A few years ago I read an article on resiliency in children. The study used the term “ordinary magic” to describe the resiliency present in children who have experienced significant trauma. I thought the word “magic” was an odd, fanciful choice, especially in a discussion with such a serious subject. Wouldn’t they have been better served to use a more scientific (or at least more grounded in reality) term?

The truth, however, is that no scientific explanation can adequately describe the alchemy that occurs in the act of resiliency. Against all odds children rebound; they bounce back; they continue to function. Even in cases where they’ve experienced tremendous abuse and neglect, children find ways to go on and even thrive.

Also, think about the term “ordinary.” Doesn’t magic mean “extra-ordinary?” The word “magic” conjures thoughts of mystery, transformation and the unexpected. Thus, “ordinary magic” is the mysterious and unexplainable happening daily, routinely even. Things that shouldn’t be possible, shouldn’t happen, do! There is “magic” all around us, miracles and extraordinary events we take for granted but can’t be fully explained. While we can find partial explanations and identify specific actions that increase the chances for a child to overcome, we don’t fully understand how resiliency works. Yet it happens every day, especially with those children we serve in the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, SWAN, because the “magic” is a result of the care and love given by professionals, and in time, the parents and families.

The 2013 SWAN/Independent Living, IL, Summer Conference, “Be the Change,” was a celebration of this “ordinary magic” and recognized the resiliency we all help facilitate in the children we serve. This annual event defies a number of odds. Over 650 people attended in the middle of summer, the height of vacation season. They came to celebrate their work, to learn, to experience and to reinvigorate each other and their commitment to the children. At a time of year with so many other distractions, the conference demonstrated yet again what a dedicated group the SWAN network truly is.

This year’s conference, which occurred July 10 -12, 2013, had close to a record number of attendees, all coming together to experience and share. Families traveled great distances to be with other families. They came to learn new techniques and acquire new skills to improve the lives of the children to whom they have dedicated their hearts.

(continued on page 8)
Permanency Conference Award Winners
Permanency Conference Award Winners

Congratulations to all our award winners from the 21st Annual Permanency Conference. You truly are working to “Be the Change.”
**SWAN Advisory Committee Outstanding Service to Adoption**
This award highlights an individual, organization, agency or corporation that has worked hard to promote a positive perception of adoption through educational efforts and who is easily recognized as an outspoken adoption advocate.

**Robert Gioffre**

**Permanent Family Recognition**
Families selected for this award have provided legalized permanency for a child or children in the child welfare system through adoption, formal kinship care or permanent legal custodianship.

**Wayne Hopkins and Steve Renninger**, Berks County  
**Deborah Holmes**, Philadelphia County  
**Mark and Susan Telesha**, Lehigh County  
**Marilyn Thomas**, Washington County  
**Cathy L. Riggie**, Jefferson County

**Philanthropy Recognition**
The individual, business, congregation or organization selected for this award demonstrates a charitable contribution that promotes the permanency of children in foster care.

**Phil Delta Theta fraternity**, Gettysburg College  
**Ara Barlieb**, Barlieb Wallace Productions

**Permanency Teamwork Recognition**
Teams selected for this award exemplify a collaborative effort that promotes the permanency of children with special needs.

**Concern**, Stephany Gallagher, permanency specialist  
**Northampton County Children and Youth**, MaryAnn Irwin and Jennifer Delong, adolescent caseworkers  
**Montgomery County Children and Youth**, Stephen Polonsky, adoption caseworker  
**Currie and Patricia Markham**, adoptive parents

**County Collaborative Recognition**
This award recognizes a collaborative effort between a county court and a county children and youth agency that expedites permanency through adoption, formal kinship care or permanent legal custodianship.

**Crawford County Children and Youth Services**, and **Crawford County Court of Common Pleas**

**Permanency Advocate Recognition**
This category recognizes a dynamic individual or organization that does not fit the criteria of the other categories and may include parents, judges, attorneys or other individuals who, through their professional or volunteer efforts, had an impact on system change, judicial improvement, service delivery or family support either locally or throughout the state of Pennsylvania.

**President Judge Jolene Grubb Kopriva**, Court of Common Pleas of Blair County

**Independent Living Professional Recognition**
The individual working in the public or private child welfare agency selected for this award has demonstrated they have helped a youth transition to a successful, contributing member of society.

**Pamela J. Meterko**, Independent Living coordinator, Pentz Run Youth Services

**Permanency Professional Recognition**
Individuals selected to receive this award are permanency professionals working in a public or private child welfare agency, who have actively demonstrated their support and commitment to finding permanency for children in the child welfare system, through adoption, formal kinship care or permanent legal custodianship.

**Matthew Steiner**, permanency coordinator, Wesley Spectrum Services
Fun at the Conference
More Conference Fun
Youth Advisory Board Leadership Summit
By Barbara Huggins, Youth Quality Improvement Specialist
The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center

The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board 2013 Youth Leadership Summit held in June was a success. The most important goal of gathering youth from across the state was to build connections and community between YAB members. Unfortunately, while a child or youth is in care, there are not many opportunities to connect with those who are in similar situations. The feelings that “no one else” could possibly share in their feelings of “being out of place,” or “no one wants me,” belongs to them and them alone. Who could possibly understand what it is like to be separated from their family and undergo the tough transition to adulthood alone? The fortunate thing is that there are many youth and alumni of the system who understand those questions exactly! YAB is happy to provide opportunities to build friendships. There were also many opportunities to learn about PA YAB and to pick up a few new leadership skills.

During the summit, youth listened to an expert panel of YAB leaders and their regional coordinators. The panel answered questions on how they organized their meetings, recruitment of new members and how to accomplish their goals. Since the implementation of Act 91 of Fostering Connections, it has been YAB’s goal to inform and get youth involved with supporting the efforts. During the summit youth were presented an opportunity to practice what they had heard about! They broke up into groups and created skits on what different pieces of the law meant for older youth in care. These youth are the experts!

In the afternoon they heard from motivational speaker Jaiya John, who was a former youth in care who uses spoken word poetry to help youth heal. Jaiya then led what was many participants’ favorite portion of the summit, a sacred circle; a youth-only, safe, sharing space where youth shared their stories and supported one another. During the sacred circle the energy changed, and youth came exploding out of the session. There was laughter, tears, prayer and finally, cohesive community! After a brief YAB resource discussion and dinner, youth headed back to the hotel where they continued their friendships in the pool or in the fitness room.

The second day of the summit was about teaching youth about the Quality Service Review (QSR). Participants learned about the tool and then watched interviews take place in front of them. Then they rated the case based on what they saw and heard. This summit was a memorable one in that many youth who had never been to a YAB event before left feeling motivated and inspired.

The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board is made up of former and current foster youth, ages 16-21, who advocate, educate and form partnerships to create positive change in the substitute care system. If you would like to know more about the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board, you can check us out at www.independentlivingpa.org or like us on Facebook. You can also contact Barbara Huggins at bmh75@pitt.edu.
The 2013 Independent Living Youth Retreat was a success! From all the planning by the youth on the retreat steering committee to the collaboration with the adults, the week was a hit!

The youth really came together to plan the curriculum and really worked hard in their roles as leaders at the retreat to make it a positive and fun experience. The theme of the 2013 Youth Retreat was “United Not Divided,” a phrase that each can interpret as they wish. This year 98 youth came from all across Pennsylvania, working with the help and facilitation from 102 supporting county staff and agency workers.

When the week came to a close on Friday, you could tell that many attendees had found their own meaning of what “United Not Divided” meant to them. From the scavenger hunt on the first day that aimed to have the youth interact with one another, to the Minute-to-Win-It morning warm up game, the youth began to build friendships and bonds that carried out through the week. They also had group activities and classroom sessions in different activities such as fun furniture, outdoor experience, music expression and so many other things.

Throughout the week, the youth were able to interact, be leaders and just have fun! There was a dance, pool party, talent show and a banquet! This year’s keynote speaker was Travis Lloyd.

The closing keynote speaker, Richard Santana, took us on a journey from “Homeboy to Harvard” and transformed on the stage to demonstrate the impact one person can have in a child’s life. He took time to thank all the people who had been influential in his life and had made him the resilient man he is today. The conference ended with the children. The children and youth who attended the teen and daycare program throughout the week got to share some of their music and thoughts with the audience. Phyllis Stevens, the teen director, celebrated her 20th year with the program. We also welcomed Amy Salvatore as our new child care director.

This 2013 SWAN/IL Summer Conference was a wonderful tribute to all those professionals and families who “are the change” in the life of a child and help to facilitate “ordinary magic” in every day.
More from the IL Youth Retreat

(continued from page 8)

Throughout Travis’s message, he spoke about the youth taking charge of their lives, asking for help, stepping up to pursue their dreams and bettering their futures, despite the environments that they come from. Travis’s favorite quote that he repeated many times to the youth throughout his presentation was, “I’ma get it anyway. Anyway I’ma get it!” He was engaging, fun, interactive and really seemed to enjoy his time hanging out with the youth. When the week came to a close many were sad to walk away from the new friends they had made, but many were also glad to sleep in their own beds. So many memories were created, friendships made and the meaning of “United Not Divided” poured out through the smiles of all the youth.

What a great retreat we had this year, but the fun doesn’t stop. Planning has already begun for Youth Retreat 2014!
As you know, life is transition. Whether you’re 15 or 55, life is constantly evolving and throwing new obstacles in your path. No one knows this better than system youth, especially Youth Advisory Board (YAB) youth. We try our best to adapt and adjust, and we use whatever tools that we have available. In YAB, we use our tools of experience, partnering with professionals and much more to assist ourselves and our peers with the transitions of life.

This is why I love YAB Statewide gettogethers. Whether it’s the summit, the retreat or even a quarterly statewide meeting, this is where the most fun and most amazing things happen. Every person’s story and situation is different.

Some youth, like myself, may have had to grow up quickly and never fully enjoy the treasures of childhood. Some youth may have been abused, neglected or even forgotten about by the system until they found YAB. But at the end of the day, especially at big statewide functions, none of that matters. When we get together we get work done, but we also have fun, we network and socialize, but most importantly we pay it forward.

When we get together we are NOT our problems or our past. We are one. We are a group of youth and young adults whose sole intention is to better the lives of our peers and even of those whom we may never meet but know that their time in care will be better than ours was. We give a voice to those who need it, and we make sure that their needs are met. Because after all, It’s not about us without us.

From left to right, Megan, Victoria, Cortez
Pennsylvania resources

Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange—www.adoptpakids.org

Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network
www.diakon-swan.org

Independent Living—www.independentlivingPA.org

SWAN Helpline—800-585-SWAN

Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association—
www.psrfa.org

Legal Warmline—888-793-2512 or Isiwarmline@diakon-swan.org

Office of Children, Youth and Families
Pennsylvania Department of 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—Join the conversation

2014 Save the Date


Summer Statewide Meeting – July 8-9, 2014