

Network News

Voice of the SWAN/IL Network

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Network News

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Growing Families Through Adoption

By Karleen Vogt, BSW, SWAN OCMI Recruiter, Family Pathways

Project STAR held the 10th Annual Growing Families Through Adoption event in Pittsburgh on April 2, 2016. When Jon Douglas, Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange (PAE) coordinator, worked with the Older Child Matching Initiative, he founded this event to raise awareness about waiting youth in Western Pennsylvania. Growing Families Through Adoption has grown itself over the last decade — 23 agencies and 50 families attended this year!



The special matching and awareness day began with guest speaker, Jamole Callahan, executive director of LINK22, a network that connects young alumni of foster care with mentors, peers, leadership and entrepreneur development, education and careers. Mr. Callahan spent six years in foster care, experiencing multiple moves before he emancipated at age 18. Today he

is a child welfare trainer and consultant who speaks nationally to help empower resource parents, caseworkers and foster care youth and alumni to succeed. His story inspired many attending families to consider adopting teens.

Following Mr. Callahan's impactful presentation, the John A. Wilson Shining Star Award was presented to Liz and Todd Waits for the love and

commitment they demonstrated by including the birthmother in the process of adopting their son, as well as for honoring his heritage and the

connections he has in his life. A new award was also created this year in honor of the founder of Growing Families Through Adoption, Jon Douglas.

The inaugural Jon A. Douglas Philanthropy Award was given to Stetson Convention Services for the products and services they have been contributing since the matching event began.

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Statewide Straight Talk

From the Department of Human Services

By Carrie Keiser, Director, Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network



It's a new and exciting day in Pennsylvania as recent federal and state law requires that children in out-of-home care be afforded the opportunity to engage in age and developmentally appropriate extracurricular,

enrichment, cultural and social activities and experiences. Finally, caregivers no longer need to obtain permission from counties, private providers or courts for children in the foster care system to participate in everyday activities such as attending their prom, spending the night at a friend's house, going to summer camp, learning to drive or a multitude of other things that children who are not in foster care do every day.

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (Public Law 113-183) established requirements to ensure child welfare agencies identify, protect and prevent children and youth from becoming victims of sex trafficking, but the law also focuses on improving outcomes for children and youth, particularly older youth, in foster care. One of the important components of the law is the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS), which:

- Requires licensing standards to permit foster families and congregate care facilities to apply a RPPS when making decisions about whether to allow children/youth in foster care to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural and social activities and experiences; and
- Promotes opportunities for children/youth in foster care to participate in age or developmentally appropriate activities.

Pennsylvania Act 75 of 2015, the Activities and Experiences for Children in Out-of-Home Placements Act, which became effective

December 10, 2015, assures Pennsylvania's compliance with P.L. 113-183. Act 75 empowers the resource parent(s) for the child, or a designated staff person in the child's placement setting, to make decisions regarding the child's participation in essential, healthy life experiences and activities provided the decision is based on an RPPS. The law requires that caregivers receive training on how to use and apply the RPPS to decisions and ensures liability protection for caregivers, county children and youth agencies, and private provider agencies, when a child participates in an activity and the trained caregiver acts in accordance with the RPPS. The law also requires that caregivers receive notice of their responsibilities and rights under Act 75 and that children and youth also receive notice of their opportunities under Act 75.

Act 75 defines RPPS as "careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety and best interest of a child while encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child, that a caregiver must use when determining whether to allow a child in an out-of-home placement under the responsibility of the county agency to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural and social activities."

Caregivers who have received training have the authority to apply the RPPS and permit a child to participate in an extracurricular, enrichment, cultural or social activity without prior approval of a county agency, private agency or the court as long as the age or developmentally appropriate activity or experience does not conflict with any applicable court order or service plan.

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Practice Makes Perfect

By Brenda Lawrence, SWAN Program Administrator

A private provider interested in becoming a SWAN affiliate recently asked me, “Why should we want to do that work?” I thought, *Here is my chance to talk about SWAN’s work!* But how does one summarize the vast value of SWAN services and practice? I was glad to tell them that there are many reasons to be involved with SWAN, and here are some that I highlighted.

In Pennsylvania, the wonderful news is that the work trained and delivered through SWAN was initially developed by the network — with input from partners, counties and affiliates — and is supported by the SWAN prime contract staff in all regions of the state. Program and regional technical assistants, Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange (PAE) coordinators, and Legal Services Initiative staff are responsive to the network and provide countless resources such as quarterly and statewide meetings, in-person site visits, units of service meetings, regional meetings, training, brochures and so much more.

But why is practice of the SWAN units of service important to our kids and families?

First, remember that the objective of the SWAN program is to support and enhance timely permanency services for children in the custody of Pennsylvania county children and youth agencies and to provide Post-permanency support services to families. Complementary to this, the purpose of the SWAN prime contract is to increase permanency opportunities for foster children and to reduce the amount of time it takes to complete the permanency process.

Second, SWAN assures fidelity of service delivery and consistent quality of services for each completed referral. SWAN services represent a permanency continuum, offering support to children and youth and families throughout their permanency journey. The services build upon each other: For example, the Child Profile is a necessary document for adoption, providing prospective families a “picture” of who the child is and helping

children and older youth understand and complete their history — but it also serves as the foundation for Child Preparation and Child Specific Recruitment (CSR) services.

Child Preparation is a unique practice designed to give the child or youth a “voice” and allow them to talk about how moving and meeting new families felt, not just recalling the details around the experience. We often hear from children or youth served that they felt “valued” because someone took time to listen and help sort out their feelings. It also gives the child or youth a chance to have some say in the search efforts put forth to help them and their siblings look for a family who can meet their needs if they cannot return home.

The CSR unit of service, in conjunction with PAE registration and diligent search, is the next key to finding people — families and kin relationships — who can provide permanency to children and youth. Which brings us to the Family Profile; when it is completed, families receive 24 hours or more of permanency-focused training to better equip them to understand and support the child or youth to whom they provide permanency and connect them to Post-permanency services.

The practices of each service are constantly refined and revised in response to new legislation. This is important to county workers who must meet those requirements and expectations for the children on their caseload, such as having the option to refer a Family Profile to secure a review and approval of a kinship family resource.

All children and older youth in care have access to SWAN services, whether they have a goal of adoption or not. SWAN also provides Post-permanency services to all Pennsylvania families who have adopted — even outside of the child welfare system — as well as to families who have provided permanency to a child through formal kinship care or permanent legal custodianship.

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Help Us Help Families

By Karen Lollo, PAE Coordinator

It is vital that the information in the Resource Family Registry (RFR) be current in order for families to receive accurate match suggestions. Any time their information changes, their record must be updated. For example, family records often are not put on hold or closed when circumstances change, which results in the family continuing to come up in a search for matches and receiving mailings.

Since Act 160 of 2004 went into effect on January 29, 2005, amending the Child Protective Services Law and establishing the RFR, registering families with the RFR and keeping their information current is also a legal requirement.

The letter emailed to the caseworker acknowledging the CY 131 is often used as proof of family registration in the RFR. These letters are emailed as encrypted documents and remain available for only 30 days, so please be sure to print them for your records as soon as you receive them. Agencies can view their agency's RFR families in the SWAN Portal at www.diakon-swan-network.org on the Home page under Records. A routine check of that list will help you keep your agency's family records up to date.

In a recent round of customized match

searches done for waiting children, approximately 18 percent of the families that came up as possible matches had already accepted a placement; 15 percent were closed, and 12 percent were on hold. None of these changes were reflected in the RFR.

Another important reason to make sure families are registered and that their information is current is so that they can request detailed information about waiting children active on www.adoptpakids.org. Families must be registered as approved to adopt in order to get information on specific children from the SWAN Helpline.

If you have questions about updating family information, please contact Dawn Sariano, child and family data manager (DSariano@diakon-swan.org), or one of our family data analysts: Melissa Geesaman (MeGeesaman@diakon-swan.org), Kimberly Mills-Fisher (KMills-Fisher@diakon-swan.org) and Laura Crowell (LCrowell@diakon-swan.org). They are responsible for processing the CY 131 information.

Questions regarding the CY 131 process should be directed to your SWAN regional technical assistant (RTA). If you are not sure who that is, visit www.diakon-swan.org.



Recommendations for Older Youth

By Barbara Huggins, Youth Quality Improvement Specialist,
The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center

It is with much excitement that the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) presents their Developmentally Appropriate Freedoms and Normalcy Recommendations, addressing some of the needs for older youth in the substitute care system. The announcement is timely, in light of federal legislation passed in 2014: "The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act" P.L. 113-183 and Pennsylvania's Act 75 "The Activities and Experiences for Children in Out-of-Home Placement."

The YAB is made up of former and current youth in the substitute care system that share their stories to educate, advocate and form partnerships. Their mission is to create positive change in the system and child welfare communities.

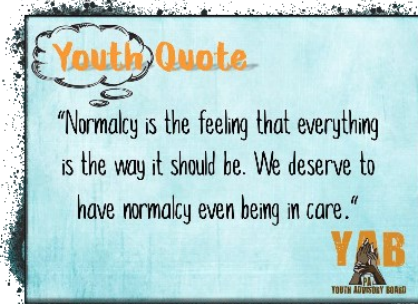
Developmentally appropriate freedoms are important to older youth in the child welfare system. They aid in the process of guiding a foster care youth toward a happy, healthy adult life. Here are some other reasons why participation in these activities benefits youth:

- It helps them feel normal.
- It builds their self-esteem and can help them cope with stress.
- It prepares them for adulthood by giving them access to safe experiences and decision making.
- It increases interactions with friends.
- It connects them to a more natural support system, which could lead to safe, permanent and nurturing connections that will last a life time.

Stated simply: Developmentally appropriate freedoms and normalcy help youth THRIVE and achieve success, despite the negative situations that define their past.

Here is a snapshot of some of the YAB's Developmentally Appropriate Freedoms and Normalcy Recommendations:

- Youth should have support in order to access social and school activities that promote healthy physical and emotional lifestyles.
- In addition to what is already required under the Children in Foster Care Act, youth should have access to know-your-rights trainings.
- Youth should have access to an objective mediator who can support them when there are disagreements with caregivers and staff.
- Implement the use of the Teen Success Agreement as a living document.
 - Youth's privacy should be protected, and humiliation should not be used as a method of punishment.
 - Preplacement visits are best practice and vital to the success of a youth's placement.
 - Resource parents and placement staff should be trained and supported in providing developmentally age appropriate freedoms to youth in their care. This is crucial to the success of youth transitioning to adulthood.
- Relationships with family members and siblings should remain intact.



The YAB is distributing these recommendations in order to be a part of the conversation and to be a part of youth achieving normalcy. The group looks forward to working and speaking with counties and organizations on this effort, and would love to work with organizations interested in learning more about developmentally appropriate freedoms.

Find the Developmentally Appropriate Freedoms and Normalcy Recommendations and the accompanying Teen Success Agreement at www.independentlivingpa.org under Current Events. Please feel free to contact Barbara Huggins at bmh75@pitt.edu for more information.

Adoption Month 2015!

Lawrence



Westmoreland



LSIPs: Juliann Botten; Samantha Stoops; Shannon Smith; Kimberly Rupp; Erin Veith; Ashleigh Wiel; and Shelly's infant son, Myles

Monroe County

Monroe County Children and Youth Services held their Adoption Day event on November 19, 2015 at the Pocono Inn Towne, Stroudsburg. More than 100 people attended the celebration, including state representatives, county commissioners, local judges and nine families who adopted a total of 13 children. It was a very exciting day, thanks to the community that came together to help with this event; the location, food and entertainment all were donated by local businesses.

— Michele Haydt, Program Manager II,
Permanency Services Unit,
Monroe County Children and Youth Services

Lawrence County

Lawrence County Children and Youth Services held a farm-themed Adoption Day celebration on November 14, 2015 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Community support included donations by

Dean's Dairy, Sheetz, local foundations, Eat'n Park, Pizza Joe's, Dairy Queen, court-appointed attorneys, and many others. Families enjoyed games, food, a photo booth and craft activities. A penny social offered families chances to win baskets donated by companies and individuals in the community. The children enjoyed a bounce house and the opportunity to meet up with other children and families. This is one of CYs' favorite activities, because the day honors the families that so selflessly make room in their hearts and homes to kids.

— Helen Polombi
SWAN LSI Paralegal, Lawrence County

Westmoreland County

Westmoreland County's National Adoption Day celebration was held at the Westmoreland County Courthouse on November 20, 2015. The event honoring the children and families adopted that day had a *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* theme. The Lawrence



Northumberland

County Legal Services Initiative paralegals (LSIPs) did all the decorations and even made the balloon arch seen in the photo above. There was a magician, food, candy and gift bags for the kids, and court personnel, agency CYs staff, and court-appointed special advocates attended.

— *Shelly Castillo, BSW,
SWAN LSI Coordinator*

Northumberland County

Adoption is a magnificent event that creates families and makes dreams come true in the hearts of people who have so much love to give. Adoption is genuine love.

In honor of National Adoption Awareness Month, Northumberland County Children and Youth Services held their 6th Annual Adoption Day on November 5, 2015, celebrating those families and adoptions finalized throughout the year. Twenty children were adopted into their forever families in 2015, with seven of

those adoptions occurring during the Adoption Day ceremony.

For the past six years, the event has been held in the Northumberland County Courthouse with fun games and activities such as face painting, balloon figures and crafts in the morning and insightful speakers offering words of wisdom to attendees. This year's speakers included Northumberland County solicitor Michael J. Robinson, Esq. and the Honorable Anthony J. Rosini. The morning was followed by a luncheon, and the Adoption Day event was capped off with the finalizing of adoptions — at which children banged the gavel to finalize and seal their adoptions. All families were also presented with gifts to celebrate their adoptions.

Since the first Adoption Day ceremony in 2010, Northumberland County has been honored to finalize and celebrate more than 100 adoptions.

— *Jamie M. Barrick,
SWAN LSI Coordinator—Region 10*

Adoption Month 2015!



Promoting Permanency on Facebook

By Constance A. Bach, Director of Adoption, Children's Home of Pittsburgh

The Children's Home of Pittsburgh & Lemieux Family Center celebrated National Adoption Month by sharing families' personal stories about their experiences with the Adoption Program at The Children's Home.

They invited birthparents, birth grandparents, adoptees, adoptive parents, foster parents, and families who receive SWAN services to submit stories which were posted on The Children's Home's Facebook page throughout November. The nine story posts received nearly 1,000 likes, comments, and shares and reached nearly 19,000 people.

The response to this campaign was very positive, from both those who submitted their stories and readers. These stories engaged individuals to learn about the services at The Children's Home, while increasing their knowledge and sensitivity toward families who experience infertility and adoption and children who are in the custody of children, youth and family service agencies. The families who wrote their stories were enthusiastic about sharing them, which seemed to be therapeutic.

If you would like more information or have any questions about the Adoption Program at

The Children's Home of Pittsburgh, please contact Connie Bach, Director of Adoption, at cbach@chomepgh.org or visit www.childrenshomepgh.org.

The Children's Home of Pittsburgh & Lemieux Family Center
Nov 18, 2015 at 10:09am • 🌐

"With the new year at hand, we are looking forward to working with others to create more stable families, safe communities with youth who attend and enjoy school, graduate, and grow up to realize their full God-given potential."- Joy and Dwayne Woodruff, Whirl Magazine, January 2013

My husband and I joined the official ranks of foster parents in D... [Continue Reading](#)

Ryan & Alisa's Story

THE CHILDREN'S Home
A LEMIEUX FAMILY CENTER

Adoption-Focused Training

By Jean M. Barney, LPC, Executive Director, Families Caring for Children

In celebration of Adoption Month in November 2015, Families Caring for Children Inc. sponsored two informative workshops at the Radisson Lackawanna Station in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The workshops, targeting pre-adoptive families, adoptive families, other resource families and adoption professionals in the area, focused on open discussion about adoptions and trauma as it relates to adoption.

In "We're Adopting: Discussing Adoptions Openly," participants learned about the importance of the adoption story as well as skills to help maintain family cohesion and open conversation about all adoption issues.

The workshop "Understanding the Connection between Adoption and Trauma" mainly focused on the core issues; in learning about them, the audience had an opportunity to explore the significance of brain connections, attachment and bonding.

Each workshop had many participants from the targeted groups. Adoption professionals showed special interest in both topics as they might apply to the families they serve. The mix of professionals and families in the sessions allowed sharing perspectives from both sides; thus, families and professionals were sensitized to the views and barriers that each face.

The workshops were presented by Leonette Boiarski, LCSW, ACSW, an adoptive parent as well as a seasoned adoption professional employed by Madison Adoption Associates. As she presented, Ms. Boiarski nicely adapted the content to meet the needs of participants. The evaluations revealed very positive responses, and many participants indicated an interest in future workshops by Ms. Boiarski. A member of the board of directors of Families Caring for Children attended to familiarize himself with the content and interface with families and professionals.



The 24th Annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference

June 15–17, 2016

Kalahari Resorts & Conventions

Pocono Manor, PA 18349

statewide adoption and permanency network

independent living services

Meet Dominick!

By Marian Kolcun, CSR Specialist, OCMI, Children's Service Center

Dominick, 18, is a handsome young man anxiously seeking a forever family. He describes himself as "adorable and lovable." He's comical and outgoing once he gets to know you. He's very social and has no fear approaching people and introducing himself. Two things important to him are talking and being nice to one another; he feels talking is a good way to express emotions, and being nice to each other helps people get along better. He says it works for him.

He enjoys *Pokémon*, and he's quite the expert! He also likes sports, especially football — both playing it and watching it. He's an Eagles fan. His true passion, though, is cooking and baking: He has special recipes of his own. He wants to make those things for his forever family.

Dominick participates in emotional support and life skills classes. He likes attending school, but he admits that he finds academic subjects challenging at times; however, he asks for help. He wants his forever family to

be able to assist him with his homework, and he plans on staying in school until he is 21.

Although he has not been in a family setting for years, he zealously desires a family of his own. His forever family would work with him on a daily basis, providing direction, guidance and support. He likes the idea of doing things with a family, as he's not had many opportunities to experience even the simplest things in life like going sledding, going to the movies and catching fireflies on a summer night. He would enjoy sharing his opinions on various topics and teaching his family some things about electronics. It would be best if he were the youngest or the only child in a family. He would do best in a home without animals.

Dominick, PAE ID#C3610218, is legally free for adoption. Can you be his forever family? For more information, please contact his recruiter, Marian Kolcun, at 570-351-9290 or kocunm@diakon.org.



A Fun, Active Family Looking to Grow

By Leah McConville, Matching Specialist, Adoption Connection PA



Casey Chandler, Tony Ranalli and Chance Castellano (#MeetTheKids star) have been together as a family for more than three years now. They live in a suburban neighborhood approximately ten miles west of Pittsburgh in the Montour School District. The area is very safe, with limited traffic flow in and out of the condominium development in which they live. Their home is not necessarily the quietest one in the neighborhood, but it certainly is the most fun.

Their interests include bowling, tennis, softball, dirt biking, motorcycles, quads, video games, camping, movies, music, traveling and cooking. On a whole, the family likes to try new things and is usually up for just about anything. They have two fish, two cats and one dog that are truly a part of the family. There has been some talk of moving into a house which would provide more room for an additional member of the family. The search has begun.

The child they are looking for is a male between the ages of twelve and sixteen who has interests outside of the home and the gaming console — but there's some flexibility in this preference for the right child. There are no limitations on race or religion. He must show respect to the home and the pets within the home. He must be willing to share in the tasks around the house and the care of the pets.

Mostly, the family is looking for a child that will give them a chance, be willing to integrate himself into their nontraditional home and be willing to accept the unconditional love they have to give.

Practice Makes Perfect (*cont'd from p.3*)

A major benefit of these services for children and families is that the practice is similar across the state: Children and older youth are given a voice, and families receive the support of staff who are trained in SWAN's practices.

While not all of the private providers of foster and adoption services in Pennsylvania are SWAN affiliates, many of the children in out-of-home care are placed in SWAN agencies who may be more attuned to the permanency practices SWAN delivers. SWAN affiliates are part of a whole — an organized, coordinated

public and private effort to provide permanency for children and to develop and locate families who can be permanency resources for children. It is a statewide movement that is often more effective than individual and isolated efforts. And by participating in SWAN practices, affiliates are able to work with kids and families throughout the continuum, from the time the child enters care and beyond achieving legal permanency — confident that they are giving the child the best possible chance for a happy home and future.

Colton's Forever Home

By Heather Myers, Foster Care and Adoption Caseworker,
The Institute for Human Resources and Services, Inc.



Craig Berry, Colton Berry, Christine Feorino and Judge Tina Gartley

It was a long road. Sometimes it seemed like we were never going to get there. I knew if I felt that way, Colton was feeling it worse — and he was. Now that it's behind us, Colton's only criticism is how incredibly slow the legal system works; however, we finally made it!

When I received the initial referral for Colton's Child Specific Recruitment in January 2013, it looked like a daunting task. Finding a family willing to accept an older youth with such a difficult past was one thing, but the additional requirement to search a good distance away due to the publicity of his case made it even more challenging. I needed to wholeheartedly embrace the out-of-state process and look outside of our local area.

After my first conversation with Christine and Craig in the summer of 2013, I was immediately excited. Sometimes the pieces just fit. Everything about their backgrounds, personalities, likes, and dislikes supported exactly what Colton needed. I presented their information to the county, and we discussed the family with Colton as well. Due to the distance, we had our first meeting by

Skype in November 2013. It went so well, all parties agreed that the family could visit Colton over the Thanksgiving holiday. Success! They hit it off.

And so began the excruciatingly long process of navigating the waters of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children and working toward this move. Thankfully, the two adoption workers I dealt with in this state were excellent, and we quickly established a good working relationship. Colton continued day visits with the family on weekends while we continued working behind the scenes. We transitioned to day visits, and eventually weekend visits, in their home. Colton continued to do extremely well. So much so, that after the school year ended in June 2014, we moved him to his pre-adoptive home.

Colton began to *thrive*! He began to *live*! In this home, he experienced things he never had before. This family supports him in any way they can. He has traveled to several different states. Colton is interested in music, so they gave him an instrument, he takes

voice and conducting lessons, and he joined the band and choir. The family takes him to see plays and musicals.

They have enabled him to come out of his shell, to grow, to become the person he is today. Colton gets straight As in every subject since moving to his forever home. He has gone on numerous college tours with his family. He was encouraged to enter an art contest in Pennsylvania for teens and young adults ages 16–24 who are or have been in foster care, kinship care or adopted. Colton wrote a poem about his life in foster care which won first place and a cash award of \$500.

So finally, all the legal pieces fell into place, and Colton’s adoption was finalized on February 5, 2016 — just two weeks shy of his 18th birthday. Colton arrived at court

impeccably dressed in a black tuxedo with tails, and moved the entire courtroom to tears when he called out each of his workers and thanked them individually for their part in his healing and finding his forever home. He spoke eloquently and showed a resilience and wisdom that is far beyond his years.

I am humbled to have been a part of this young man’s life. By far, this was one of the more emotional and happiest adoptions I have had the honor of testifying at in my 16 years working for the Institute for Human Resources and Services. Colton has contacted me twice since his adoption, once by sending me a card and again by text message. I have encouraged him to stay in contact with me. I have no doubt his future is bright and he will do amazing things. He already has.

Growing Families (cont’d from p.1)

Jon presented the award to Bill Sandherr, president of Stetson, who was honored and ready to help Project STAR with this event for many more years as it grows and promotes permanency.

Jon said, “It’s an honor to see this event in its tenth year, and I’m thankful for people like Mr. Sandherr who help promote permanency. It’s an amazing honor to work with youth, families and everyone under the SWAN network. I am just as passionate today that every child deserves a family.”



Front: Liz Waits, Bethany Leas (Project STAR), Patricia Sanders-Madison (Project STAR), Jon Douglas; Back: Todd Waits, Russ McCurdy, Jamole Callahan, Bill Sandherr (Stetson Convention Services)

Statewide Straight Talk (cont'd from p.2)

When applying the RPPS to a decision about the child's participation, the caregiver must consider all of the following:

- The child's age, maturity and developmental level to maintain the overall health and safety of the child.
- The potential risk factors to the child or to others and the appropriateness of the extracurricular, enrichment, cultural or social activity or experience.
- The best interest of the child, based on information known by the caregiver.
- The importance of encouraging the child's emotional and developmental growth.
- The importance of supporting the child in developing skills to successfully transition to adulthood.
- The importance of providing the child with the most family-like living experience possible.
- Any special needs or accommodations that the child may need to safely participate in the activity or experience.
- The child's wishes, though not determinative, may also be considered.

OCYF is in the process of amending regulations and licensing checklists used by the Office of Children, Youth and Families Regional Offices and revising multiple bulletins, including:

- Concurrent Planning Policy and Implementation;
- Youth Independent Living Services Guidelines;
- The Resource Family and Adoption Process Act;
- The Resource Family Care Act;
- Children in Foster Care Act (Act 119 of 2010); and,
- The Permanent Legal Custodian Policy.

OCYF will issue an RPPS Bulletin that will

provide an overview of the requirements established by Act 75 of 2015. The RPPS Bulletin will provide guidance on who can make RPPS decisions and on what topics; however, while OCYF is aware of specific questions regarding haircuts, sleepovers, hunting, social media, sports, out-of-state travel, employment and so on, it is important to understand that many of these questions may not be addressed in the RPPS Bulletin. The law is clear on who can apply the RPPS, the types of activities and experiences the RPPS can be applied to, and what to think about when applying the RPPS.

OCYF's Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act workgroup is working on critical thinking guidelines and fact sheets to assist caregivers and agencies in this process. Once this information is submitted to OCYF, it will be included in the RPPS Bulletin. In the meantime, agencies need to encourage caregivers to use critical thinking skills for decision making.

Questions to consider:

- How well do I know this child/teen?
- Who will be attending the activity?
- Does the child know who to call in case of emergency?
- Would the activity violate a court order or service plan?
- Would I allow my own child to participate in this activity?
- Is the activity age or developmentally appropriate?

RPPS is a huge shift in decision making authority. Change is not always easy, but I'm willing to bet that no one working in the child welfare system would dispute the true intent of this law, which is to ensure that all children and youth in out-of-home care have as many positive everyday life experiences as possible — just like kids who do not live in the foster care system. These opportunities can only help to increase the success of the children we serve and our system as a whole.

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

lsiwarmline@diakon-swan.org

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

www.dhs.pa.gov

Network News

Karen Lollo at klollo@diakon-swan.org

SWAN listserv through Google Groups

Joe Warrick at jwarrick@pa.gov

SWAN on Facebook

www.facebook.com/AdoptPA

SWAN on YouTube

www.youtube.com/AdoptPAKids