

In the last few months, many of us have seen the normal patterns and activities of our lives drastically change due to the coronavirus. Visits with family members, trips to the store, sporting events and in-person church services were paused. Jobs and livelihoods, if they were not lost permanently, have been changed with social distancing guidelines. At COBYS, in-person visits with children, clients and families shifted to virtual contact and continue with many modifications. Most staff now work at least partially from home.

These kinds of adjustments are never easy, but COBYS was able to expertly continue care of our clients. For us, change and the uncertainty of not quite knowing what is going to happen next is inherent in human services and child welfare service delivery. It is also what existed for our foster children and resource families well before coronavirus.

Two particular groups of children, kids older than six and those in sibling groups, experience this upheaval and uncertainty in the foster care system at a high level.

Both these characteristics make it "difficult" for them to find a permanent home.

The realities for these kids:

- Because there are fewer homes to accept them, many are placed away from their home community. As a result of transitioning to a different school district, school age children experience loss of social and academic connections, potential decrease in academic performance, the need to perform extra work to catch up and, for high schoolers, not graduating on time with their peers.
- Brothers and sisters, especially sibling groups of three or more, often must be placed in different resource homes, adding stress for children who are already losing other connections in their lives.

For School-age Foster Care Kids and Sibling Groups, Uncertainty Is Normal

The Need

- In 2019, 77% of referrals made to COBYS for foster care were for children age six and older. COBYS was only able to care for a small fraction of these 1,646 children.
- In the United States in 2018, children six and older accounted for 58% of kids in foster care. The referral statistics for COBYS show the disproportionate need for foster homes for school age children compared to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.
- In 2019, of the 2,141 children referred to COBYS for resource families placement, 34% were part of 281 sibling groups. We placed only 14 sibling groups.

The Opportunity

- Children who are adopted from foster care have a greater chance of attending higher education and are less likely to face homelessness, unemployment, addiction, and incarceration. Children who are adopted as teens have increased eligibility for financial aid to obtain higher education.
- Placing siblings together in the same foster home is linked to greater placement stability and a greater likelihood of them leaving foster care by going to a permanent placement.
- COBYS encourages families to consider caring for siblings as being akin to creating a blended family, with each family bringing something unique to the family dynamics.
- In caring for older children, not only do the children have new life experiences, families also are introduced to hobbies, music, food and technology they otherwise may not have.



How One Family Keeps it Together

As a COBYS resource family for three years, Todd and Nikki Pyle already have a wealth of experience with fostering older children and sibling groups. Their foster placements have included a sibling group of three, a sibling group of two and currently, two, non-related 17-year-olds. For the Pyles, "the biggest joy of fostering siblings is keeping them from being separated. When kids enter care, they lose just about everything they've ever known and being able to provide a way for them to not also lose their sibling(s) could be invaluable to them. We also feel like kids are more comfortable coming into a new home when they have familiar faces at their side. And the same joys that come with fostering a single child, such as seeing them grow in all sorts of ways, building a bond with them, watching them thrive and seeing their accomplishments are multiplied as you experience them with multiple children."

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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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Persistence Pays Off



Right outside our front door at home there is a porch light. For the past number of years, a Robin has made her nest between the light and the wall. Our porch is covered, so it really is a very nice space for a bird. The nest is about a foot from my head if I stand in the doorway. You may think that having a nest with baby birds right outside your front door is a good thing. It is not. Because her nest is right there, the porch gets very dirty very quickly. Sometimes when I go out, I forget she is there and she startles and flies away, startling me. In order to leave her alone, I

will sometimes go in or out another door. I am not a fan of this arrangement. It is very inconvenient.

So I decided that this was the year that Mrs. Bird (I know, not very creative, but we have to call her something) would not build her nest at that location. Each time she started building her nest, I would remove it. This went on for about a week. My wife knew what I was doing, and I could tell she wasn't a fan, but I persisted. One Friday morning as I was leaving for work, there were a few twigs that I removed. When I got home, there was a fully formed, complete nest where just that morning, there was nothing.



I had a decision to make. Should I or shouldn't I remove the nest? It didn't take me long to come to the conclusion that I would let the nest right where it was. I went inside, hung my head, and told my wife that I had just been beaten by Mrs. Bird. I still don't like the nest there. The only reason I left it there was because I admired Mrs. Bird's persistence.

Jesus tells a parable in Luke 18:1-8 about a widow that went to a judge time and time and time again asking for justice. She went so many times that in exasperation, the judge finally says, "Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!"

So the word that has been coming to mind a lot these past few months is "persistence." Mrs. Bird has it and the widow in the parable had it. Do I have it? Do you?

As we continue to deal with ALL that is happening in our society, are we being persistent in our prayers? Are we being persistent in our work? Are we being persistent in pursuing important relationships with friends, family, and co-workers?

The good news is that persistence pays off. The bad news is by the very definition, it takes a while. My prayer and hope is for all of us to be persistent in the things that matter.

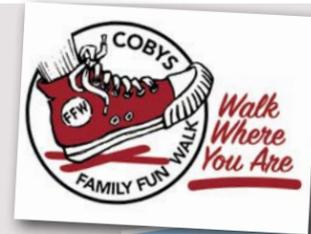
Mark Cunningham, Executive Director

COBYS Events

Thanks to our COBYS Family Fun Walk Walkers!

Since COBYS wasn't able to hold our annual Family Fun Walk in Harleysville, PA, we asked participants to modify the event and "Walk Where You Are". Some participants shared a few of the photos of their walks and post-walk treats.

We're so grateful to this dedicated group. Gifts and pledged gifts of more than \$6,500 was raised for COBYS!



Together

continued from page 1.

When it comes to being resource parents for older children, according to Todd and Nicole, "the biggest challenge of fostering older children has been that our bio children are much younger, so we have not experienced parenting teens. This has made navigating typical teen issues such as cell phones, screen time, school, independence, work and motivation more challenging as we learn as we go. It is also challenging to parent teens who have grown up with different rules and expectations."

For Nicole, "it is a joy being able to talk to teens about what their long term goals are and then having the opportunity to support them in their goals and watching them achieve those goals such as graduating, getting a job, saving for a car, and learning the skills needed to live independently. There are many misconceptions about foster teens. I think it's important for people to remember that they are just average teens, making the best of tough situations, who deserve a family and support system."

For a full Q&A with the Pyle Family on their foster care experience, visit www.cobys.org/FCstories

The Faces of COBYS

How does COBYS make a difference?

Treva Bollinger, On-call Foster Care Caseworker



COBYS participates in the foster care and adoption journey for many precious children. The process is fraught with emotions and messiness. COBYS makes the diffidence by treating everyone involved in the imperfect process with DIGNITY, care and the idea that all life is valuable!

Donna Railing, FLE Educator



COBYS makes a difference in the lives of the families that attend classes by giving the parents skills to deal with teaching, loving, disciplining and guiding their children. The parents can bring issues to light and learn from the educators and the other parents. I have witnessed single parents gaining confidence and abilities to nurture their children more effectively.

What three words would you use to describe your co-workers/COBYS

Keri Miller, Senior Foster Care Caseworker



Dedicated.
Compassionate.
Diligent.

I consider COBYS co-workers a family.

2020

Celebrating 40 years

The COBYS anniversary year celebration continues with our third decade.

The 00s—Expanding to Meet the Need

The 2000s were a turbulent time in American and world history. Terrorism, war, a financial crisis, hurricanes and natural disasters impacted the entire planet. Locally the need for the many services COBYS provides continued.

There were some reasons to reflect and rejoice at COBYS. We acknowledged our 20 years of service at a celebration event at the Lebanon Expo Center. We symbolized serving 14,654 people by stringing 14,654 lights from the ceiling.

We also saw the more than two decade tenure of Executive Director Glen Faus end with his retirement at the end of 2001. Glen's guidance helped COBYS navigate its share of rough waters, and he held steady at the helm to position COBYS for the future.

There was a growing need for specialized work to be done on the county level. Based on our record of providing exceptional care, COBYS entered into a partnership with the Lancaster County Children and Youth Social Services Agency to provide intensive program services for foster children, biological families and foster parents. The Family Reunification Program whose name soon changed to The Permanency Unit, opened an office on E. Orange Street in downtown Lancaster. A few years later COBYS purchased the property at 134 E. King Street and the Permanency Unit had a permanent home. Later in 2015, at the request of the agency, COBYS began doubling the Permanency Unit in size to help meet the demand for this excellent program. These cases are often gut-wrenching in nature and sometimes take years to work through to finalization.

Through the turmoil years, COBYS refocused our mission statement to reflect the broader goal to raise our children and adults up to be all they can be.

We worked through both the external and internal challenges of running an agency built to serve those in society that need us most. COBYS not only survived the decade, but thrived at our core mission.



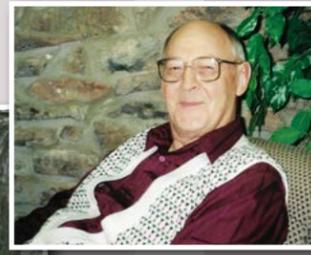
40 Years
compassion
dignity
hope



20 Year Anniversary Celebration



Executive Director Glen Faus retires

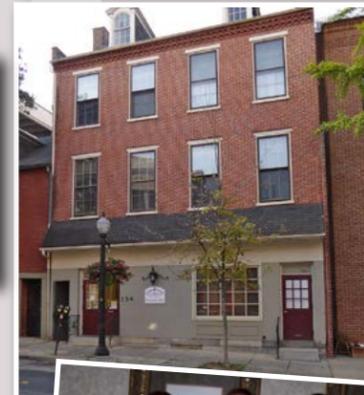


Updated Mission Statement
Motivated by Christian faith, COBYS Family Services educates, supports and empowers children and adults to reach their full potential.

New logo adopted in 25th anniversary year



Permanency Unit grows and moves



Foster Care and Adoption services continue to grow



Post Permanency services begin for adoptive families



People Helping People carving by Jon Strom at main office

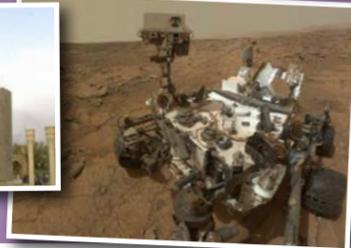


COBYS website redesign

The 2000s



YouTube



In each issue of Fostering Hope in 2020 we will highlight milestones from one of the decades of our 40-year history. Next issue: Part 4: The 2010s.

2019-2020 Annual Report

During the last year, while acknowledging and celebrating 40 years of service, COBYS Family Services has continued its focus on providing quality, expert care, delivered with compassion, dignity and hope. We continually evaluate the services we provide and make adjustments in staffing levels and services delivered to ensure fulfillment of our mission, that **motivated by Christian faith, we educate, support, and empower children and adults to reach their full potential.**

COBYS employs 134 staff, including 57 full-time and 77 part-time employees. During the past fiscal year (July 1, 2019-June 30, 2020), COBYS served children and families in these ways:

Adoption. The COBYS Adoption unit provides a range of services that assist children and families during the foster care process, in finalization of adoptions and in the life-long journey for families who have experienced adoption. During the coronavirus, adoption services continued with virtual service delivery, including completion of adoption finalizations by courts through virtual hearings.



The following units of service were provided:

- Child Specific Recruitment 35
- Child Preparation..... 67
- Child Profiles 106
- Family Profiles 39
- Adoption Finalizations..... 37
- Post Adoptions Services..... 83

To date, 579 adoptions have been finalized by COBYS.



Counseling. This year, in addition to a continued focus on training for our therapists, the Counseling department added two additional therapists, Rebekah Bowland and Alyssa Roberts, bringing the total on staff to ten. This increase in providers is in response to a continual need for increased mental health services. Our counseling services encourage individuals, children and families to work through problems and find healing in broken relationships.



During the past year, Counseling provided and engaged in:

- 7,349 therapist hours of individual and group counseling services at seven different locations.
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) training for seven therapists. Allowing for expert care for adults who have experienced trauma, PTSD, depression, anxiety and addictions.
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) training for eight therapists. Increasing capacity to provide evidence-based treatment for children and adolescents who have experienced trauma.
- Continued service to clients, including new ones, through telehealth, maintaining needed mental health care during a time of increased stress and uncertainty due to the coronavirus.

Family Life Education. Our Family Life Education (FLE) programming provides individuals, parents and children with hands-on tools to strengthen family bonds and tackle challenges with cooperation, courage, responsibility, self-esteem and respect. Many kinds of programming continued during the coronavirus this spring in virtual form.



FLE statistics for the past year:

- Number of classroom hours..... 989
- Number of participants served..... 902 (606 adults, 91 youth, 205 children)
- Number of courses held.....56 including Parenting Wisely, Seeking Safety, Incredible Years Dina, Family Nurturing and Truancy Diversion Program
- Number of workshops held.....12 including Incredible Beginnings, Power of Positive Reinforcement, Promoting Positive Social Skills and Trauma Focus Workshop
- 33 locations including churches, schools, day cares, and community organizations. COBYS offers services at a variety of locations because, through consultation with our community partners, we know that clients more readily use classes they can easily access directly in their home communities. Offering community-based programming helps eliminate a barrier clients have in accessing the services they need.

Foster Care. The Foster Care department provides compassionate care for foster children who need safe and loving homes. This includes recruitment and retention of resource parents who walk alongside children and their biological families toward the next stage of their life journey.



Foster Care statistics for the past year:

- 26,990 days of care to 156 children
- 35 sibling groups and 16 medically needy children were served
- 98 children were discharged from care, 33 of these to parents or other relatives
- 29 foster children were adopted, while 36 were discharged to other placements
- 118 resource families were served, including 20 newly licensed families and 18 families who concluded their service

The Foster Care team is happy to continue with strong service to sibling groups and medically needy children. Decreases in the number of children served and days of care this year in relation to last year are attributed to the intentional use of kinship care (relatives) by county agencies and judges, as well as the impact of the coronavirus on children entering the foster care system and referred to COBYS for care.

Permanency. COBYS is contracted by the Lancaster County Children and Youth Social Service Agency to act as the county caseworker, working with parents and families on their court approved plans for reunification. We help them access court-required services to work towards children returning to custody of parent(s). We also assure the safety of children in their out-of-home placements.



The program promotes a stronger and more stable family unit and helps families understand their needs and requirements. The goal is for families to reunify whenever safely possible.

During this past year, staff in our Permanency Unit walked alongside children and families, resulting in the following:

- 122 kids from 82 families being served
- 25 kids from 18 families being reunified with family members
- 20 kids from 14 families being transferred to adoption unit
- Two children in one family being released to caregivers through permanent legal custodianship
- Three children from three families signed out of care as they turned 18 years of age

Our Permanency staff continue to monitor the effects of the coronavirus on children in care and their biological family members. Adults may be impacted by increased stressors in their lives such as lack of employment and access to services that could impact potential reunification with children.



2020 Annual Banquet

Financial Support. COBYS Family Services remains on strong financial footing. While there have been decreases in individual and group donations through private giving over the last two years, we have also been blessed by substantial bequests. These and past planned gifts, managed wisely over time along with our yearly donations, have provided the organization with the resources it needs to operate, even in uncertain times. Throughout the year, we actively engage with new and long-time donors and are continually in awe of their generosity for the individuals, children and families we serve.



Year-to-Date Private Giving Summary (Five-Year Comparison)

	7/1/2015 - 6/30/2016	7/1/2016 - 6/30/2017	7/1/2017 - 6/30/2018	7/1/2018 - 6/30/2019	7/1/2019 - 6/30/2020
Bequests	\$106,448.86	\$1,003.29	\$700,422.95	\$26,949.71	\$580,090.69
Campaign	\$52,375.52	\$11,974.60	\$7,103.00	\$25,125.00	\$0.00
General	\$666,412.95	\$706,513.37	\$727,509.15	\$696,170.44	\$624,739.22
In Kind	\$28,900.28	\$24,440.91	\$45,281.01	\$33,222.65	\$29,066.53
Total	\$854,137.61	\$743,932.17	\$1,480,316.11	\$781,467.80	\$1,233,896.44



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*Celebrating
40 years*

SAVE THE DATE • REGISTRATION IS OPEN!

**Yes,
It's
On!**

The Tradition Continues!
65-mile Motorcycle Ride
10/25-mile Bicycle Ride
3-mile Walk

www.cobys.org/bike-and-hike

**Sunday,
September 13, 2020**

Lititz Church of the Brethren
300 West Orange Street, Lititz

3
Options
to Take
Part!

Invitation
inserted in this
newsletter!

Event Sponsors

