

Network News

Voice of the SWAN/IL Network

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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
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Harrisburg, PA 17105-2675



Lions and Tigers and... Elephants, Oh My!

By Pamela Wagner, SWAN Program and Conferencing Division Manager

Like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz, in June the participants of the 2016 SWAN/IL Summer Statewide Meeting and the 24th Annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference were transported to an enchanting land! This year's conference was held in a new location, the Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in Pocono Manor, Pennsylvania, from June 14-16. The resort was truly awesome and prompted one participant to comment, "We finally have a facility worthy of our conference." Reminiscent of Oz, our theme this year was "Bravery, Courage, Triumph." Throughout this event we saw examples of all of these traits in our children, youth, families and professionals.

Yes there were lions, tigers and elephants, but fortunately they only came in the form of artwork and sculptures; the Kalahari was an extremely welcoming place for conference participants to gain and

share information. While in most respects the location couldn't be beat with its family-friendly atmosphere and its giant waterpark, it was the people that made this year's conference special. People from all over the state

gathered once again for a few days in the summer in fellowship to spend time with those who share a calling: permanency for youth. They talked about their accomplishments over the last year as well as some of the heartbreaks they have experienced.

More than 650 participants attended the two-and-a-half day event. The conference began with a powerful presentation by Michelle Nauman-Brown, a youth advocate with Family Design Resources, Inc. (FDR). She is a young woman who spent most of her childhood in the foster care system and currently collaborates with FDR program staff to advocate for permanency for older youth in out-of-home placement. She talked



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Conference Highlights



passionately about the issue of trauma and did a masterful job of relating her own experiences to the current evidence around trauma-informed care.

The conference boasted 42 workshops on a variety of topics, in rooms with exotic names that evoke the spirit of Oz, like Sagewood, Zambezi, and the Nile. Many of the workshops were new, but some, like the yoga workshop, were back by popular demand! A few participants remarked that the choice of

workshops was so extensive and information-rich they wished they could go to them all!

We enjoyed an incredible matching event on the Tuesday evening before the conference, which allowed families and workers to meet in person to share information about the children in care and "break bread" together at a bountiful buffet. This year, 29 families attended this matching reception and 67 agencies reserved tables.

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The annual SWAN/IL recognition banquet again offered numerous examples of bravery, courage and triumph. We were honored to have Cindi Horshaw, director of the Bureau of Policy, Programs, and Operations within the Department of Human Services, Office of Children, Youth and Families, as our mistress of ceremonies. She handled the event with tremendous grace. The families who received the awards stole the show with their moving

testimonies and tremendous stories of dedication to our most vulnerable children.

The closing keynote was presented by Jamole Callahan, a national motivational speaker, LINK22 executive director and trainer for the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program. Jamole shared the story of his time in foster care, discussing the influences and people that helped him through this period of his life. His

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CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS



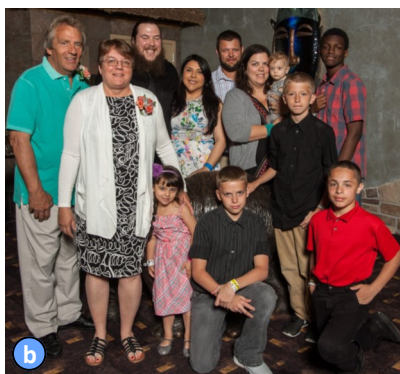
message of hope conveyed the possibility of triumph for our youth.

After Callahan’s moving speech, it was extremely gratifying to see performances from all the youth and children who are the heart of the conference. This year we said goodbye to Phyllis Stevens, our teen care program director. She has been volunteering in this capacity for 22 years! We honored Phyllis and her work over the past two decades with

flowers and well-wishes. She has been an inspiration to both parents and youth, and her caring spirit and contagious energy will always be remembered.

As Dorothy had to leave Oz behind, we all also had to return home. But the inspiring stories we heard there will not soon be forgotten! Goodbye, Oz, I hope to travel down the Yellow Brick Road again in the year to come! ■

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.

- a. **William and Jacquelyne Bailey**, Montgomery County
- b. **Alan and Sandra Donchez**, Lehigh County
- c. **Analeisa Ecker**, Allegheny County
- d. **Jeannette Liddick**, Mifflin County
- e. **Jeffrey and Jennifer Steele**, Northampton County
- f. **Tom and René Williams**, McKean 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.

- g. **Brandon's Forever Home**

Permanency Teamwork Recognition

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

- h. **Rhonda Jewart**, Butler County Children and Youth Services
- Brenda Dunmyre**, Family Pathways
- Ellen Rogan**, Catholic Charities Counseling and Adoption Services-Erie
- Stephen and Lisa Totleben**

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Permanency Advocate Recognition

This award recognizes a dynamic individual or organization that does not fit the criteria of the other categories who, through their professional or volunteer efforts, has had an impact on service change, judicial improvement, service delivery or family support locally or throughout Pennsylvania.

- i. Marleni Feinstein**, Susquehanna Valley CASA–Voices for Children

Independent Living Professional Recognition

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

- j. Paul Flinchbaugh**, Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.

Permanency Professional Recognition

This award recognizes 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.

- k. Currin Haines-Yoder**, Dauphin County Social Services for Children and Youth

Youth Advocate Recognition

This award recognizes 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.

- l. Constance Krebs-Iannetta**, Montgomery County

SWAN Advisory Committee Outstanding Service to Adoption Award

This 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.

- m. Kevin Gray**, Pennsylvania Department of Human Services



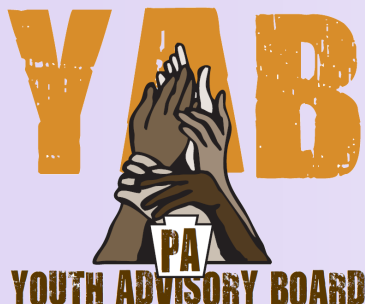
YAB Spotlight

My name is Demara Williams, and I recently graduated from Cedar Crest College with a bachelor's degree in social work. I have been with the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) for eight years, participating in panel presentations and other speaking engagements for judges, stakeholders, guardians ad litem, caseworkers, other professionals and youth. As a whole, we participated in various community service events locally, regionally and statewide.

I have adapted the YAB's mission statement as one of my primary personal goals: to educate, advocate and promote positive partnerships in the child welfare system. My personal goal is to obtain my master's degree in social work.

I am proud of myself for being a former youth of the system who then began to work for the system and achieved upstanding youth perspective roles on statewide workgroups, statewide conferences, and local and regional advocating events, while also sitting on the board of directors at Valley Youth House.

The YAB has helped me with my personal and professional growth as a woman, mentor, social worker and friend. It also helped me strengthen my weaknesses and build upon my strengths to effect change and make a better system for current and upcoming youth. For more information about the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board, head to www.independentlivingpa.org.



The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center (CWRC) is very proud of Demara's accomplishments, and we wish her the best of luck in her future endeavors! The CWRC is currently looking for youth ambassadors for each of its four regions. Applicants must have experience in foster care and be enrolled in a postsecondary education program. Find out more about the position and how to apply at: <http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/HumanResources.html>

Pennsylvania Resources

Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN)

www.adoptpakids.org

Prime Contractor for SWAN

www.diakon-swan.org

Independent Living

www.independentlivingPA.org

SWAN Helpline

800-585-SWAN

Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association

www.psrfa.org

SWAN Legal Services Initiative Warmline

888-793-2512

Isiwarmline@diakon-swan.org

**Office of Children, Youth and Families,
Pennsylvania Department of Human Services**

www.dhs.pa.gov

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Joe Warrick at jwarrick@pa.gov

SWAN on Facebook

www.facebook.com/AdoptPA

SWAN on YouTube

www.youtube.com/AdoptPAKids

SAVE THE DATE

2017 SWAN/IL Winter Statewide Meeting

January 18–19, 2017

**The Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel
State College, PA**