is done; we do all we can for children and families during November and every month of the year, and in the month of November I see just one more extra effort being made on behalf of all those who could benefit from it:

"Chris, don't be a stranger on Thanksgiving if you're around. We might not have much, but we'll have dinner. The place isn't all that big, but we'll have a seat."

Kind hearts genuinely bothered by the fact that on Thanksgiving someone they know might be alone or hungry, and they have a perfectly functional and confusingly empty seat.

November is a very good month. We give thanks for what we have, to make sure we are *aware* of those who may not have the same benefits. And when we have done all we have on behalf of those who do not have out in the world around us, we look around to the world near us and we—to the best of our ability—fill our empty seats.

That is awareness. That is true *kindness*. And that is good. I hope all of your holidays are comfortable, enjoyable and well fed. I wish you a happy new year and, wholeheartedly, I wish you not a single empty seat this holiday season.

Neither rain nor snow nor...

(continued from page 1) registered this year. We had over 90 children and teens in our child care program.

Forty-three workshops were presented at this year's conference. Many were new workshops that were not offered previously. The awards banquet went off without a hitch and did a wonderful job of honoring those families and professionals who serve our children and youth. The picnic was great with wonderful food, great entertainment and of course the marvelous balloon animals. I even saw some adults with balloons who said they were "for their kids."

The closing keynote by Eric Tyler Anderson astounded everyone with his magic tricks. How did he know all that? He was truly amazing and everyone got to leave with a smile. As always the children and young people were a true delight and remind us all of why we do our jobs!

"Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds" not only describes the SWAN/IL network dedication, but it also describes our hearts. Because we understand the importance of our task and urgency of our work, nothing keeps us from it!

2014 Independent Living Older Youth Retreat

Demara' M. Williams, Youth Ambassador
Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center

The theme for the 2014 Independent Living Older Youth Retreat was "We Are Infinite." The Older Youth Retreat was a yearlong process that could not be done without the steering committee. It was great to be a part of the steering committee and work with other youth and staff to plan out the entire week of the retreat.

The retreat is a great way to bring out leadership skills and teach youth other skills such as organization and the planning process that goes into creating such a fulfilling week! The hard work pays off when the time comes to enjoy the week with everyone else.

Serving as a co-facilitator was a great experience, and I loved watching the bonds of the peer groups grow, especially as the youth related and connected with each other. It is just truly amazing watching the youth come

out of their comfort zones, make new friends and become leaders so quickly. Everyone worked together and was very supportive during the peer group session games, such as "cross the line."



The youth first noticed that just like they are infinite, so were the countless amounts of activities that they could take part in during the week. There were activities for everyone such as all different sports, card and board games, movies, a variety of creative painting activities, hip hop dance, music expression, and of course the famous creative field day event.

Along with all the great fun that everyone had, it was great to hear from Jamari, an older youth who was in the #MeetTheKids and was adopted at the age of 20. And I can't forget (continued on page 8)



2014 IL Youth Retreat

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Richard Santana who was the guest speaker at the banquet. The youth loved his authenticity when he talked about his past experiences. Because the youth were able to relate to Mr. Santana, they really listened to his message about perseverance, drugs and sex.

The retreat is such an amazing opportunity for youth to get to experience, from staying on a college campus to engaging in so many different activities. A comment that I will never forget that was made by a youth was, "For a week I was able to call this retreat my home."

Between all the memories that are made and all the knowledge that the youth gain in learning about themselves and older youth, resources are infinite! The youth left the retreat feeling more empowered, confident and, of course, infinite!



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

2015 Save the Date

SWAN / IL Winter Statewide Meeting

January 21-22, 2015 - State College