

Network News

Voice of the SWAN / IL Network

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Network News

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Teens Transformed into Fashion Stars

By **Melanie Rehrig**
Supervisor, Older Child Matching Initiative

To celebrate National Adoption Month, Diakon Adoption and Foster Care held its 2nd Annual Fashion Show and Matching Event at the Topton campus on Saturday, November 2, 2013. Eighteen 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 23 families also attended this event.

Before the event, each youth was given a \$75 gift card to buy two outfits to model during the fashion show and ultimately keep. The youth



were encouraged to browse sale and clearance racks to get the most for their money. They were rewarded for their savvy shopping skills as they were allowed to spend any remaining money on additional pieces of clothing or accessories. One youth did so well that she was able to buy three pieces of costume jewelry while another bought a fashion scarf and tights.

This shopping activity empowered the youth by allowing them to hand-select clothing (continued on page 10)



From the Department of Public Welfare

By Carrie Keiser, Director,
Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network



Thirteen years ago, I began my child welfare experience as a caseworker in Dauphin County. In 2002, I joined the Office of Children, Youth and Families, OCYF, first as a coordinator with the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange, PAE, and later as a Human Services program specialist with the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, SWAN, unit. When I started with OCYF in 2002, I knew nothing about the SWAN program, its mission or the size and scope of the network.

I remember attending my first SWAN quarterly meeting. I was overwhelmed by the smiles on everyone's faces and in watching everyone hugging one another, happy to see each other again. I actually thought, "Well, this is a little odd," and I felt a little uncomfortable as well. I mean, to witness child welfare workers from across the permanency spectrum in happy, positive moods was a bit of a shock. I would, however, quickly realize that being a part of this program and being around passionate, dedicated individuals who wanted nothing more than to improve the permanency outcomes for children and youth was where I definitely wanted to be, hugs and all.

In my role as a PAE coordinator, I provided information and updates about PAE and was responsible for decorating and putting up the PAE matching display at the meetings. My favorite memories of those early days were the Matching Moments, because I loved hearing directly from the child specific recruiters about the children and youth that came across my desk every day. One of my greatest joys over the past 10 years has been watching how the Matching Moments has evolved.

Ten years ago, inviting youth to SWAN meetings or asking them speak in front of the public was not only unheard of, it would have been considered to be potentially detrimental to the child. Having children present their stories in person is now a staple at every SWAN/

Independent Living quarterly meeting. This network quickly learned and witnessed that the children and youth we represent are their own best spokespersons about their need for permanency. It has become OCYF's goal to offer our youth as many opportunities as possible to speak out about their need for a permanent family.

Since last January, OCYF has been informing you about the commitment to reducing the number of youth who have to reside in congregate care settings and the belief that every child should be in the most family friendly, least restrictive environment possible. As such, a new media campaign, #MeetTheKids, was created to recruit resource families who are willing to accept placement of older foster youth into their homes.

We gave 12 foster care youth a platform to break down those often misguided and misinformed ideas individuals have when it comes to fostering or adopting older youth. I am pleased to inform you that since the #MeetTheKids campaign launched in July 2013, five of the 12 youth featured in the campaign have been matched with a prospective adoptive family (Evan, Nakada, Jamari, Chance and Tymiene). All five are visiting with families, and each visit appears to be going very well. Many of the remaining youth featured have received multiple inquiries from families, and caseworkers are working hard to find the most suitable family to meet their needs.

The campaign also received national recognition when 19 year-old Jamari was a guest on the *NBC Today* show on November 7, 2013. Jamari discussed the need for adoptive families who are willing to provide a permanent home to teenagers in foster care. Additional youth featured in the campaign have also been interviewed on a variety of local radio stations across the Commonwealth.

The response from the public has been extremely positive and has demonstrated the success of this campaign. OCYF plans to continue to build upon this campaign and has already begun the process of creating additional commercials featuring a new group of PA foster youth.

Over my short career with SWAN, I have watched this network change and grow and relished in learning so much from many of you. I continue to be humbled by this network and the people who make positive changes in the lives of children,

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Interdependence to Permanency

By Brenda Lawrence
SWAN Program Administrator

Since the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network and Independent Living joined forces in 2005, we have worked together to assure our very vulnerable older youth receive all the services they can. We all work to make sure IL knows what SWAN services are, how to refer them and why. We also inform SWAN workers about IL programs and initiatives so older youth are exposed to the many IL resources.

This work helps to assure all who serve these youth know how to best access the services that will help youth succeed as they achieve a permanent outcome or leave care. We all agree that while the youth in IL benefit greatly from the services, Independent Living is not a goal nor is it a realistic plan for many of the youth. Even though adoption is the next highest permanency after reunification, that is not the goal many older youth receive. Hopefully, we have helped many of them achieve permanent legal custodian care or formal kinship.

At least once a year we are reminded that approximately 900-1000 of Pennsylvania's older youth age out of our foster care system, supposedly to live independently. They have not achieved a permanent living situation or permanency connections, and if they do, it is neither documented in our statistics nor reported. So our challenge is - how does SWAN and IL - both as programs and as collaborators - dramatically reduce those numbers of youth aging out? Our goal is to increase their:

- Successful return to home when possible;
- Sincere efforts and opportunities for adoption;
- Possible options for PLC or formal kinship; and,
- Overall chances to make permanent connections to important people in their lives.

Our youth tell us it is not our place to decide what they want or need. They must be involved all along the way - acting along with their caseworker, permanency worker, adoption worker, independent living worker, child specific recruiter, Older Child Matching Initiative worker or post-permanency worker in a spirit of *interdependence* - which is how we all exist - dependent on each other. So how do we use this interdependence to maximize permanency for youth?

Carrie Keiser, OCYF director of SWAN, shared the success of the #Meet the Kids project, which is encouraging to many, especially to adoption

workers seeking adoptions for them. All workers assigned to youth in placement must take the time to talk about this video and concept to them and introduce the youth to the tools that can help find them the family to help them succeed.

It is everybody's job in both SWAN and IL to help others do the following:

- Understand the need and right of our youth to be adopted and find permanency, to have someone to depend on while taking risks on the path to maturity;
- Help our kids in care to understand they deserve and can be more successful in a family;
- Ask them—in many ways and more than once—about finding a family and being adopted;
- Commit to never giving up and to helping our youth never give up on finding a family; and,
- Know and promote the services our programs provide so older youth in care will have maximum access and opportunity.

Finally, this is about making sure our kids leave care with the highest level of permanency possible, assuring that all who come in contact with that young person understand the *time sensitive nature* of their situation. Workers need to identify and stabilize a permanent relationship to support that youth after they leave care. That permanent relationship is not their county caseworker, not their Independent Living worker or IL supervisor, and it is not their child preparation worker or child specific recruitment worker. No matter how significant a worker may feel their relationship to the youth might be, it does not provide the youth with a permanent connection, a place to go for holidays, a person or family to celebrate their accomplishments or be there to get them through their disappointments. Aging out and having one or more of those folks to call is not good enough or adequate or okay. Our youth deserve a chance to be adopted, to seek permanent legal custodianship or formal kinship with one legally committed adult or couple.

So this is not about making sure SWAN is used or referred and not about whether IL is working - we are all working very hard to do just that. But it *is* about how our collaboration makes the greatest impact to create a connection for a child that will last *their* lifetime.

Adoption Day Celebrations Around the State

By Heather K. Britton
SWAN LSI Coordinator

November was National Adoption Awareness Month, and SWAN Legal Services Initiative paralegals across Pennsylvania were among those who did their part to celebrate adoptees and their families and raise awareness about Pennsylvania's waiting children. Here are how some counties celebrated the event and how the SWAN LSI paralegals contributed.



22, 2013 at the county courthouse. SWAN LSI paralegals Tricia Holfelder and Erin Sankey served on the county's Adoption Day Committee, helping to secure donations and plan the event.

This year, the committee planned activities for the families, including a visit from Batman and a princess,

crafts, a balloon artist and a caricaturist. Butler County Children and Youth's three therapy dogs, who calm children and parents in the waiting area outside the courtroom, were also at the event promoting their services and delighting attendees. Refreshments were donated and baked by county employees.

In addition to helping with planning the event, the paralegals assured that all of the necessary paperwork was filed for the 22 adoptions. Each adoptee received a gift bag containing a handmade ornament commemorating the day, a picture frame and a personalized gift – books with name plates for the younger children, and sweatshirts with embroidered names for the older youth. Both gifts displayed the children's new adoptive names.

Armstrong County

SWAN LSI Paralegal Lynn Kovar helped organize and solicit donations for Armstrong County's Adoption Day celebration on November 16, 2013 at the Belmont Arena in Kittanning, where the first 100 attendees enjoyed ice skating. An adoption awareness event was held in the arena's conference room, with six SWAN affiliates supplying information about foster care, adoption and waiting children. About 80 people attended the event, an increase over the previous year. The Kittanning newspaper and the Armstrong Leader Times interviewed Lynn and Foster Care Coordinator Carol Pontious for articles that advertised the event and provided

information about the specific SWAN affiliates in attendance.

Butler County

Butler County's Adoption Day event was held on November

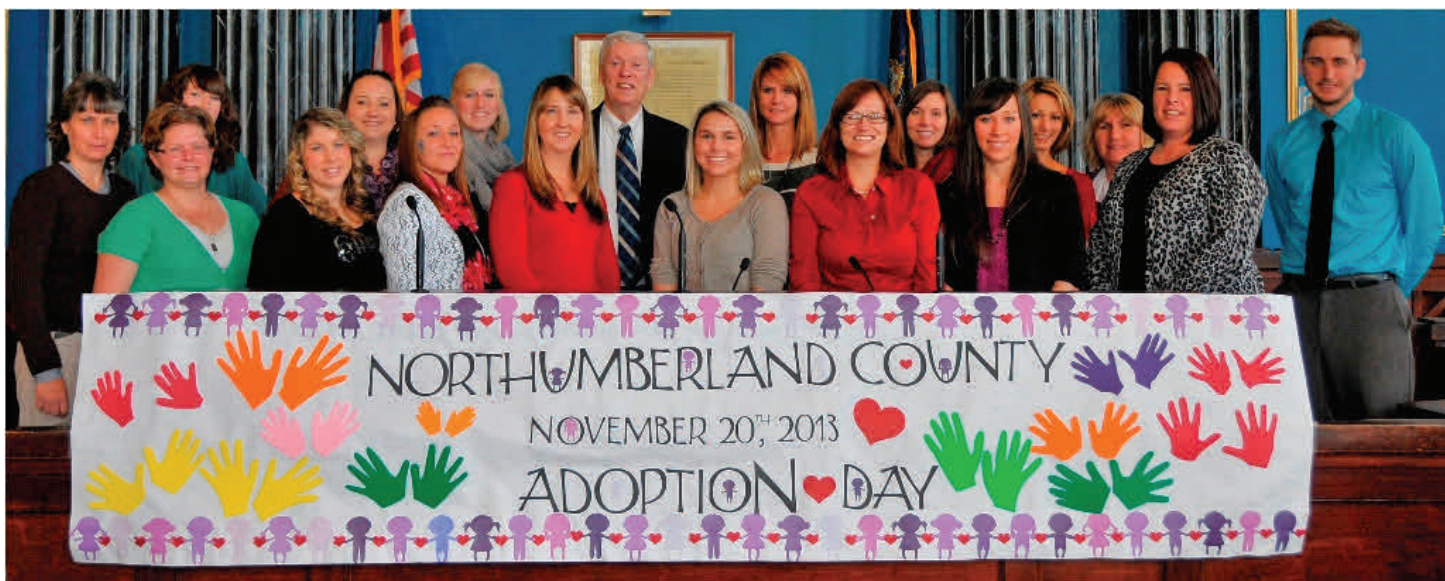


Clearfield County

SWAN LSI Paralegal Christine Kutch organized and arranged funding for two Clearfield County Adoption Month celebrations. On Friday, November 22, she led a private family party at Clearfield's roller skating rink, to which all families who adopted through Clearfield County Children, Youth and Family Services and are still receiving subsidies were invited. Families who adopted more than a decade ago and recent adoptive families

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More on Adoption Day Celebrations



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attended, along with agency staff, county judges, county commissioners and attorneys, a total of about 80 attendees.

On November 23, Christine hosted an adoptive and foster parent recruitment open house. Sixteen SWAN affiliates were represented, and 58 prospective adoptive parents and families attended to learn more about the foster care and adoption processes. Local television news stations WTAJ and WJAC promoted the event. WJAC also provided news coverage the day of the event and interviewed one of the adoptees.

Christine most enjoyed meeting with and coordinating the TV interview of one of the adoptees, Emily Conklin, whose adoption was finalized in 2012. Christine worked on the legal aspects of Emily's case from 2009 – 2012, but this event was the first time she was able to really

interact with Emily. She said, "Emily gave one of the best interviews I have ever seen. This dynamic little girl is so animated and articulate. I am so grateful that she found a family who truly brings out the best of who she is. Nothing else compares to this type of fulfillment."

Lawrence County

Lawrence County SWAN LSI paralegals Erin Andrews, Megan McConahy and Katie Heaney (since promoted to LSI coordinator), partnered with two Lawrence County Children and Youth Services supervisors, Marcia Earl and Lisa Matteo, to plan and host the county's Adoption Day celebration.

The event was held on November 16 with the theme, "Under the Sea." Adoptees and their families were invited to decorate plush fish shaped like the Disney-Pixar characters Nemo and Flounder through the organization Noah's Ark. Families were
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Statewide Straight Talk

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youth and families on a daily basis. I am even more overwhelmed by the children and youth who step up to speak out about their need for a family; they have shown a determination to never give up and remain focused and committed to finding a family of their own. This same focus and commitment exists in so many of you who do this work every day as well, as is shown by our fantastic outcomes.

Since SWAN began in 1992, more than 36,000 foster youth have been adopted in Pennsylvania. In federal fiscal year 2013, 1,875 foster youth were finalized. This is a tremendous success; however, there is still work to be done, because Pennsylvania still has waiting children and youth who need homes. I know this network is up to that challenge, as am I, and I look forward to working with all of you on this most important mission and to the continued growth and success of this program.

More on Adoption Day Celebrations

(continued from page 5) entertained by a balloon artist and a variety of carnival games, including a bouncy house and an instant photo booth complete with costumes and props. Workers from three affiliate agencies-- Family Pathways, Bethany Christian Services and the Children's Aid Society of Mercer County--helped adoptees and their siblings make photo frames, tote bags and other foam creations. Attendees were also given raffle tickets to win one of many gift baskets donated by the Lawrence County Children and Youth Advisory Board and staff.

The adoption day celebration is the Lawrence County paralegals' favorite day of the year. The county invites all families who have adopted through the county in the past, so the paralegals get to see children who have been out of agency custody for years and their families.

Mifflin County

Mifflin County's first adoption day celebration was held on November 2 at the Lewistown Country Club. LSI Paralegal Tiffany Lohman proposed the idea to County Administrator Mackenzie Seiler because she "always thought there should be more of a celebration than just a 15 minute hearing." She wanted families to have time to "take in the moment and not have to worry about rushing out of the courtroom for the next hearing" because of the court's busy schedule.

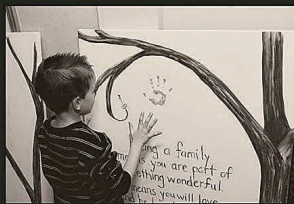


In addition to Tiffany and Mackenzie, two county supervisors and other agency staff volunteered to help plan the event. Their kid-friendly buffet included over 150 cupcakes with filled, heart-shaped centers that Tiffany baked. She sent invitations to all families who had adopted in the past five years and compiled their photos, videos and statements about what adoption means to them into a presentation that played during the meal. Gift



bags for the adoptees included a coloring book, a box of crayons and a wooden bracelet made from popsicle sticks for the children to decorate. Each adoptee and their family were introduced. Professional photographer Kille White volunteered her time to take professional family portraits.

Adoption Awareness Month



While the children worked on a surprise performance for their parents, the adults listened to the guest speakers: President Judge Timothy S. Searer, County Solicitor Patricia Gardner, Esq., and adult adoptee Julie Ufema. Tiffany's favorite moment of the evening was when Judge Searer recounted that when he arrived at the event, he walked up to a little boy in the hall and asked him what he was coloring. The boy responded, "I know you. I have your picture on my night stand." Tiffany said Judge Searer "seemed in awe...as if it were the first time it occurred to him how important he is to these children." Later that evening, other



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More on Adoption day Celebrations

(continued from page 6)

adoptive families came up to Judge Searer to say that they, too, have their adoption finalization pictures with the judge displayed in their homes.

In addition to celebrating these adoptive families, Mifflin County used this event and the entire month of November to raise awareness about the need for more foster and adoptive parents. They placed foster care agencies' brochures in their lobby, purchased "One Day" t-shirts for staff to wear every Friday and ran foster and adoptive parent recruitment ads in the local newspaper and on the radio.

Monroe County

Monroe County's first adoption day event was held on November 21 at the county's administration building. SWAN LSI paralegals Joan Goode and Tara Erb served on the county's Adoption Day Committee, prepared gift bags, decorated and set up snack tables, staffed the event and helped with the clean up afterwards.

The Adoption Day Committee was formed through Monroe County's Children's Roundtable. Committee members used their community connections to solicit funds from local organizations to buy refreshments and supplies. Also donated were a cupcake cake, YMCA family memberships, stuffed animals to be distributed at future adoption hearings and snow tubing tickets to Shawnee Mountain. The YMCA also provided backpacks that doubled as gift bags and contained donated coupons from Wendy's and McDonald's restaurants, in addition to a coloring book and craft item. A volunteer magician dazzled families with her magic act, face painting and balloon art. In addition, a local photographer took free family portraits, which could be displayed later in the frames provided at a discounted rate by A.C. Moore. Three adoptions were finalized before the event.

Joan reported that the county discussed holding an adoption day event for years, but the idea never got off the ground until 2013. This year's event was so well attended and successful that the Adoption Day Committee will be looking for a larger space, applying for more grant money and seeking more donations to make next year's event even bigger and better.

Northumberland County

Northumberland County held its 4th annual adoption day event on November 20 at the county's courthouse. All families who finalized adoptions in the past year were invited and celebrated. SWAN LSI paralegals Mabelle Drumheller, Mandy Flickinger, Nicole Matrey and Sara McIntyre, along with Catherine Gemberling, director of Permanency, planned the event. Donations came from 23 contributors. The paralegals also coordinated all of the day's activities and events.

Families participated in games and activities including balloon art, face painting, caricatures, a lollipop game, arts and crafts, hand tracing and a bean bag toss. After the games, Ms. Gemberling spoke about the day's events and explained the significance of National Adoption Day. Next, special guest speaker Raphael Cameron gave a heartfelt speech on how adoption has affected him and his family. He

spoke about his hardships growing up without a stable, loving family and how he overcame those obstacles, including being asked to care for his eight year-old brother when he was just 21 years old. This year, Raphael and his wife adopted her two cousins after fostering them for nearly two years. They are now the proud parents of five children and were named Snyder County Foster Parents of the Year on May 16, 2013.

The Honorable William Harvey Wiest gave closing remarks to the audience and spoke about his personal experience as an adoptive parent. The morning ceremony ended with all of the year's adoptees invited to the bench to take their turn in the annual "Banging of the Gavel." Afterwards, the children and their parents received a gift from the agency, most of which were donated by area businesses and community members. The Elk's Lodge provided a catered lunch, and one more adoption was finalized in the afternoon.

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The efforts of these and other SWAN LSI paralegals assured that adopted children and their families across the state were honored and celebrated. The paralegals share their ideas and enthusiasm in hopes of inspiring others to organize similar events in their counties. If you would like to plan an adoption awareness event in 2014, please consult the Adoption Day Planning Guide on the SWAN website for tips.

<http://diakon-swan.org/news/uploads/AdoptionDayEventsPlannerJanuary2013FINAL.pdf>

More on Adoption Day Celebrations

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Washington County

Washington County's Adoption Day event, "Light up the Night," was held on November 22 at the county's children and youth services office. The adoptees did just that as they were each given a sky lantern to release in their names, symbolizing their own and their adoptive families' journeys through the adoption process. LSI paralegals Michelle deRosa, Dawn Ellis, Nikita Lewis and Kristine McDowell secured the entertainment, magician David Lawrence of DLC Productions; coordinated the menu; shopped for food and supplies, and more. On the day of the event, the paralegals and volunteer agency staff set up and decorated the room. In keeping with the theme, they lit 300 tea lights in luminary bags throughout the room to signify the Washington County children still in care and waiting to be adopted.



Another special moment for the paralegals and families was when Adoption Supervisor Marie Wolf-Hatalowich spoke of her joy for the adoptees and her gratitude for the families who provided that permanency. She said, "Our Adoption Day 2013 celebration was created to illuminate the 57 adoptions finalized in Washington County since our previous adoption day in 2012. We chose the theme of 'Light the Night' to honor and celebrate every child whose adoption was finalized over the past year... It was also important to acknowledge the 300+ children in our care awaiting permanency with luminary bags, which offered a quiet, yet powerful message when the lights were turned down."

Westmoreland County

The Westmoreland County Children's Bureau held its National Adoption Day event, "It's Your Day," on November 21 in the county's courthouse. The event not only celebrated adoptive families but also served to recruit and honor resource parents. Children and adoptive families were greeted that

morning by LSI Coordinator Shelly Castillo, SWAN LSI Paralegal Adrienne Mitchell and county staff. The halls were decorated with balloons and a balloon artist was on hand to entertain the families. Refreshments were available before the adoption finalizations began, during which six children were adopted into four families as decreed by judges Christopher Feliciani and Chris Scherer.

After the finalization hearings the children and their families, LSI and agency staff, judges, solicitors, commissioners, courthouse staff and court appointed special advocates all gathered for a reception in commissioners' meeting room.

Commissioner Charles Anderson read an adoption day proclamation, after which commissioners Ted Kopas and Tyler Courtney, judges Feliciani and Scherer and Children's Bureau Director Shara Saveikis each greeted and thanked the crowd of 75 people. Adrienne and fellow SWAN LSI Paralegal Judy Criado presented the adoptees with individual gifts, after

which the children were free to get their face painted by the county's foster care department and enjoy drinks and cake.

Shelly was primarily responsible for planning and coordinating the event, gathering donations from the Kiwanis Club and by initiating paid county "dress down days," the proceeds from which she and Adrienne then used to buy gifts for the six children whose adoptions were finalized that day.

Wyoming County

Wyoming County's adoption awareness event has been held at the Wyoming County Fair for the past two years. SWAN LSI Paralegal Roxana Cameron coordinates the event. On August 29, Roxanna and other SWAN LSI staff set up a tent at the main entrance to the fair. They displayed posters of waiting children so that no fairgoer could miss them as they entered. SWAN staff in matching blue t-shirts greeted fairgoers and

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Meet Tyler!

By Jill Bruce
PAE Coordinator

On the surface, Tyler appears soft-spoken, polite and reserved. However, after Tyler grows comfortable in a relationship, he turns into a funny, uplifting and sociable young man. In fact, he is often in a good mood and likes to generate positive attention from those around him. Tyler's demeanor is reflected by his interest in comical movies and television shows. One of his favorite movies is "School of Rock" starring Jack Black.

Tyler, who is 17, enjoys reading, electronics, listening to music, nature walks and swimming. He especially enjoys mysteries and horror fiction, with Steven King a favorite author. Tyler is so inspired by reading that he says he'd really enjoy working in a library, just to be around all the books and all the stories they contain. Tyler equally likes to tinker with electronics of all kinds. He also enjoys listening to music, notably rap and hip hop, and he says he would take pleasure in working in a big electronics store such as "f.y.e."

Tyler graduated high school in 2013, completing an emotional and autistic support program where he did well in his classes. His favorite courses were math and reading. Tyler currently is looking forward to obtaining steady work.

Tyler does best with a consistent routine. He dislikes disruption in his routine and becomes frustrated by it. An ideal family for Tyler would provide him with much structure and support. Tyler is attention-seeking and desires to meet clear expectations that are set for him. Tyler prefers a traditional two-parent family, possibly with two older female siblings. He would do best if he were the youngest in the family. He takes things very



literally, so only after Tyler lives with a family would he truly understand the meaning and feelings associated with being adopted. Tyler is legally free for adoption. His PAE ID# is C49AA61.

For more information about Tyler, please contact Marian Kolcun of the SWAN Older Child Matching Initiative, Children's Service Center, mkolcun@e-csc.org and 570-825-6425 ext. 653.

Adoption Day Celebrations

(continued from page 8)
provided them with the daily event calendar, in addition to distributing information about waiting children and how to become a foster or adoptive parent through Wyoming County.

The local radio station interviewed Roxanna, and the event was also listed in the fair's program, "so there was all this free advertising" about their presence and purpose at the fair, she said.

Teens Transform into Fashion Stars

(continued from page 1)

that fit their personality and style, while it also addressed self-esteem and independent living skills (shopping while on a budget, choosing the correct size and paying for their purchase). Hands down, the winner of the best deal went to a youth who found a skirt for just \$1.99!

The day of the fashion show surely was a magical one for all who attended. Youth arrived well before the start of the event so they could receive "A-list celebrity treatment." Professional hair stylists Tammy Rheinman and Kayla Mullen of Kuts and Karats in Fleetwood; De'Vora Trapp, Empire Beauty School graduate, and Brittney Walker, Empire Beauty School student, along with Mary Kay make-up consultant Gladys Balthaser, were on hand to provide the youth with complete makeovers. The end result was amazing; each youth felt and looked like a fashion star!

During the fashion show the youth were excited to model their outfits, but they were also understandably nervous due to the large audience. DJ Outlaw, also known as Dave Walker, Sr. of Majik DJ Entertainment in Reading, helped calm their anxiety by playing upbeat music while they walked down the red carpet. By the time they modeled their second outfit, they were pros!

After the fashion show ended, the youth, who were feeling extra confident from their head-to-toe makeovers, and waiting families had a chance to



mingle with each other. The youth also had their workers by their side for extra support and encouragement. One family and youth were seen talking for quite some time, even well after the event had ended.

During the day's festivities, ten youth received Heart Gallery photos provided by Lauren Little of Little L Photography in Reading. These professional head-shots of the youth looking their best will be used in their own recruitment. Lauren stayed for the entire event and captured the youth getting their makeovers, modeling their outfits, interacting with families and dancing with each other.

Although the final number of matches made at the event is not yet in, it's safe to say the event was a success. Because the youth were together for many hours, they had the chance to get to know one another and friendships were

formed. They discovered they are not alone in this search to find a forever family to call their own. One youth was getting cold feet but decided (continued on page 11)

Teens Transform into Fashion Stars

(continued from page 10)

to attend after some coaxing from her worker. At the end of the event, she was smiling from ear to ear!

The SWAN OCMI program is a free program that serves children over the age of 10 who have a primary or concurrent goal of adoption or an informal plan of adoption. Sibling groups are also eligible, as long as one child is 10 years old. The children must also be registered with the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange or be eligible for registration. During the 2012-2013 fiscal year, 57 matches, 38 placements and 18 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.



Growing Your Post-Permanency Program

By Sue Zola

Post-Permanency Technical Assistant

How do we reach the thousands of Pennsylvania families providing permanency to children and let them know about the support services provided through SWAN? This topic was discussed at a recent Post-Permanency Unit of Service meeting. The following are four of the ideas suggested by the participants:

Educate the intake workers at the various children and youth services offices about the post-permanency services offered through SWAN. These workers are the first contact for many of the permanency families calling for help. Due to the turnover among intake workers, this exchange of information should be ongoing and include the Helpline's telephone number and a brief synopsis of the services available.

Ask counties to send out post-permanency brochures at least once a year to families receiving subsidies, maybe as part of their adoption month activities. While many of the counties have done this in the past, we need to touch base with the counties regularly to make sure they have the SWAN brochures and remind them of the importance of mailing them to the families.

Talk about post-permanency services during recruitment. Families need to know from the beginning that support services are available once they have made a permanent commitment to a child. Many recruitment activities take place at local community events

with families who are already providing permanency. This lets recruiters educate not only adoptive families but also formal kinship and PLC families about SWAN's Post-Permanency services.

Keep in touch with families who received a placement through their agency. Some affiliates already hold an annual social activity and invite families who have previously adopted through their agency. However, not every family attends these events, so the question becomes "how do we reach the families who don't attend our activities?" These are the families who also need post-permanency services but may not know about them. One suggestion was to call families or send a postcard and ask how things are going – maybe on the anniversary of their placement or finalization date. This would let families know that they haven't been forgotten and that help, whenever they need it, is just a phone call away.

The participants also talked about the importance of telling families from the beginning about SWAN's Post-Permanency program. Helping families understand these are not an entitlement but are time-limited and based on funding availability. The meeting ended with the participants discussing how some of the information they heard in this meeting could be used immediately to reach families who are struggling or isolated and need to know these services exist!

Erie SeaWolves Sponsor Adoption Awareness Event

By Karly Vogt, Adoption Resource Caseworker
Family Services of NWPA



traumatic stress disorder. She aspires to work with veterans. Jamari has traveled a lot recently, as a youth ambassador in Washington, D.C. and to SWAN's Summer Statewide Conference in Lancaster.

Jaimie, PAE #C20AA83, is an athletic young woman who enjoys football and baseball. She recently went kayaking for the first time. Her favorite team is the Pittsburgh Steelers, and she hopes to go to a Steelers game sometime soon. Jaimie loves animals and wants to one day have a dog she can call her own. She is quick to laugh, smile and sing along to the radio while in the car.

Finally, nine adoptees got to run out on the field with the SeaWolves players for the "field of dreams."

It was a beautiful night for Family Services' 6th Annual Adoption Awareness and Matching Event. With about 315 attendees and 13 agencies, it was surely a night of fun. Agencies traveled from Butler, Beaver, Pittsburgh, Clearfield, Harrisburg, Warren and more.

This Erie SeaWolves event gave a few special kids a night they would always remember.

The first special young man who participated in the event was Tyler, PAE# C62AA27.

Tyler threw out the game's first pitch and also made announcements over the loudspeakers. He is a thoughtful young man and has great insight for someone his age. Tyler has a great sense of humor, and his smile is almost as contagious as his laugh. He gets along well with his peers, has an open heart and is very considerate of others. He wants a forever family who will give him unconditional love and acceptance.

Young ladies Jamari and Jaimie got to say "play ball" together at the start of the game. These two became friends as they each pursue their goals of becoming adopted.

Jamari is an artistic young woman of many talents including crocheting, gardening, cooking and dress design. She recently completed her first year of college where she is working towards a career as a psychologist specializing in post-



As a thank you for their participation, each of the kids received a SeaWolves bag with a ball, hat and a t-shirt. Our agency also handed out t-shirts, megaphones, pom-poms, stress balls, glow sticks and tattoos to fans, families and children to help draw attention to our important cause. A raffle and auction table also helped draw people to the tables and helped raise money to help offset the event costs. The entire event was made possible by our sponsors and staff. The

adoption program raised awareness about post-permanency services and sought to recruit more adoptive families by reaching out to the general public.



The New McDowell Family

By Melanie Rehrig
Supervisor, Older Child Matching Initiative

Anyone who has ever committed themselves to something understands barriers will need to be overcome and that with triumph also come the joys to experience. With diligence and dedication, abilities will develop and improve, like with the athlete or the musician. Occasionally, those with inherent talents make us stop and take special notice, as is the case with the McDowell family.



Amber and Matthew McDowell did not set out to adopt a youth. A young couple, they were starting to realize the fruits of their hard work in buying a home and establishing themselves. The rest of their lives would be altered by a short question asked by one of Amber's students, Cecilia. Cecilia had become frustrated with the foster care system, and at one point asked Amber, her teacher; "Mrs. McDowell, why don't YOU adopt me?"

Amber took the question to heart and also to her husband Matthew. The McDowell's decision to pursue adoption could not have been easy. They faced some obvious challenges. Among these were the very real cultural and ethnic differences between themselves and Cecilia. Through discussion and much thought, they decided to act on Cecilia's request. Immediately road blocks were put in their path, but with the assistance of Cecilia's county caseworker and the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network's Older Child Matching Initiative, OCMI, recruiters, those barriers to permanency began to crumble.

Once Cecilia was placed in the home, more road blocks surfaced as the family began to introduce her into their community. Unfortunately, the school, the neighborhood and even the hairdresser were not welcoming. The McDowells then became what every child needs when transitioning to a new home environment: awesome advocates for their daughter. The family held together, communicated together and worked together, becoming an example of how a family's bonds are the links that hold us together through tough times.

Cecilia was adopted by the McDowells on September 27, 2011. More than a year and a half

later, the McDowell's and Cecilia continue to learn new things. Amber and Matthew are learning to be parents to not only a child but a teenager and a young woman. In addition, Cecilia is learning to be a part of a loving family who cares for her and will be there for her through good times and bad. Together they are looking

towards the future, and Cecilia is happy that her parents are supporting her decision to study cosmetology. Cecilia is currently thriving in her forever family. She still has connections with her past and is looking forward as well to a bright future.

The SWAN OCMI grant has had a fantastic start to the year. Our partner agencies, which are spread across the state of Pennsylvania, have been keeping busy with hosting matching events. Project STAR held its "Growing Families through Adoption" matching event on April 6, 2013 in Pittsburgh. Twenty-two agencies and 53 families attended this event. Children's Service Center had its matching event on May 4, 2013 in Tunkhannock. This event was also a huge success!

SWAN will hold a matching event, along with matching moments, at the SWAN/IL Summer Statewide Meeting at the Lancaster Host Resort and Conference Center in Lancaster on July 10, 2014 from 9 a.m. to noon. Youth will be present during the matching moments to share information about themselves and display their talents. Waiting families will have an opportunity to interact with these youth and learn more about them. Please mark your calendars as this is always an exciting and successful event!

Since its initiation in 2008, the SWAN OCMI grant has helped more than 52 older youth find their forever families. Just this year alone (since the start of the fiscal year in July), the OCMI grant has had 41 matches, 29 placements and 13 finalizations. The SWAN OCMI grant is currently working with 42 counties across Pennsylvania and is always looking for new counties to join!
(continued on page 14)

Movie Night Celebrates National Adoption Month

By Kelly Myers

Permanency Supervisor, Bethanna



To celebrate National Adoption Month, the agencies of the Adoption Coalition of Lancaster

County, ACLC, planned the second annual free movie night at the Penn Cinema in Lititz, Pennsylvania. The ACLC agencies (Bethanna, Bethany, Children's Home of York and Reading, Church of the Brethren Youth Services, Families United Network, Lancaster County Children and Youth and Pressley Ridge) planned this community event to promote awareness about the need for foster and adoptive homes.

Two adoption themed movies, *Despicable Me* and *Annie*, were shown free to the public at three theaters at the Penn Cinema complex. The event was advertised in local newspapers and on WJTL radio. Penn Cinema helped to advertize the event by showing the Older Child Matching Initiative's, OCMi, #Meet the Kids commercials and a specially designed video preview of the event during movie previews for October and November.



Before the movies, the musical group "King's Strings," comprised of an adoptive family that all play stringed instruments, performed in the lobby of the theater while families browsed tables with information about how to become a foster or adoptive parent. ACLC agency staff were identified by their purple ACLC shirts to answer any questions.



WJTL and the local Blue Ridge cable TV provider broadcasted live from the event. ACLC staff members and some movie attendees were interviewed during the live broadcast as well. At the beginning of each movie, the OCMi #Meet the Kids 13-minute documentary was shown in all three theaters.

Approximately 300 people attended the event. Free popcorn was also given to each family who attended, and door prizes included free CD's of Kings Strings and Penn Cinema movie passes.

The McDowell Family

(continued from page 13)

The SWAN OCMi grant is a free program that serves children over the age of 10 who have a primary or concurrent goal of adoption. Sibling groups are also eligible, as long as one child is over

the age of 10. The children must also be registered on PAE or be eligible for registration. If you would like to learn more about the SWAN OCMi grant, please contact Melanie Rehrig, OCMi supervisor, at 610-682-1527 or at rehrigm@diakon.org.

Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality

by Kelly Swanson

Communications & Public Policy Director, Pennsylvania Key

Foster and adoptive families open their hearts and homes to young children so they can give these children their best chances of success. Love and consistency is so critical, but how are they supporting the child's development? We know that the experiences a child has in his or her first five years affect their brain development and learning for life. Do families know if the child is meeting typical developmental milestones or may need some help? What's the best way to deal with temper tantrums or involve young children in daily activities like grocery shopping? And if they are looking for child care, how do they choose?

You can help families get the information and resources they need to help their infant, toddler or preschooler grow with the Early Learning GPS (Guiding Parents Smoothly). Whether they've cared for young children for years or suddenly find a young child at their doorstep, the Early Learning GPS can help answer all of these questions and more!

Tested by parents, the Early Learning GPS asks 10 questions that address the biggest things families can do to help their young child grow and develop. The questions address your child's brain, your child's development, you and your child, and when your child is not with you. Don't worry – it's not a test. The questions ask parents to think about situations and how they would address them. When the parent answers, he or she receives simple tips and links to reliable resources specific to the answer. You can start wherever you want and come back as often as you'd like – answers may change depending on the child or what's happening in your life.

The information was created in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and

Your child's brain Your child's development You and your child When your child is not with you What's Next?

**Set the right course
for your child's success
in kindergarten and
beyond with the
Early Learning GPS
(Guiding Parents Smoothly)**

Every child is Pennsylvania's future

Help children reach their promise through quality early education
www.papromiseforchildren.com

Infant Toddler Preschooler
www.papromiseforchildren.com

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Early Learning so you know the information is reliable. Others spent hundreds of hours pulling together the most useful tips and resources for you.

Families can use the Early Learning GPS on their own, with agency staff or other professionals or as part of a group activity.

You can get started by visiting the Pennsylvania's Promise for Children website at www.papromiseforchildren.com and clicking on the Early Learning GPS link.

Professionals can watch a 10- or 30-minute tutorial to get a sense of how the Early Learning GPS works and download a personal map worksheet that families can use to jot down what they want to do with what they've learned. Additional resources, such as a facilitator's guide, will be available soon at www.papromiseforchildren.com. For more information or to schedule a training, contact Kelly Swanson at kelswa@berksiu.org or 717-213-2074.

DVAC Adoption Awareness Event

By Chris Swank
SWAN Technical Assistant



from Mars. DVAC staff and the adoptive families who assisted in the event wore alien boppers on their heads in honor of the movie, so they could be identified if anyone had questions about adoption.

Despite the bitter cold temperatures and the threat of snow, 54 people attended the event including families from the community interested in adoption, DVAC staff, adoptive families and waiting children.

The Colonial Theater in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, was the site of the Delaware Valley Adoption Council's, DVAC, adoption awareness event about older children on November 12, 2013.

This event began with a short documentary about the Older Child Matching Initiative and its focus on finding homes for teenagers. Two teenagers who were in the documentary attended, one of whom was matched with the family who brought her to the event. Lawyer Jay Ginsburg, a long time member of DVAC, was the master of ceremonies for the evening and shared how adoption has touched his life over the years.

The 2007 adoption themed movie, *Martian Child*, was shown. The comedy-drama film is about a writer who adopts a strange young boy who believes he is



An information table was set up in the theater lobby for further information for families on how to get involved. This event was free of charge and was sponsored by the DVAC through a grant from the Office of Children, Youth and Families to celebrate National Adoption Month. DVAC is a consortium of approximately 40 public and private agencies, individuals and groups in Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania that promotes and

advances the cause of adoption in the tri-state region.

Family Open House and Farm Tour

By Indra Morales
Salvation Army

On October 19 and 20, 2013 the Salvation Army Children's Services and PAE partnered with Flint Hill Farm in Coopersburg, Pennsylvania, for its 2013 Annual Fall Open House and Farm Tour. The event was an opportunity for families to come out and have a fun-filled day, while at the same time educating those attending about the joys of adopting.

The free admission event included entertaining fall activities such as pony rides, hay rides and pumpkin picking. In preparation for National Adoption Month in November, the Salvation Army Children's Services and PAE set up informational tables, where we handed out literature and "Adoption Rocks" bracelets. In addition, toy raffles were held, and face painting and coloring stations were set up for all children to enjoy.

Perhaps the most poignant moments were the hourly presentations of the #MeettheKids commercial sponsored by SWAN. The video featured children in need of adoption who were given iPhones and asked to record a documentary from their perspective. An estimated 500 people who attended the event saw firsthand children who are in need of an adoptive family. Those passing by could not help but stop and watch as these children expressed themselves in unforgettable ways. It was a fun-filled family event, and a fantastic opportunity to spread the word about adoption!



News from PSRFA

By Kathy Ramper, Executive Director
Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association

Out with the old in with the new, year that is, happy 2014. As we move forward to make this the best year for PSRFA we look back and celebrate the great times we had last year. Our annual conference was a huge success and was truly inspiring from beginning to end! From the social workers to the foster parents to the foster children and the children now adults who grew up in the foster care system - who are now presenters, youth advisory board members, to the administrators, board members, volunteers and staff....You are all part of an amazing group of selfless, dedicated and loving

individuals who work tirelessly every day to make a difference in the life of a child. Thank you.

Congratulations to our award winners, Foster Family of the Year, William and Joanne Coolbaugh; Caseworker of the Year, Robin Klimke; Foster Parent Association of the Year, Northumberland FPA; Agency of the Year, Beaver County Children and Youth. What a great group of award recipients and so well deserved. We are looking forward to seeing everyone at this year's conference at the Holiday Inn, Grantville, October 23 - 25, 2014.

As always thank you for all you do for the children.

SAVE THE DATE!

On May 24, 2014, PSRFA will host a scholarship benefit concert at the Forum in Harrisburg with a performance by "We Rock" and starring our featured guest, **Jimmy Wayne!**

For more information you can go to our website www.psrfa.org. Tickets are on sale now! Don't miss out this will be a great event.

Information about the Special Kids Network

By Jane E. Marsteller
Public Health Program Administrator, PA Department of Health

In 1996, the Special Kids Network, SKN, program, funded through the Pennsylvania Department of Health's Maternal and Child Health Services Title V block grant, began as an information and referral helpline through its toll-free number - **800-986-4550**.

The service focuses on children and youth with special health care needs, CYSHCN, and their families, providing information to callers about needed resources. Even armed with information, parents frequently express difficulty in knowing how to navigate through the maze of health and human service systems intended to help them and their children. Complicating matters is the fact that needs of CYSHCN change as they encounter various life events through their lifespan, i.e. diagnosis, working with the health care system, contending with the educational system, and post-secondary transition, to mention a few.

In response, the SKN program added a service coordination feature through a partnership with the PA Elks Home Service Program. They are a statewide, nonprofit organization with over 50 years experience providing in-home service coordination

at no cost to families. For the families who may require assistance in obtaining support services, a call to the SKN helpline may help. Call on behalf of a family or provide them with the toll-free number - 800-986-4550.

Staff with years of experience in service coordination for CYSHCN answer the phone from 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. There is no charge to families for this service, and all it takes is a call to the SKN helpline to initiate service coordination for your families.

In addition, six regional coordinators and parents of children with special health care needs, one for each of the department's designated regions, work with communities in identifying service gaps and connecting community resources to fill those gaps.

As parents of CYSHCN, they offer a unique perspective to the work they are doing on behalf of the department and families of children with special health care needs.

**Special Kids Network helpline -
800-986-4550**

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 lsiwarmline@diakon-swan.org

**Office of Children, Youth and Families
Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare—
www.dpw.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

2014 Save the Date

Summer Statewide Meeting – July 8-9, 2014

2014 Permanency Conference – July 9-11, 2014

