

## More Than Sipping Smoothies

### The Challenging Work of a COBYS Permanency Caseworker

COBYS Permanency Unit Caseworker Sonya Lantz spends an hour on a lazy summer day on an Ephrata park bench, conversing politely with a middle-aged mom named Alice.

Her colleague Wendy Moore gets paid for sipping a Hawaiian Breeze at Tropical Smoothie on a warm afternoon in Lancaster, while mother Nicole enjoys a weekly visit with her children.

Becky Frey spends a pleasant Friday afternoon chatting with foster parents Dave and Mary Hess on their Manheim-area farm, while their six-month-old foster son sits on the floor and contentedly squeals and squirms.

Sipping smoothies, hanging out in a park, making googly eyes at a baby. . . I think to myself, "I could do this job." But as you might expect, a caseworker's job isn't always a day in the park. I shadowed three COBYS Permanency caseworkers to learn more about what they do to protect children and, when possible, help families get back together.

Based in an office at 134 E. King Street in Lancaster, the COBYS Permanency Unit serves children and families referred by the Lancaster County Children and Youth Social Service Agency. The program employs a supervisor, five caseworkers, a case aide, and a secretary, who currently are overseeing the needs of 45 foster children and their families. The children are being cared for in 27 foster homes and nine residential treatment facilities.



*COBYS Permanency Unit Caseworker Wendy Moore enjoys a smoothie with Nicole and her kids Alexis and Jeremy during a weekly family visit. The work of a caseworker involves a lot more than cool drinks on a summer day.*

Permanency Supervisor Nicole Lauzus explains that the primary role of the caseworker is "to address the issues with biological parents that led to their children going into custody" so families can be reunited. Those issues might include incarceration, drug and alcohol abuse, family violence, physical or sexual abuse, inadequate housing or income, lack of parenting skills, mental illness, and more.

In the case of Wendy's client, Nicole, her plan includes finding housing, receiving parenting training, and staying crime free. She is progressing on all counts, having already found income and housing and nearly completed COBYS intensive Family Nurturing parenting program. And she is steering clear of trouble with the law since her release from prison.

Nicole says she appreciates

Wendy's encouragement and support. "She helps me work on my plan, and she really gives me encouragement," says Nicole. "She's been very supportive."

Wendy observes, "Since I've got the case, she's done amazing." Weekly monitored visits at the COBYS office have been increased from one hour to two, and soon may be expanded to four hours at the location of Nicole's choice. "She's always early for visits," says Wendy, "and always prepared with a bag of stuff to do." Barring any setbacks, Nicole may have her children back by the end of the year.

At the park in Ephrata, Sonya is conducting her monthly visit with Alice to see how she is progressing on her goals. She asks Alice to review the medications she is on

*(continued on page three)*

## Mission Statement

*Motivated by Christian faith, COBYS Family Services educates, supports, and empowers children and adults to reach their full potential.*

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## Now What Do You Say?

When our kids were little and received a gift, my wife, Mari, or I would look at them and prompt them with, "Now what do you say?" Of course, we expected them to say, "Thank you." They learned to say it, and sometimes they actually meant it.

Now that our kids are older, I find myself telling them about newspaper articles that I read or other situations that I am aware of, where people are experiencing difficult situations or losses. My goal is to remind them that we always have much to be thankful for, even in times of disappointment or discouragement.



As I write this, I am feeling particularly thankful. And interestingly enough, my thankfulness stems from some difficult and unfortunate situations here at COBYS. Nothing has happened that is remarkably bad but, as you might imagine, things don't always go perfectly or as planned when working with children victimized by abuse, and their families.

As a result of these recent occurrences, I just spent part of this morning writing thank you notes to a few staff members who were directly involved in resolving these situations. I told them how much I appreciated the grace and skill that they demonstrated in the midst of trying circumstances. (Lest you think that writing such notes is a normal occurrence for me, I will confess that it is not. I recognize that I need to get better at sharing words of appreciation with the many people I value.)

Even after being employed at COBYS for 15 years now, I can say without hesitation that the difficult work that our staff does continues to impress me. Their care and dedication is making a difference in the lives of the kids and families that we serve. I am thankful for their work.

I think about how the Christians at Corinth might have felt after reading these words from Paul's first letter: "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:4 NIV). Or how about the church in Philippi, when Paul wrote to them: "I thank my God every time I remember you" (Philip. 1:3 NIV)? I have to believe that they were encouraged by Paul's words of appreciation.

So, I wonder, who are you thankful for today? Have you told them? Or like my kids in years gone by—and sometimes like me today—do you need someone to prompt you with a, "Now what do you say?"

I am confident that saying thanks will bless you, and those hearing your thanks will most certainly be blessed and encouraged.

Oh, and thank you for taking the time to read this article. I appreciate it!

*Mark Cunningham, Executive Director*

*(continued from page one)*

and how things are going with her therapist. Alice's nearly 18-year-old son is in a specialized placement some distance away.

Because of his serious offenses, the son, Sonya believes, needs more time and is gratified to hear that Alice and her son seem open to having him continue in care beyond age 18 so he can get the help he needs.

"I am glad you are supporting and encouraging him in that, Alice," Sonya says. "Keep encouraging [your son]."

Sonya gently inquires whether Alice has been forthright about her son's offenses with the relative who



*Caseworker Sonya Lantz checks in with Alice at an Ephrata park.*

may eventually provide housing for him. She hasn't.

"She needs to understand what [your son] is going through and what kind of treatment he is in," Sonya urges.

Alice reports that her visits and phone calls with her son are going well. ("He talks my ear off!") She and Sonya review a few details for an upcoming court appointment, which will be followed by a birthday visit. Sonya offers more encouraging words and is on her way.

It's clear that both Wendy and Sonya have a positive relationship with these clients. Generally, says Nicole Lauzus, "Clients view us in a positive light." Any animosity tends to be directed toward the county, which made the decision to remove children from the home. Most clients understand that COBYS caseworkers are there to help them regain custody of their children.

Of course, relationships can sour quickly when a biological parent is failing to make progress or when the goal is not to return their children to them. At times, caseworkers need to take precautions in potentially dangerous situations.

Becky's monthly visit with six-month-old Deshaun (not his real name) at his foster home, however, is anything but dangerous. While Deshaun chews on his fingers, Becky gets a positive report on a recent doctor appointment from the foster parents. The healthy looking baby is in the 90th percentile for both height and

weight. He sits up, squirms, sucks on his toe, and is on the verge of crawling. "Everything seems fine and on target," Mary Hess reports.

If Deshaun were older, Becky would also meet with him privately to address any concerns he might have, but at this stage he isn't talking.

Not all cases are as simple as one mom and one healthy baby placed with one foster family. Sonya recounts one case that consisted of two parents and their four children—each with special needs requiring therapy—placed with three different foster families. Sonya needed to be in touch with each party and various service providers assisting the family and carefully document everything. The parents sometimes called her twice a day with issues or concerns. Each call necessitated another log note in the burgeoning family files.

"If I had 12 of those cases," she says with a laugh, "I don't think I would be able to stay sane."

While COBYS Permanency caseworkers generally do stay sane, the job is demanding. Hours are long, with frequent evening visits and significant travel, especially when children are placed in distant residential facilities.

Documentation is tedious. Sometimes caseworkers need to support county recommendations for a family when they feel another outcome might be more beneficial. Other times they need to tell clients things they don't want to hear.

"It's hard to balance everything," explains Nicole Lauzus. The best caseworkers, she says, are able to balance their work and personal life, juggle the many tasks related to their jobs, and remain positive, empathetic, and flexible, none of which is easy.

But spending an hour in the park, sipping on a smoothie, and face time with a bouncing baby boy aren't bad ways to maintain balance in a challenging job.

## **What a Permanency Caseworker Does**

1. Identifies resources and refers clients to providers to receive help to achieve the goals on their Child Permanency Plan.
2. Meets at least monthly with biological parents, foster children, and foster parents to monitor progress of parents and ensure well-being of children.
3. Supervises or monitors regular visits between biological parents and their children.
4. Offers support and encouragement between visits. Responds to crises.
5. Prepares reports and testifies for court hearings for each case every five months. Cases are to be resolved or moving toward adoption within 15 months.
6. Attends periodic Permanency Review Committee meetings with county officials to review cases and recommend changes in goals when necessary.
7. Monitors client progress and keeps detailed log notes of every contact and all aspects of the case. After 15 months, one family's file may fill an entire file drawer.

# The Year in Ministry

Motivated by Christian faith, COBYS Family Services educates, supports, and empowers children and adults to reach their full potential. We carry out this mission through adoption and foster care services, counseling, family life education, and a permanency program. The past year was characterized by growth in foster care and counseling ministries, strong giving and financial health, and the discontinuation of one program.

During the past year (July 1, 2010–June 30, 2011), nearly 70 staff (28 full-time) served children and families in these ways:

**Adoption.** Adoption staff finalized 27 adoptions of foster children and provided additional services to 132 foster children and 34 foster/adoptive resource families. An affiliate of the Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network (SWAN), the COBYS adoption program offers six services: family profiles, child profiles, child preparation services, child specific recruitment (for harder to place children), legal finalization, and post permanency services for adoptive families (whether or not they adopted through COBYS). Sixteen families received post permanency services, which was an area of growth in the adoption program.

In addition to these SWAN-



related services, COBYS provided birth parent counseling to eight families facing unplanned pregnancies and worked with eight families who are seeking to adopt through the infant adoption program. Two infant adoptions were finalized.

**Counseling.** COBYS therapists provided 2,110 hours of therapy during the year, a 36 percent increase over the previous year. The growth was fueled by the addition of experienced part-time Attachment and Trauma Therapist Laura W. Miller, LCSW, in September, who provides services primarily to COBYS foster children and adopted children. After receiving a key insurance certification in July, COBYS is poised to expand service to children with trauma and attachment disorders in the coming year.

Michele Romeo Martin, Psy.D, began in October as part-time Supervisor of Counseling Services and has brought energy and vision for expanding COBYS counseling services.

COBYS offers individual, family, and marital counseling on a sliding scale basis for uninsured clients. Therapists address

relational issues with couples and families; depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders; ADHD; and more. A "Benevolent Fund" supported by private donations enables COBYS therapists to serve all clients, regardless of the fee they are able to pay.

## Family Life Education.

COBYS Family Life Educators led 27 courses and 71 workshops, providing 1,273 adults, youth, and children with skills, information, and encouragement to strengthen family bonds. A total of 34 churches, schools, and community groups partnered with COBYS to provide these programs.

A significant two-year grant through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, beginning in January 2011, helped offset a 45 percent reduction in funding from the Lancaster County Drug and Alcohol Commission. COBYS is eager to partner with churches, schools, and community agencies to offer programs to strengthen family relationships and reduce risk factors that imperil children and youth.

**Foster Care.** The foster care program saw an expansion of days of care and received a strong evaluation from the Department of Public Welfare.



Foster care staff facilitated 20,576 days of care for 98 foster children, a 10 percent increase in days of care. Eleven sibling groups were placed together. Of the 37 children who were discharged, 27 were successfully reunited with their birth parents or relatives, and 10 were adopted by their COBYS resource family.

Eleven new resource families were approved during the year, with the total number of approved families decreasing from 53 to 50. With an unusually large number of families (36) completing training

during the past year, staff anticipate approving a record number of new families in the coming year. During the annual inspection by the Department of Public Welfare in July, inspectors commended staff for the quality training and support COBYS resource families receive.

**Permanency.** The Permanency Unit provided services for 80 children from 46 families, down slightly from the previous year. Thirteen of those children took steps toward adoption while 17 were able to return home to their parents. Staff rejoiced with one child who graduated from high school and expected to enroll in college in fall 2011. Three new caseworkers joined the staff during the year. The goal of this specialized program—which is based in Lancaster and operated in partnership with the Lancaster County Children & Youth Social Service Agency—is to find a permanent home for foster children as quickly and safely as possible.



**Group Home.** In October 2010 the Board of Directors made the difficult decision to discontinue the Teen Mother & Child Group Home program, which had served teens and babies at a Manheim facility for 15 years. The home closed its doors on November 18. With the trend in the child welfare system toward seeking more local, less costly placements, fewer counties are utilizing residential facilities. Residents at the home were referred by county agencies, with those agencies reimbursing COBYS for services provided. The number of referrals had trended downward over a several-year period.

The Board of Directors is seeking to sell the group home property to free resources for new or existing ministries.

**Financial Support.** After experiencing a sharp drop in private giving the previous year, total giving to the general fund for the 2010/2011 fiscal year rebounded by 2.75 percent. We rejoice in reversing the downward trend in giving and thank the generous donors who made it possible, despite economic uncertainty.

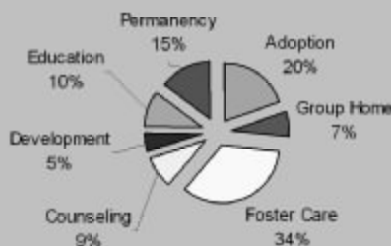
*Audited financial statements will be available upon request when the audit is completed. A list of donors will be available soon at [www.cobys.org/news.htm](http://www.cobys.org/news.htm).*



**Sources of Revenue**  
N=\$2.98 million (unaudited)



**Expenses by Program**  
N=\$2.77 million (unaudited)



## Private Giving Comparison

Year	ANE Churches	Other General	Total General	Campaign
2010/11	\$94,608.62	\$412,110.84	\$506,719.46	\$12,053.85
2009/10	\$93,651.16	\$399,492.80	\$493,143.96	\$25,498.97
2008/09	\$107,590.67	\$489,569.90	\$597,160.57	\$34,033.03
2007/08	\$115,614.40	\$465,738.84	\$581,353.24	\$86,111.67
2006/07	\$108,828.67	\$439,106.71	\$546,935.38	\$108,229.38



*Last year's Bike & Hike was a wet one. Goals for this year's event are 600 participants, \$100,000, and a sunny day!*

## Bike & Hike Aims for \$100,000 Goal

\$100,000 and 600 participants. Those are the ambitious goals for the 15th annual COBYS Bike & Hike, slated for Sunday, September 11, at the Lititz Church of the Brethren. Events begin at 1:30 p.m.

The Bike & Hike includes a three-mile walk through Lititz, 10- and 25-mile bicycle rides on rural roads around Lititz, and the 60-mile Dutch Country Motorcycle Ride, which this year travels north through scenic Lancaster and Lebanon Counties. Sights along the way include fertile farmland, a covered bridge, the picturesque village of Rexmont, Cornwall Furnace, Miner's Village, Mt. Gretna, and more.

Participants choose their event and either pay a registration fee or obtain sponsors. (Many give generously themselves and also obtain pledges from others.) The registration fee is \$25 per person. The fee may be waived for those who obtain \$25 or more in pledges from sponsors. Pre-registration is not required.

Last year persistent rain dampened the event and limited attendance to 298 people. But generous giving from business sponsors and supporters still totaled

nearly \$88,000, a new record.

"In order to gross \$100,000 this year," says event planner Don Fitzkee, "we were counting on strong business support to get us started. And we were not disappointed." Businesses have pledged some 50 percent more than last year's record amount. (See sponsors, below right.)

"Now we're counting on participants and their sponsors to get us the rest of the way there. We think we're primed for a big year after last year's rainy day."

Each participant receives a free t-shirt (while supplies last), ice cream and refreshments, and an opportunity to win one of dozens of door prizes donated by area businesses. Those who raise certain levels of support can earn additional prizes, including jackets, gym bags, denim shirts, hooded sweatshirts, caps, and insulated lunch bags with the COBYS logo. Junior and senior high youth groups who raise \$1,500 or more win a free gym and pizza night.

In addition, grand prizes donated by area businesses will be awarded to the top three fundraisers. Prizes include a \$100 gift certificate for travel with Bob Neff Tours, a trip

for two to New York City from Conestoga Tours, and a bistro patio set from Good's Store. Top fundraisers may choose one of these prizes or substitute any other prize from the prize table.

For the first time, this year donors will be able to donate on site via credit card. Also new, WJTL FM 90.3 will broadcast live from the event.

Additional information, including printable brochures and sponsor sheets, is available at [www.cobys.org/news.htm](http://www.cobys.org/news.htm). Or contact Don Fitzkee at 800-452-6517 or [don@cobys.org](mailto:don@cobys.org).

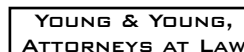
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### Major Sponsors



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### You Can Support COBYS Through United Way

While COBYS Family Services does not receive funding through United Way's regular fund drives, individuals can designate their United Way donations to benefit COBYS through the Donor Choice program.

To participate, simply fill out the form that is available from your employer and specify COBYS as the agency you would like to support. You can help your employer and the United Way reach their goals, while also supporting a ministry you know and trust.

## Palmyra Area Counseling Center Relocates

The Palmyra Area Counseling Center relocated to new space at Palmyra First United Methodist Church, 520 E. Birch Street, Palmyra, in August. The center is a joint ministry of COBYS Family Services and Palmyra Area Cooperating Churches (PACC).

Since opening its doors two decades ago, the center has been housed in space donated by the Palmyra Church of the Brethren. The Palmyra Brethren now will be utilizing the building for other ministry purposes.

"We are grateful for the facilities that the Palmyra Church of the Brethren provided for 20 years," said COBYS Executive Director Mark Cunningham. "And we are excited to begin a new relationship with Palmyra First United Methodist."

Mark presented a welcome mat to the Palmyra Brethren during

a June Sunday service to thank the congregation for hosting the center. The mat, said Mark, is to be

used to extend the same warm welcome to future occupants of the building that COBYS enjoyed.

### Bosis to Join Counseling Staff in October



Tracy Bosis, MSW, LCSW, begins October 3 as a part-time therapist for COBYS Family Services. She will see clients at the Oregon and Palmyra Counseling Centers.

Tracy brings with her more than 20 years of outpatient mental health experience with particular interest in families and integration of faith with therapeutic intervention. Since 2001 she has provided individual, family, marital, and group counseling at Philhaven's East Petersburg office, where she has conducted adolescent groups, in addition to individual and family therapy work.

She earned her Master of Social Work degree from University of Illinois at Chicago and an undergraduate degree in Psychology at Nyack (New York) College. Tracy lives with her husband, Dave, and three children in Lititz. They attend Lancaster Evangelical Free Church.

COBYS offers counseling services at three locations in Lancaster and Lebanon Counties. For more information or to schedule an appointment, contact Miriam at 800-452-6517 or [counseling@cobys.org](mailto:counseling@cobys.org). Or visit [www.cobys.org/counseling](http://www.cobys.org/counseling).

## All in a Day's Work



August 4 was a big day for six children, the two families who adopted them, and the many COBYS staff who were present at Lancaster County Courthouse to help celebrate the finalizations. In the morning, Gary & Dawn Dupler Jr. (left) officially welcomed Cody, 9; Stephen, 7; and Anthony, 5; into their family. After lunch, Jon & Karrye Hawryluk adopted Andrew, 5; Zackery, 4; and Isabelle, 2. Presiding Judge Jay Hoberg thanked both families for providing a stable home life for the children and "ordered" the many family and friends in the gallery to volunteer for childcare so the parents could get some time to themselves. Both the Duplers and Hawryluks doubled the number of children in their families.



## Two Churches to Host Fall Grandparenting Programs

“Grandparents often have a different approach to parenting than their children do,” says COBYS Family Life Education Supervisor Carol Rago, which can



make it difficult to know how best to support their own children in the parenting role. COBYS can help.

The Conestoga and Lititz Churches of the Brethren will host COBYS “Grandparenting Today” programs this fall. Conestoga will host three sessions on Thursdays, September 8-22, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. The Lititz program will meet each Wednesday in October, with an optional buffet dinner from 5:00 to

6:00 p.m., followed by class from 6:15 to 7:30. Both programs are open to the public.

The grandparenting emphasis, says Carol, grew out of conversations with local churches. Some churches said they have more people in the grandparenting stage of life than young families and wondered if COBYS had anything to offer for people with white hair, grey hair. . . or no hair at all. The answer now is, “Yes, we do.”

The curriculum focuses on ways grandparents can positively impact their grandchildren’s lives. Topics include understanding generational differences in parenting styles, using active communication with family

members to strengthen bonds, intervening versus interfering, building self-esteem in grandchildren, and dealing with divorce and special needs. The first three sessions are geared toward those in a more traditional grandparenting role, while an optional fourth session addresses grandparents raising grandchildren.

To register for the Lititz or Conestoga programs, or to explore offering a similar program at your church, contact Desiree Weber at [desiree@cobys.org](mailto:desiree@cobys.org) or 717-656-6580.

For a list of COBYS family life education programs and workshops, visit [www.cobys.org/programs](http://www.cobys.org/programs).

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