

Network News

Voice of the SWAN/IL Network

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Network News

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Youth Shine Bright at 2017 Retreat

By Barbara Huggins, Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center

Even the stars need darkness to shine, and at the 2017 Older Youth retreat, shine bright they did!

With a total of 91 youth and 49 staff from across Pennsylvania, the 2017 Older Youth Retreat was held at the University of Pittsburgh's Johnstown campus from August 7-11.

This year's event included opportunities for youth to experience college life, make connections with their peers, and leave feeling inspired and motivated.

They participated in a variety of activities, including a college fair at which attendees could explore a variety of options for post-secondary education.

The youth also attended an alumni panel discussion about the transition to adulthood. They were then able to spend time with each panelist during an activity called alumni speed mentoring, where alumni transitioned from peer group to peer group for discussion.

Focus groups have become a tradition at the retreat because they give youth an opportunity to voice their experiences and recommend improvements to the system. This year, the discussion surrounded youths' experiences with normalcy.

On the last day of the retreat, youth participated in a field games tournament. They broke off into groups and competed for the coveted Peer Group of the Year award. This year's peer group winner was Team Teal.

Youth jumped from field games to formal for that evening's banquet.

Everyone enjoyed a chance to dress up,

and youth stopped by the red carpet-themed backdrop to pose with the friends they made throughout the week. The banquet honored this year's Older Youth Agency of the Year award winner, The Moving-On Program at Hermitage House Youth Services (Crawford County). The banquet took an enchanting turn with a presentation by motivational speaker Eric Anderson who shared how magic and hard work helped him become successful.



Retreat Attendees and staff pose for a group photo outside Laurel Hall.

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A “Phan-tastic” Time at the NAC/SWAN Older Youth Matching Event

By Melanie Rehrig, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and Kelly Myers, Family Design Resources, Inc.

The National Adoption Center (NAC) and the Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) co-hosted an older youth matching event on Saturday, March 25, 2017. Nineteen youth and 15 families attended the event at Citizens Bank Park, home of the Philadelphia Phillies.

The pleasantly warm March day began with a light breakfast followed by introductions and icebreaker activities to help the youth and families get to know one another. Next, the facilitator for the day’s festivities, Josh Strelbicki of Family Pathways, led organized team games and activities. One of these activities involved two-person teams (consisting of a waiting youth and a waiting parent) spending time talking to each other so that they could introduce their team member to the larger group. Each team got to share the special handshake that they created to represent their team. “It was nice to see the families really getting into this activity and creating connections with the youth over their own special handshakes. Each adult was also able to share a strength about the child in their introductions as well,” said Kelly Myers, PAE coordinator for the southeast region.

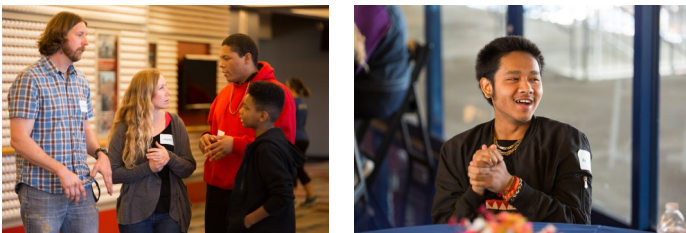


Event attendees had the opportunity to meet Phoebe Phanatic.

Following the stadium tour, more interactive activities took place between the youth and families, including the activity “Everyone Has a Voice.” This activity, a fan-favorite among the youth, involved the youth sitting in a circle and the facilitator talking with them about what’s on their minds while the families listen. Various types of questions were asked such as: What do you want to be when you grow up? Where do you see yourself in ten years? What does family mean to you? The youths’ answers provided the families with insight into their foster care experiences as well as their hopes and dreams.

Everyone seemed to agree that the activities were not only fun, but also prompted them to learn more about each other. One family shared, “I think getting to hear the children speak and say how they felt was amazing.”

The group enjoyed some down time by eating ice cream together. The last activity on the agenda was having the youth decorate their own personalized t-shirts. They were given fabric markers and were encouraged to have others write down positive things about them or special memories of the day. The families and staff enjoyed writing on the youth’s shirts and offered words of encouragement and praise. In addition to these t-shirts, the youth went home with a bag of goodies courtesy of the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB).



Youth and families participate in icebreaker games and activities.

After some hard work and laughter, everyone enjoyed a stadium-themed buffet lunch consisting of hot dogs, pizza, French fries and of course, Philly cheese steaks! The Philly Phanatic’s mother, Phoebe Phanatic, made a special guest appearance during the lunch break, and the youth loved getting their pictures taken with her. One youth who was initially hesitant of the oversized mascot eventually jumped in to several group photos with Phoebe after getting some special attention.

After lunch, everyone in attendance received a very special behind-the-scenes tour of Citizens Bank Park. The tour included areas that are typically closed to the general public, including the batting cages, dugout, press conference room, and locker room. The tour really was a “phan-tastic” treat!

Dates to Remember

2018 SWAN/IL Winter Statewide Meeting

January 17, 2018 - January 18, 2018

Penn Stater Conference Center, State College

2018 SWAN/IL Spring Quarterly Meetings

Scranton - March 28, 2018

Radisson Lackawanna Station

Clarion - April 4, 2018

Park Inn by Radisson

Monroeville - April 5, 2018

DoubleTree by Hilton

Lansdale - April 18, 2018

Holiday Inn Lansdale

Philadelphia - April 19, 2018

Clarion Hotel and Conference Center

Enola - April 24, 2018

Central Penn Conference Center

2018 SWAN/IL Summer Statewide Meeting

June 12, 2018 - June 13, 2018

Kalahari Resorts and Conventions, Pocono Manor

26th Annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference

June 13, 2018 - June 15, 2018

Kalahari Resorts and Conventions, Pocono Manor

Wholehearted People at the 25th Annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference

By Pam Wagner, Family Design Resources, Inc.

This summer was the 25th anniversary of the Pennsylvania Permanency Conference, and I've been extremely lucky over the past 25 years to have been a participant in this wonderful event. Over 48,000 children and youth have found permanency through the efforts of those in our SWAN network. The conference was held at the Kalahari Resort and Convention Center in Pocono Manor, PA from June 28-30, 2017. As in the past, a lot of incredible moments happened during this event. More than 800 people attended the conference over the two and a half days.

Recently, I listened to a TED talk which discussed the importance of being vulnerable. The speaker, Dr. Brene Brown, presented the idea that to be open to new ideas, connections and love, we must express vulnerability. When people enter into a situation and let genuine emotions show, others want to connect with them. She called those who are able to share their vulnerabilities with others "wholehearted" people. This, of course, made me think of the Pennsylvania Permanency Conference. Many of the people I met at our most recent conference in June were willing to share their accomplishments as well as their failures. They were willing to "wear their hearts on their sleeves," to be vulnerable and make connections and in so doing touched the lives of children and families. This "wholeheartedness" could be felt in every workshop, youth presentation and keynote speech.

The conference started with a keynote from Constance Krebs Iannetta, a former foster youth who spent six years in the dependency system before aging out. She talked candidly about her time in foster care, her desire for a permanent family and her own resiliency as she now works with foster youth across the country in her position as the Foster Care Alumni Association national director.

We had 44 workshops over the two and a half days dealing with all types of permanency issues. Presenters, many of whom were professionals or families in the field, were willing to talk about their own triumphs and struggles in an effort to teach others. It was an incredible opportunity to learn



Lisa Stum, Heather Riegler, and Suzanne Palmer pose for a photo while helping to keep activities organized.

from others and for others to learn from us.

The conference was not only a time for learning but also for celebrating our accomplishments. A banquet was held on the first night of the conference. Professionals and families from across the state came together to honor the accomplishments of their peers. The Mistress of Ceremonies for the banquet was Cathy Utz, Deputy Secretary,

Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF). Cathy has worked for the past 19 years providing oversight to numerous children and youth initiatives. Cathy did a masterful job of overseeing this event, offering commentary and continuity that kept the program lively and entertaining.

On Thursday evening, a picnic was held for professionals and families. Activities included games and drawings. The families had the opportunity to enjoy time with each other, and the celebration continued at the Kalahari's indoor waterpark late into the evening.

The ending keynote was provided by Ms. Connie Going. Connie is a national adoption advocate and CEO of the Adoption Advocacy Center. She has more than twenty-five years of experience in child welfare and adoption. She is also a mother of two sons who came home through adoption. Connie presented her family's adoption story. We appreciated Connie's candor and honesty as she shared experiences both good and bad. Her passion for finding solutions and making a difference in the lives of children came through loud and clear.

For the last 25 years we have ended the conference with a children's segment, where we bring on stage all the children who have been part of the teen care and child care to remind us of why we really do this work. This year was no different and, as in the past, this was one of the most emotional parts of the conference.

Last year we said goodbye to Phyllis Stevens, who had been our teen care director for the previous 20 years. This year we welcomed Angela Damiano as our new director. Angela has been involved in this

Youth Shine Bright (cont'd. from p.1)

The retreat brought together youth from across Pennsylvania and showed that our stars really do shine bright. Pictures and videos from the week can be found on the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) Facebook page by searching for @PAYouthAdvisoryBoard. YAB also encourages everyone to participate in this year's hashtag challenge, #shinebright2k17, and ask five friends to join in on the fun; it's a great way to share what has helped you shine bright in darkness or to be uniquely and wonderfully you!



#ShineBright2k17

This year's Older Youth Retreat Theme is:
"Even the stars need darkness to shine."

The 2017 Retreat Steering Committee wants to know what makes YOU shine bright! Your challenge is to take a picture, or record a video of yourself sharing what inspires you to shine even in darkness, or hard times. What makes you courageous or unique? Be creative! Illuminate yourself with a light source, then upload it to your social media account of choice using this hashtag - #ShineBright2K17. Don't forget to challenge 5 of your friends!

Please keep all videos and images respectful

A small version of the graphic seen in the top middle section, featuring a white star with a trail and the text "EVEN THE STARS NEED DARKNESS TO SHINE" in yellow.

A “Phan-tastic” Time (cont’d. from p.2)



Matching event staff pose with Phoebe Phanatic.

NAC has been co-hosting Older Youth Matching Events with SWAN since 2009, and they have proven successful. Julie Marks, NAC Older Youth Project Manager, said “I love the chance for youth and families to meet each other in person. On several occasions, we’ve seen families meet a youth who is older than the age the family was initially interested in and the in-person meeting opened their minds to that older youth. Face-to-face interactions make a different impact than reading a paragraph or two



Julie Marks, NAC Older Youth Project Manager, & Jenn Casner-Hockenberry, PAE Family Coordinator pose for a photo on the field.



Youth and families participate in icebreaker and teambuilding activities.



Event attendees tour Citizens Bank Park.

about a child on a website.” One of the families in attendance agreed sharing, “The group activities with the kids were the most valuable part of the day. Meeting the kids in person is a lot better than reading or hearing about them from the website or hotline.”

Bringing waiting youth together at events like this is also important because they learn that they are not alone. “An additional benefit of these events is that the youth have a chance to meet and enjoy others who are in similar situations. Even if the appropriate family for a particular boy or girl is not present at a matching event, just knowing that there are real families interested in adopting teenagers provides

hope that there is a family for them,” said Ms. Marks.

It is obvious from the popularity and success of these events that they are working: 14 of the 19 youth in attendance at the event received a total of 54 inquiries. One family even drove several hours to meet one of the youth in whom they had previously expressed an interest.

I think it’s safe to conclude that NAC and SWAN outdid themselves this year and “hit a grand slam.” One youth summed up the day’s festivities very simply in a few words: “It was awesome and fun!”





Beaver County CYS Hosts Annual Family Picnic

By Katie Bruno, Family Design Resources, Inc.



Angela Puntureri and Liz Newberry are SWAN Legal Services Initiative paralegals supporting Beaver County. On Wednesday, August 16, Beaver County Children and Youth Services hosted their annual family picnic for all of the families they service. It was a beautiful day filled with lots of fun activities for children and their families. The activities included things like an art center, petting zoo, bounce houses, a rock wall, train rides and much more. There was a ton of food for families to enjoy with the crowd favorites being snow cones and popcorn. Angela and Liz were able to help with the picnic and had a wonderful time interacting with the families.

Wholehearted People (cont'd. from p.4)

conference since she was four years old. She considers this an important part of her childhood memories. Angela brings her excitement and energy to this position, and we deeply appreciate the incredible job she did this year.

Amy Salvatori is our child care director. Amy has watched this program grow over the past several years, and we feel so blessed to have her as part of our family. Her compassion and long-time experience with children has been an added bonus to this program.

I would also like to thank the SWAN prime contract conferencing staff, Beth Duzey, Ina Wertz, and Charlotte Wilson-Manley as well as Joe Warrick and Carrie Keiser from OCYF and the conference



The conference planning committee worked tirelessly to ensure that this year's conference was better than ever.

planning committee for their hard work and dedication. I have had the honor

over the past eleven years to work with these consummate professionals; they are the backbone of this conference. Thank you to each of them for the hundreds of hours of service they have given to this great event.

We don't have to travel the world to find people who are vulnerable and who are "wholehearted" in their approach

to life; we need only look as far as all the Pennsylvania families who open up their hearts and homes to children and the professionals who lay bare their feelings and faults so others may learn. We need only to look to the Pennsylvania Permanency Conference. Hope to see you there in 2018!

Conference Award Winners

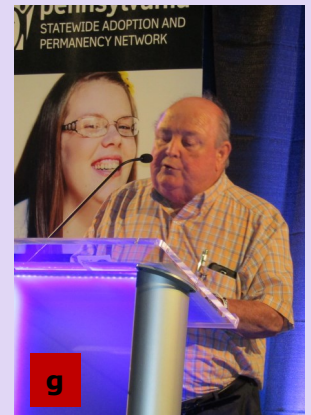


a. Stephanie Salvatori of Lycoming County Children and Youth Services was the recipient of the Youth Advocate Recognition award.

b. Karen Knodel of Bethanna was the recipient of the Permanency Professional Recognition award.

c. Blessings Foster Care Ministry was the recipient of the Philanthropy Recognition Award.

d. Andrew and Kelly Hughes of the Foster Love Project were the recipients of the Permanency Advocate Recognition award.



e. Rodney and Cari Prezioso and family of Mercer County were recipients of the Permanent Families Recognition award.

f. Matthew and Amy Stohrer and family of Lebanon County were recipients of the Permanent Families Recognition award.

g. Ronald Williams, Wyoming County Commissioner and Adoptive parent was the winner of the SWAN Advisory Committee Outstanding Service to Adoption award.

h. The Permanency Teamwork award recipients were **Laura Gellner**, Butler County Children and Youth Services; **Karleen Vogt**, Family Pathways; **Ken Laaks**, Children's Aid Society of Mercer County.

i. August and Roxanne Long and family of Carbon County were recipients of the Permanent Families Recognition award.

j. Shane and Rachel Ramos McMahan and family of Montgomery County were recipients of the Permanent Families Recognition award.

k. Vincent and Sharyn Mazzoni and their son of Bucks County were recipients of the Permanent Families Recognition award.

Not pictured: Permanent Families Recognition Award winners Paul and Katrina Keane (Allegheny County) and Independent Living Professional Recognition award winner Leasia Ayers-Caswell, Adams County Children and Youth Services.

Conference Highlights



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

SWANhelpline@diakon-swan.org

Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association

www.psrfa.org

SWAN Legal Services Initiative Warmline

888-793-2512

lsiwarmline@diakon-swan.org

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

www.dhs.pa.gov

Network News

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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