

## Dinner and Conversation Recap

# Community Matters

**COBYS Family Services understands the importance of community.** We see first-hand every day the overwhelming benefits of raising a family with a strong support system (community) in whatever form that takes. We also see the heart-breaking effects when families aren't a part of a healthy community.

On Thursday, March 14, 2024, COBYS hosted their annual spring Dinner and Conversation event at the Inn at Leola Village. Three COBYS foster families shared their journeys and perspective on fostering with COBYS. Their stories underscored the enormous positive impact foster families have on the children and families they serve. Here are excerpts of their stories.



**Krista Casler**

**Lara Welk**

**Bethany and Dan Fethkenher**

### **Stand-by family called to serve with emergency care**

For Krista and Jesse Casler, foster care had been a possibility ever since a service trip caring for abandon children in Romania in the 1990s. They saw the potential in the children if only they could be part of a caring family, and hoped they could someday provide that kind of care.

Fast forward with life, jobs and their own family to 2017 when they revisited the idea and were directed to COBYS by friends. Since then they have provided foster care, respite care and emergency foster care to 18 placements so far. They consider this service a calling

### **Single-minded purpose with team approach**

To her friends, a "plus one" response to an invitation automatically means Lara Welk is bringing a new foster placement to the event. Such is the accepting nature of her support community.

After a mission trip caring for children in Africa and some exploring the possibility of international adoption, Lara, a single, special education teacher, looked locally and found COBYS.

While attending the training sessions at COBYS she noted the similarities of her educational training for special needs kids with those of foster children. But

### **Foster-to-adopt family matched by COBYS**

Even when foster care gets an early start Bethany and Dan Fethkenher learned, "Nothing is final till it's final." While the Fethkenhers were completing their foster care training, COBYS proposed that they meet a pair of brothers in foster care to see if it could be a good fit. It was, and the formal interview process began.

The matching turned out to be the quickest part of the process. As they moved toward adoption, unforeseen bureaucratic delays and hurdles extended the process, nearly doubling the amount of time it should have taken.



## 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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## Initial Reflections

I recently celebrated my one-month anniversary of working at COBYS and I am so happy to be here! I have been doing a lot of reflection related to what I have experienced over my first month as executive director. Here is some of what I have learned:



- There is an unwavering commitment throughout the organization to serving children and families well.
- There is a level of compassion and resilience here that is simply amazing.
- Caseworkers provide a beacon of hope for children and families experiencing difficult circumstances.
- Every employee displays the ability to navigate complex situations with empathy and professionalism.
- A servant's heart is demonstrated daily.



As an organization, there are so many good things for us to celebrate. Are there some challenges as well? Of course there are, no organization is without barriers, but we have a lot for which to be thankful.

One of the items for which I am most thankful is how I have observed everyone supporting one another, through both challenges and celebrations (spiritually, emotionally, physically...however is necessary). We are called to do that for one another in scripture.

**1 Corinthians 12: 25-27** "...so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for one another. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part in it."

While you may not be physically here to participate in the support, there are ways that you can be a part of our team and contribute to our supportive culture. Most importantly, you can cover COBYS in prayer. Our jobs are challenging, but knowing that we have prayer warriors standing in the gap for us is always appreciated. If you are someone who enjoys sending uplifting notes or cards, I encourage you to write notes of support and mail them to us (our address may be found in this newsletter). Finally, we always appreciate your financial support. That is what allows us to do what we do!

Thank you for considering ways to support COBYS as we support children and adults around our community.

Blessings,  
 Mike

## Set Up Steadfast Support

**Be a Monthly Motivator:** Set up your COBYS donation as a monthly gift. Recurring gifts provide COBYS financial resources when they are most needed. Setting up an automatic credit card donation allows you to spread your donation out over the year and check a task off your "to do" list. Visit [www.cobys.org/donations](http://www.cobys.org/donations) and click "Make Recurring Gift".



To discuss your donation, contact Director of Development Anne Stokes at 717-656-6580 ext. 101.

## Community Matters continued from page 1

### Stand-by (continued)

because there are so many kids in need.

In their stand-by role, they are on call for emergency placements on a rotating basis for a week at a time. It helps that they both are good in a crisis because their placements all occur at a tumultuous time for the children when safety and stability are essential.

Although Jesse was unable to attend the event as he was traveling for work, Krista shared that they are blessed with an amazing support system, beginning with their sons who know the drill and jump into house safety preparation mode when a call comes in that a placement will include toddlers, to family and friends who go beyond mere understanding and show their support in so many ways.

And although there are so often heartbreaks and challenges in caring for kids at these moments of incredible crisis, with generous and empathetic hearts they also manage to find joy and sometimes even bizarrely lighter moments in the absurdity of the foreign environment these children find themselves in.

That positive attitude and calling to serve as foster parents is vital in providing the first step toward a new start for these children.



The Casler family

### Single-minded (continued)

her biggest take-away was the coaching she received on learning to dial back her enthusiasm and energy when first meeting placements as they would not be arriving with the same level of exuberance.

Lara shared the story of a placement of a teen mom. She was overjoyed with the prospect of a "two-for-one deal" which would allow her to support a new mom while enjoying the opportunity to care for an infant. Lara learned that there were challenges about building and nurturing a three-sided relationship, especially one where a new, young mom felt threatened when someone else bonded with her child. She needed to put herself in the "mom's shoes" to understand her point of view to help her negotiate their relationship.

**"It is so rewarding to see growth, maturity and the "ah-ha" moments in the life of my foster teen mom."**

– Lara Welk

Although the placement had challenges Lara maintained her connection with the teen mom and baby even after they left her care. And now Lara marvels at the growth and maturity of the young mom who now considers Lara as her "mom".

Lara is so appreciative of her support system. Now the "plus one" announcement to friends and family sets the wheels in motion as she is peppered with questions about the vital stats (age, gender, list of needs, etc.) of the new placement so they can all participate in providing for those needs.



The Fethkenhers on vacation

### Foster-to-adopt (continued)

The unfortunate reality of uncertainty in foster care provides all kinds of challenges. Children in foster care all come having experienced trauma. One example of how that expressed itself for the Fethkenhers was a period of behavior issues by one of their sons. Having grown up in a pattern of "changing homes" about every two years, he struggled when he reached that milestone in his new adopted home because he internally didn't understand the concept of stability and permanency.

Parents can sometimes feel like they are stuck in "crisis intervention" mode with instances like that, feeling more like care givers than parents.

Relief and support for foster parents come in many forms. Respite care is one service that helps the Fethkenhers. Bethany and Dan get a chance to reconnect and refresh and the boys get some time with a caring, special couple. It is a blessing for them to get away and know the boys are being cared for so well. Marj and Dave Stoddard have become more than a source of respite care, they are now part of the extended family. They understand the boys and love and care for them far beyond offering "kid-sitting" service. And, according to Dan, "Their household is so calm, and such a nice diversion from our 'normal', hectic life."



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### A Look Inside

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### No, you're not missing any pages.

This issue of the newsletter may feel a little lighter, because, well, it is. There is still plenty going on at COBYS, but we are testing a four-page issue. We'll keep sharing updates and information on social media, in emails and on our website. Let us know what you think.

## COBYS 2024 Sunday, September 8, 2024



# Changes are afoot!

(see what we did there?)

### The end of an era.

The motorcycle ride portion of B&H is being discontinued. Riders can visit the event web page for historic courses we've offered over the years. We hope you will still join us and experience something new.



**A few changes are coming** to our signature fundraising event. We are excited to introduce the **Tasty Tour**, a new opportunity for foodie walkers.

The **traditional 3-mile walk and 10- and 25-mile bicycle rides** remain. The new **Tasty Tour** is a shorter walk with stops at four popular eateries in Lititz.

The event will end with the **Incredible Ice Cream Celebration**.

**More details to come, but come on, yum!**



Event Sponsorship Opportunities Available  
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Contact Anne Stokes  
Today!  
anne@cobys.org

Details and registration this summer:  
[cobys.org/bike-and-hike](http://cobys.org/bike-and-hike)