

## It's All About Abby



*Milly & Ervin Zeiset and their whole family provided exceptional love and care to help Abby become all that she can be after she suffered a traumatic brain injury. Now the Zeisets are adjusting to a new supportive role for Abby's pre-adoptive parents.*

The best thing that ever happened to Abby\* was going to live with COBYS foster parents Ervin and Milly Zeiset. In July 2011, when Abby was two, she and two siblings arrived at the Zeisets' East Earl dairy farm, where they became part of a welcoming extended family and experienced life the way it should be for kids.

Ervin and Milly, who are parents of five and grandparents of 14, had gotten into foster care with COBYS a few years earlier. "We had some children that were moving out of the house," says Milly, "and my sister and her husband were foster parents at Lancaster County Children and Youth. . . . So we thought, 'We have a few extra beds. Why not tuck a few children in?'"

With room in their house and hearts, they decided to give foster care a try. She laughs now at her naivete, and marvels at how much she has learned.

*\*To protect Abby's privacy, we have not used her real name.*



But, as it turned out, the Zeisets would teach COBYS staff and others much more—about unconditional love and personal sacrifice for the well-being of a child.

Due to their stage of life, Ervin & Milly weren't looking to adopt, so after nearly a year with the Zeisets, Abby moved on. Three months later they received the terrible news that a tragic incident had resulted in a traumatic brain injury. It was unclear whether Abby would survive, but clear that she would be severely disabled if she did.

As Abby clung to life, COBYS reached out to Ervin & Milly to test their openness to providing care. It began with an invitation to visit at a medical facility in Hershey.

"Of course we wanted to go see her," recalls Milly, "but little did we know when we saw her how she would be. And I just cried for like three hours."

Medical staff told the Zeisets that Abby's chances of recovery would be enhanced if she were with a family where she was loved, rather than a nursing facility.

"And we knew we had love for Abby," says Milly, "but we didn't know that we had anything else" to offer. "So we thought, 'If it's better that she's in a home where there is love, we'll give her that, and then everyone else has to help us and teach us what she needs.'"

This was just before Thanksgiving in 2012. For the next month Milly would make daily 90-minute round trips to Hershey to visit and receive training on caring for Abby. Ervin joined her as his farming responsibilities allowed.

On December 21, after nearly three months in medical facilities, Abby came home to the Zeisets, where she would be provided the best of care for the next three-and-a-half years. It quickly became all about Abby as Milly, Ervin, and their extended family made sacrifices to provide for their little girl.

COBYS Senior Foster Care Caseworker Stacy Bashore-Steury marveled at the lengths the family went to to meet Abby's needs. "And it wasn't just Milly and Ervin," she says. "It was the entire family. All of their kids would change what they were used to doing so that she could come."

*(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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*Fostering Hope* is the quarterly newsletter of COBYS Family Services, a Christian family service agency, affiliated with the Atlantic Northeast District of the Church of the Brethren.

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## This I Believe

From 2005 to 2009 National Public Radio ran a regular segment called *This I Believe*. The series invited people from all walks of life to write short essays about the core beliefs that guide their daily lives. I always appreciated these thoughtful pieces, so I thought I would take this opportunity to share some of my own "This I Believe" statements. Some of them are more serious than others, and they are in no particular order.

I believe that. . .

- Each child should have an opportunity to go to school.
- COBYS staff are extraordinarily kind and compassionate.
- Turkey and stuffing dinners are way too delicious to have only once or twice a year.



- It is tragic that many people are trying to fill a void in their lives by turning to drugs or alcohol. The number of people who are addicted is frightening.
- Far too many people text while driving. I see them regularly.
- As a society we have it very wrong when athletes and actors are paid ridiculously high salaries and are considered heroes, while social workers, teachers, and other service providers work long, difficult hours for relatively little pay.
- I am able to use about five percent of the capabilities of my smart phone.
- Jesus did an amazing thing for all humanity when he died on the cross for our sins.
- Laughter can be incredibly medicinal.
- Nobody should watch horror movies. I saw one when I was younger. HUGE mistake. (What happens if you get scared half-to-death twice?)
- The Outer Banks, North Carolina, is a great place to vacation.
- If everyone had to preach one sermon, people would be more appreciative and less critical of our pastors.
- Listening to my kids play their ukuleles and the piano is the sweetest music in the world.

Finally, I believe I am done.

*Mark Cunningham, Executive Director*

*(continued from page one)*

The Zeisets altered Christmas plans that first year to accommodate Abby. The living room became Abby's bedroom, filled with a hospital bed, wheelchair, and other medical equipment. Ervin and Milly surrendered their privacy, with nursing staff present in the home for 16 hours a day.

With support from Ervin, other family members, and professionals, Milly became Abby's around-the-clock caregiver, learning how to feed and administer medicine through a feeding tube, transporting her to countless appointments with doctors and therapists—often at distant facilities—comforting her when she was in pain, and encouraging her to be all that she could be.

"It was a lot to learn," says Milly, "but our nurses stood by us and walked with us and Stacy and COBYS were there every step of the way. We couldn't have done it without them because it was a lot to learn."

And somehow, says Stacy, Milly still managed to keep an immaculate house and maintain a large garden. "It was always just amazing to me," says Stacy with a smile.

"Milly is just the kindest woman," says COBYS Director of Placement Services Mary Sourber, "so loving and nurturing towards Abby. She was committed to defying what the doctors said Abby's quality of life would be. And she worked tirelessly, making sure that Abby was comfortable and happy."

Surrounded by a loving family and supported by a variety of professionals, Abby began to progress beyond what some thought possible. Over time, she showed more awareness of her surroundings, smiled, and vocalized, and eventually began to take food by mouth. Included in her very limited vocabulary was the word "Mommy."

In January Abby began kindergarten in a class for children with special needs at Blue Ball Elementary School. "It was a wonderful classroom," says Milly. "The teacher said she wouldn't want to be doing anything else, and it showed."

But as Abby continued to reach new milestones, Milly & Ervin faced an agonizing decision. What about the future? The Zeisets are "headed toward 60." There was no question of their commitment to Abby, but they struggled to discern if she ultimately would be better off with younger parents, who could be there for the long haul. They eventually decided that a new family should be sought, but that they would care for Abby as long as it took to find just the right family.

COBYS Senior Adoption Caseworker Sheryl Bernot began a nearly three-year process of seeking an adoptive family through a service called Child Specific Recruitment (CSR). (COBYS provided similar services for 13 other children last year.)

Sheryl attended more than a dozen matching events, where agencies and prospective adoptive families network to find homes for children with special needs. She spread the word via websites and Facebook, reviewed family profiles, researched prospective families, seeking the perfect family to care for a medically needy child, while also being open to having Milly & Ervin remain involved in Abby's life.

"Sheryl was the person who brought all the right people together," says COBYS Adoption Supervisor Jen McDowell. "That's the role of the CSR—networking with various agencies to find the best family for the child."



The family not only needed to pass muster with COBYS and County staff, but also with Milly & Ervin, who wanted nothing but the best for their little girl. They found the right family—parents of three birth children and another foster child with special needs.

July 21, the day that Abby went to be picked up by her new parents, was a bittersweet day. The goal of finding the right family was met, but that didn't make parting any easier.

Eager to provide the best care as long as she possibly could, Milly had refilled all of Abby's prescriptions. With the help of a nurse, she organized Abby's medical equipment and personal items, and had her bathed and waiting for her new family to arrive.

"Everything was there for Abby," says Milly. "I made little cups of food to last her for a month. I pureed and froze it and sent it along with mom. . . . So she still could be eating my food."

An emotional Milly said her good-byes to Abby before her new family arrived. When they came, it took all she had to help Abby into her wheelchair and say one last goodbye. She watched her little girl being wheeled out the front door by her new mom, but Milly did not follow. She knew what she was able to bear.

What she didn't see was Abby being helped into a newly purchased van. On the back it said, "Princess on board. Make way for her carriage." Abby is expected to be adopted early next year.

Since July, Milly & Ervin have visited Abby a few times, even though her new home is some two hours' drive. They are working to shift into more of a grandparenting role and are pleased that Abby's new parents welcome their ongoing involvement.

"At first it's really hard to release that Mommy thing," says Milly. While Abby's new mom assures her that Abby can have more than one mom, Milly is learning to relinquish the role. But she holds out hope that the little girl who first learned to call her "Mommy," will one day add "Milly" to her vocabulary.



# Annual Report

COBYS Family Services experienced unprecedented growth in staff, budget, and services during the past year.

Motivated by Christian faith, COBYS 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 more. At year's end, COBYS employed 89 staff, including 36 full-time employees (up from 73 and 30 last year), working from three locations. During the past year (July 1, 2015-June 30, 2016), COBYS served children and families in these ways:

**Adoption.** An affiliate of the Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network (SWAN), the COBYS adoption program provides a variety of adoption-related services. They include child specific recruitment to help locate adoptive homes for harder to place

Adoption-Related Services	2014/15	2015/16
Child Specific Recruitment	11	14
Child Preparation	49	49
Child Profiles	74	91
Family Profiles	17	38
Adoption Finalizations	16	33
Post Adoption Services (# of families)	10	24



Abby Rutter Photography

children, child preparation to ready children for transitions, child and family profiles to facilitate matching, finalizations, and post adoption support. The program experienced across-the-board growth, more than doubling the number of services in key categories (see table). Jen McDowell rejoined staff as Adoption Supervisor.

**Counseling.** COBYS therapists provided 3,039 hours of therapy to children and adults during the year, a slight decrease from the previous year. Services include individual, family, and marital counseling. Therapists address relational issues with couples and families; depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders; ADHD; and more. Seven part-time therapists

provide services at the Oregon Counseling Center, north of Lancaster; and at the Palmyra Area Counseling Center, hosted by First United Methodist Church. Private donations cover the cost of therapy provided at a reduced rate to some uninsured clients.

The program received a two-year \$125,936 grant from Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to enable seven COBYS therapists to obtain certification in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, an evidence-based treatment to help children and teens overcome trauma. COBYS is one of the first in the area to offer this type of treatment.

**Family Life Education.** Fueled by new grants and additional support from public sources, the Family Life Education program saw across-the-board growth in courses and workshops, classroom hours, and clients served.



Educators led 107 courses and 31 workshops, providing 1,545 classroom hours of instruction to 1,313 adults, youth, and children. The previous year's totals were 58 courses, 14 workshops, 935 hours, and 751 clients.

Programs were offered at 36 sites including the COBYS Family Life Center in Lancaster, community locations, schools, and churches. All told, the number of programs and locations doubled, and the number of people served grew by 75 percent.

Contributing to an exceptional year of service was an unexpected \$133,000

grant from the Lancaster County Drug and Alcohol Commission to offer additional programs.

**Foster Care.** The foster care program provides temporary care for abused and neglected children. Foster care staff facilitated 26,947 days of care for 141 foster children, up from 20,367 days of care for 123 foster children the previous year. COBYS served more children last year than any time in the past 17 years, and only once in COBYS' 36-year history were more children cared for. Days of care increased by nearly a third.

Intentional efforts are made to place brothers and sisters together in the same home. COBYS families cared for a total of 35 sibling groups. COBYS families also cared for 15 children with special medical needs. Of the 65 children discharged from care, 31 were reunited with their birth parents or relatives, 16 were adopted by their foster family, and the rest went to other placements.

Through a partnership with Lancaster County, for the first time COBYS provided short term emergency foster care for 15 children who needed a foster home during the night or weekend. These additional children accounted for most of the increase in the number of children served.

COBYS approved 24 new foster/adoptive resource families, bringing the total number at year-end to 86, the largest number in memory.

**Permanency Unit.** Expansion was the theme at the Permanency Unit. At the invitation of the Lancaster County Children and Youth Agency, which funds this program, and with help from



volunteers, building renovations were completed to make room for a doubling of staff from eight to sixteen. The program is poised to significantly increase the number of families served during the current year. Krista Rankin was promoted to a Supervisor position, joining Supervisor Nicole Lauzus.

Based in Lancaster, this program seeks to find safe, permanent homes for foster children. Staff monitor the well-being of foster children, support foster parents, and assist birth parents to overcome the issues that led to their children's placement in care. Staff served 113 children from 77 families, up from 93 and 60 last year. Fourteen children from 13 families returned home to a parent or guardian. The Court terminated parental rights for 20 children from 11 families, freeing the children for adoption. Three others achieved permanency through placement with a Subsidized Permanent Legal Custodian. Two youth signed out of Agency custody after turning 18.

### Community Connections.

Through Community Connections, COBYS partners with churches, schools, and community organizations to provide case advocacy services to individuals and families with financial, mental health, relational, and other needs. The Case

Advocate helps the client and partner organization develop goals that empower the client to increase independence within six months. Last year COBYS partnered with six churches to serve seven families.

### Financial Support

The COBYS budget eclipsed \$3 million for the first time in 2015/2016, and for the current year is \$4 million. Private giving (the focus of this report) accounted for nearly one-fifth of COBYS' income. While overall private income declined from the previous year—due to a decrease from last year's record bequest amount and expected winding down of Work for the Well-Being of the City capital campaign—giving to the general fund grew by 13 percent, the fifth consecutive year of growth. Because of strong private giving COBYS was able to weather the state budget impasse that caused extreme hardship for other agencies and at one point



resulted in delay of more than \$1 million in payments to COBYS.

Pledges to the Work for the Well-Being campaign to fund family life education expansion reached the \$300,000 goal during the year. To date \$298,487 of \$302,760 pledged has been received.

We are grateful for the strong financial support that enables us to continue to serve children and families in Christ's name!

*A version of this report that includes a list of donors can be viewed on the Newsletters page at [cobys.org](http://cobys.org). Additional financial information is available upon request.*

### Private Giving Summary, Five-Year Comparison

	7/1/2011 - 6/30/2012	7/1/2012 - 6/30/2013	7/1/2013 - 6/30/2014	7/1/2014 - 6/30/2015	7/1/2015 - 6/30/2016
<b>Bequests</b>	\$9,375.00	\$33,196.96	\$31,912.67	\$228,988.26	\$106,448.86
<b>Campaign</b>	\$0.00	\$650.00	\$129,964.44	\$90,996.81	\$51,775.52
<b>Endowment</b>	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$0.00	\$500.00	\$0.00
<b>General</b>	\$519,575.60	\$524,165.69	\$557,324.10	\$586,384.25	\$665,412.95
<b>In Kind</b>	\$15,396.18	\$17,765.82	\$23,799.80	\$18,495.15	\$28,800.28
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$544,846.78</b>	<b>\$576,278.47</b>	<b>\$743,001.01</b>	<b>\$925,364.47</b>	<b>\$852,437.61</b>



## 20th Annual Bike & Hike Sets New Income Record



Oppressive heat and humidity cleared out just in time, leaving brilliant blue skies for the 20th annual COBYS Bike & Hike on Sunday, September 11. As of late September income from the event was projected to reach \$125,000, easily exceeding the \$120,000 goal and marking the 17th consecutive year of income growth. Last year's Bike & Hike raised \$118,751.

"We had another great day," said Director of Development Don Fitzkee. "We are grateful for the many generous people who helped make the 20th Bike & Hike one for the record books."

By far the biggest growth this year was in business support. Businesses gave cash gifts totaling \$32,574, up more than \$9,000 from last year. "We had a record number of business sponsors who gave \$500 or more," said Don, "including several brand

new ones." Overall, nearly 100 businesses (see sidebar) supported in some way.

Participation also was up. "We had an unusually high number of first time participants," said Don, "perhaps due to some extra publicity we did in conjunction with this being our 20th year."

The number of walkers and riders increased by 40 from last year to 509, reversing a two-year decline in attendance. Participants included 209 walkers, 131 bicyclists, and 169 motorcyclists on 106 cycles, along with some additional friends who stopped in to visit and participate in the silent auction. The biggest growth in participation was in motorcycles, thanks in part to Hernley's Polaris/Victory, who invited owners of Polaris Slingshots to participate and subsidized registration for the 14 who did. The number of walkers also grew significantly.

Four youth groups earned a gym and pizza night by raising at least \$1,500, including Little Swatara Church of the Brethren (COB), which beat their own youth group record from last year with a total of \$7,830. Others were Midway COB, \$1,620; Mohrsville COB, \$1,591; and West Green Tree COB, \$1,515. In addition, Mountville COB youth participated for the first time and raised nearly \$1,100.

The third annual silent auction raised \$3,984, up from about \$3,100 last year. The top selling item as a meal for eight at the home of Executive Director Mark Cunningham and his wife, Mari, which sold twice for \$400 each.

More than 50 volunteers staffed the event, including several from Linden Hall and the Lancaster plant of The Hershey Company, who served a day late as part of the United Way Day of Caring in Lancaster. A photo gallery from the Bike & Hike is available on the COBYS Facebook page.



**Top fundraisers were familiar faces to this event. (From right) Mari Cunningham set a new record for individual fundraising with her figure of \$10,950. Other top fundraisers were Floy Fitzkee, \$7,010; Londa Brandt, \$5,845; and Lucy de Perrot, \$3,795.**



## Special Thanks to These Supporters

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### Major Sponsors



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Steffy Printing  
Thomas H. Erb & Son Inc.  
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WJTL FM 90.3

### Grand Prize Donors

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Giant Food Store, LLC  
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### Auction Items

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Blue Ridge Communications  
Cherry Crest Adventure Farm  
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Country Barn, LLC  
Amos & Ruth Cunningham  
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DoubleTree Resort by Hilton, Lancaster  
Dutch Apple Dinner Theatre  
Ephrata Performing Arts Center  
Esbenshade's Garden Centers  
Fillmore Container  
Don Fitzkee  
Foxchase Golf Club

Fox Meadows Creamery & Country Market  
Good's Store  
Hershey Bears Hockey Club  
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Rainbow Restoration  
Shuey's Pretzels  
Smith's Candies  
Spooky Nook Sports  
Susquehanna Glass Company  
The Wenger Foundation  
Wild Birds Unlimited Nature Shop

### Facilities

Lititz Church of the Brethren  
Sam Lewis State Park

### Refreshments

Crystal Springs Water Company  
Four Seasons Produce  
The Hershey Company, Lancaster  
Hess Brothers Fruit Company  
John Herr's Village Market  
Keystone Pretzels  
Oregon Dairy  
Smith's Candies  
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### Door Prizes

AMERIGreen Energy, Inc.  
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Fillmore Container  
Halo Branded Solutions-Rick Bridgman  
Harrisburg Senators Baseball Club  
Keller Brothers Auto Company  
Kreiser's Garage  
Peaceful Valley Furniture  
Primitives by Kathy, Inc.  
Reist Popcorn Company  
Rocky Springs Entertainment Center  
Shuey's Pretzels  
Smith's Candies  
Don & Cindy Umberger  
Umberger's of Fontana  
Village Greens Golf, Inc.  
Zig's Bakery & Café

## COBYS Gearing Up for 2016 ExtraOrdinary Give

The 2016 edition of the Lancaster County Community Foundation's ExtraOrdinary Give is coming up on Friday, November 18, and COBYS Family Services is gearing up for another big day.

This 24-hour online giving marathon will benefit nearly 400 local organizations. Every dollar donated at ExtraGive.org on



NOVEMBER 18, 2016



November 18 will be stretched with at least \$300,000 from the Community Foundation, Rodgers & Associates, and other partners. The

more COBYS donors give, the greater our portion of the stretch fund.

"We'll try to top last year's performance," says Director of Development Don Fitzkee, "when COBYS finished in the top 20 out of more than 360 organizations." COBYS received \$53,830 last year through this event.

The logistics are the same as previous years. With credit card in hand, donors visit extragive.org between 12:00 midnight and 11:59 p.m. on Friday, November 18, and give a donation of \$25 or more.

On top of the stretch, during certain time periods, individual donations will be randomly selected. If a COBYS donor is chosen, the foundation will add \$1,000 to that gift.

COBYS again is seeking friends to give at the stroke of midnight to earn one of the \$1,000 Early Bird prizes offered to the first 10 organizations to reach 50 unique donors.

From 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., COBYS will partner with Brethren Village to host a giving station at Chives American Grill on the BV campus. Friends of COBYS and the Village can stop in to give or just say hello and pick up a whoopie pie, courtesy of Zig's Bakery & Café.

To learn more about the event, visit ExtraGive.org. Or contact Don Fitzkee at 717-656-6580 or don@cobys.org.

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## Love Give Live Gallery & Gifts Event to Benefit COBYS



Love Give Live Gallery & Gifts, located at The Shoppes at Brighton Village, 1170 Erbs Quarry Road, Lititz, will host an event to benefit COBYS on Thursday, October 20, from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. COBYS will receive 20 percent of all sales during these hours.

Joanna Yeater will provide music at 6:45 and 7:45. Joanna performs with a variety of choral and instrumental groups at Lebanon Valley College, where she majors in early childhood and special education with a minor in music. She plays piano and saxophone, and sings a variety of styles including jazz, sacred, and popular music.

Refreshments and product samples and information about COBYS ministries will be available throughout the evening. COBYS supporter Ann Moyer will host. Executive Director Mark Cunningham and Director of Development Don Fitzkee will be on hand to greet guests (and eat refreshments).

Love Give Live is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose goal is to create charitable business ventures to support local, national, and global non-profit organizations working to relieve suffering and promote wholeness. Co-founders are Dr. James Carson and Gail Graybill Carson.

