

September 2004

Independent Living Youth Retreat

Lock Haven University was the site of this year's Pennsylvania IL Youth Retreat, which was held from July 26th -30th. Nearly 250 youth and staff participated in "Lost in Lock Haven: Find Yourself." The title was a play on words as youth were challenged to take control of their lives and learn how to advocate for themselves. Using a curriculum developed by **Leigh Singer** at the Youth Advocacy Center in New York City especially for the Retreat, classroom sessions focused on making connections and preparing to make a successful transition to adulthood.

Activity classes also encouraged youth to think about the future while taking advantage of the recreational opportunities of the campus and the surrounding area, some participants had the opportunity to use kayaks and canoes in the nearby river while other engaged in art, music, stained glass and dance. Breakout sessions and Thursday's featured speaker, **David Pelzer**, lecturer and well-known author of "A Child Called It," "The Lost Boy" and "A Man Named Dave," also encouraged youth not to become lost or to give in, but to work to find their way to success in life.

SWAN Summer Statewide Meeting and Conference

On June 29th, the Statewide Adoption Network (SWAN) held their Summer Statewide Meeting, "Transitions to Permanency," at the Lancaster Host Resort and Conference Center, Lancaster. Attendees received information from a group of experts who focused on how we can better prepare our children for healthy, lifelong permanent connections. The majority of the meeting gave special focus to adolescents.

Dr. Dorothy Ansell, Assistant Director with the University National Resource Center for Youth Services, and a long time advocate of adolescents in out of home care, provided the morning message. Dr. Ansell spoke about the importance of finding lifelong connections for youth who typically age out of the system and the challenges associated with finding these connections. Dr. Ansell explained what permanency means from a youth's perspective and she provided strategies to help us address the challenges related to helping youth achieve permanency.

The theme continued as Pennsylvania's 13th Annual Permanency Conference, "*Expanding the Vision*", June 30 – July 2. This year's conference focused on ways in which we can better provide children in the Pennsylvania foster care system with timely permanency. A variety of workshops that concentrated on new ways to plan for permanency, including workshops on resource families, legal issues, post-permanency services, education, serving older youth, recruitment and other areas of the foster care and permanency arena were offered. More than 650 resource family members and permanency professionals, as well as 150 children and teens, attended the three-day event.

Naomi Haines Griffith, Red Clay and Vinegar Associates from Nashville, Tennessee, provided the opening keynote address. Naomi, who is a well-known national speaker on child welfare issues, encouraged us to find permanent connections for our children. Along with some humor, Naomi shared her life stories of what it was like growing up in the south, and inspired attendees to make permanent connections for our children before they leave our system without any resources.



Transition Conference: Reaching Our Outcomes Together

Nearly 1,000 agency and department staff from Independent Living, Health, Public Welfare, Education, Special Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN,) Labor and Industry, Mental Health, Mental Retardation, Juvenile Justice, parents and youth attended the 2004 Pennsylvania Communities of Practice Transition Conference from July 14-16 in State College. Sessions were held at the Penn State, Nittany Lion Inn and on Penn State's campus.

Sessions were designed to help professionals, parents, youth and young adults better understand the services and programs available to them. A special highlight was a partner series, which allowed staff new to the concept of cross-system services and collaboration receive information and ideas about community-based services and potential resources to help them better serve the transition needs of youth and young adults.

Dr. Etienne Wenger, noted Swiss social theorist and researcher into the Communities of Practice concept, was the keynote speaker throughout the conference. His work focuses on social learning systems and in trying to understand the connection between knowledge, community, learning, and identity. His basic premise is that human knowing is fundamentally a social act, which has profound implications for the way we think of and attempt to support learning. During his talks with participants he challenged everyone to design more effective knowledge-oriented organizations, to create learning systems across organizations, to improve education and lifelong learning, to rethink the role of professional associations and design a world in which people can reach their full potential.

For the first time, the Conference also included a Youth and Young Adult Leadership Forum. 50 youth and young adults with disabilities, including IL youth from Luzerne, Montgomery and York counties participated in a separate program of activities and events. Forum participants attended sessions designed to help them identify their leadership skills, prepare for college or career and discover resources that they can use in their transition. Forum planning team and staff members include **Sarah Sherwood** and **Todd Lloyd** from York County CYS, **Angelo Santore**, IL State Grant Coordinator and **Steve Eidson** from the University of Pittsburgh.



CONGRATULATIONS SANDY GALLAGHER!



Sandy Gallagher has devoted all of her 29-year career to public service in county and state government. For the past nine years, Ms. Gallagher has served as the Director of the Statewide Adoption Network Program in the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) where she has been since 1986.

In September 1999, Ms. Gallagher represented DPW at the White House celebration hosted by President and Mrs. Clinton for the Adoption 2002 Incentive Program. In July of 2000, Ms. Gallagher received the Adoption Activist Award from the North American Council on Adoptable Children at their conference in Baltimore, Maryland. In November 2003, Ms. Gallagher attended the ceremony in Washington, DC where Pennsylvania received two Adoption Excellence Awards from the US Department of Health and Human Services for increased adoptions and public awareness.

Ms. Gallagher's career began in 1975 as a caseworker for Dauphin County Children and Youth Agency. She also worked five years in the Dauphin County Assistance Office and spent two years in Medicaid Provider Recovery for the Office of Fraud, Abuse Investigation and Recovery.

Sandy has been promoted to Acting Director, Program Development Section. When you see her, please join us in offering congratulations!

Health Services for Youth

Childhood Obesity Epidemic

A report issued by Duke University in March announced that childhood obesity has reached epidemic proportions. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 15.6% of American children between 12 and 19 were obese in 2002, a dramatic increase from 6.1% in 1974. CWLA's National Data Analysis System (NDAS), a comprehensive collection of child welfare data, has created an issue brief on the subject of childhood obesity summarizing the major points. To get a brief statistical overview, more details on the related health risks, and recommended guidelines for nutrition and physical activities, visit <http://ndas.cwla.org>

Getting Serious About Teen Relationship Abuse

With an estimated one in five female high school students reporting physical or sexual abuse by a partner, the need to offer teens the tools to stay safe and build healthy relationships is urgent. For promising approaches to a devastating problem: <http://www.connectforkids.org/resources>.

No Time to Waste: Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy examines after-school programs for youth that have a positive impact on adolescent sexual behavior. <http://www.teenpregnancy.org>

Pediatricians Update Policy on School-Based Mental Health Services

With rising rates of diagnosed mental illness among children, the American Academy of Pediatrics says that mental health programs should be an integral part of a school's environment, and should work closely with a child's primary care physician.

<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/pediatrics;113/6/1>

Working with Youth in Transition

Arresting Gang Violence by Investing in Kids

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids reports that gangs have spread into suburbs and rural areas, and that gang homicides across the country increased 50 percent from 1999 to 2002. Programs in cities like Boston and Philadelphia show that combining close supervision and swift consequences for violence with community services that help young people fight addiction, stay in school or find a job can cut gang crime dramatically. <http://www.fightcrime.org>

Alternative Pathways for Finishing High School

In a recent newsletter, the Alliance for Excellent Education highlighted some programs that are working to help youth at risk make a safe and successful journey to adulthood. The nonprofit Jobs for America's Graduates collaborates with states to offer work-based learning experiences that keep kids on track for career advancement or higher education. Begun as a program for high school seniors, the model is being used as a dropout-recovery program for students in grades 9 through 12. <http://www.jag.org>

SAT Fee Waiver Requests

The Independent Living Project provides fee waivers for the SAT for juniors and seniors as well as fee waiver request for college admission applications. Forms are now available from Ann Molsky at the IL Project. Contact her at akm9@pitt.edu or 717.795.9048, ext. 231.

People in the News

Lorrie Deck, long-time friend of and advocate for Independent Living programs, has been promoted to Acting Director of the SWAN program at the Department of Public Welfare's Office of Children, Youth and Families. **Congratulations, Lorrie!**

Jerry Sopko, director for the Center for Excellence, has resigned his position, but will remain at the CBT. If you have questions about the Center, please direct them to Kathy Jones-Kelley. **Please wish Jerry well in his new career direction!**

Colleen Gormley, the Independent Living coordinator for Beaver County Children and Youth, has been promoted to a supervisory position and will no longer work directly with Independent Living. **Congratulations, Colleen, but we'll miss you!**

Toni Whiteleather, is the new Independent Living coordinator for Beaver County Children and Youth. **Welcome, Toni!**

Professional Development Opportunities

2004 Fall Regional Independent Living Meetings - Invitations were sent by regular and e-mail. If you didn't receive your information, please contact Ann Molsky.

- *Friday, 1 October*, 4 Points Sheraton Pittsburgh North, 910 Sheraton Drive, Mars, PA 16046
- *Friday, 8 October*, Best Western/Genetti Lodge, Rt. 309 North RR 2 Box 37 Hazelton, PA 18201
- *Friday, 15 October*, Penn Stater Conference Center, 215 Innovation Blvd., State College, PA 16803
- *Friday, 22 October*, Valley Forge Scanticon Hotel and Conference Center, 1210 First Avenue, King of Prussia, PA 19406

17th Annual National Independent Living Conference, "Growing Pains."
29 September - 2 October 2004, San Antonio, Texas. For more information:
www.danielmemorial.org.

2004 National Youth Development Conference, "Unleashing the Power of Youth and Community Potential." 10-12 October 2004, Holiday Inn Allentown. Contact Lee Rush at lrush@enter.net or click on www.justcommunity.com.

IL Update On-Line

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