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## SWAN: Collaborative Efforts to Support Permanency

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Pennsylvania has a long and rich history in developing successful collaborative efforts to support permanency. One example of this is the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN). SWAN, an initiative started in 1992, decreases the barriers that impede special needs adoptions. The primary goal of SWAN is to obtain permanency with all children/youth who enter the child welfare system. According to Lorrie Deck, Director of the Program Division, Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF), the network is comprised of public and private child welfare agencies, adoption agencies, the legal community, adoptive parents, organizations, and individuals working together on behalf of children and youth.

SWAN offers direct services including: (1) child profiles; (2) child-specific recruitment; (3) child preparation; and (4) services to the families who provide children with permanency including family profiles and placements, finalization and post-permanency services. Additionally, SWAN offers several support services, such as the SWAN Helpline, the

SWAN Legal Services Initiative, Training and Technical Assistance and the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange (PAE), an electronic data base designed to identify potential matches between approved adoptive families and waiting children.

SWAN supports and enhances adoption services for older children in care who are in need of permanent, loving families. To accomplish this work, OCYF contracts with a prime contractor who in turn subcontracts with approximately 80 private adoption agencies, referred to as SWAN affiliates, across the state. This statewide adoption community has helped to facilitate more than 36,000 special needs adoptions since it started. SWAN affiliates develop and implement county-based recruitment programs that specifically target this population by working hand in hand with county child welfare staff. SWAN affiliates meet directly with county staff to develop recruitment plans that are specific to the needs and abilities of identified children/youth.

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## SWAN (continued from front page)

In an effort to find families for some of Pennsylvania's hardest to place youth, SWAN began the Older Child Matching Initiative (OCMI) in 2008. The SWAN OCMI is a collaborative-diligent recruitment effort to find adoptive families for children over the age of 10, many of whom have special needs and have been in the Pennsylvania foster care system for a long time. The SWAN OCMI is not meant to be merely another type of child-specific recruitment, but rather a diligent, on-going recruitment that "pulls out all the stops" and utilizes all available methods to find permanent families. For example, while Pennsylvania uses the PAE computer-based service to match the needs of all available youth to registered approved families, the OCMI takes the matching service one step further by contacting all families who said they are willing to adopt teens and provides them with more in-depth information about the youth being served through the SWAN OCMI, even if the identified youth appear to have more challenges than the families have indicated they are willing to consider.

In addition to evaluating children/youth's strengths, needs, and challenges, all OCMI child-focused recruiters use the Elizabeth Kubler-Ross Adoption Readiness Matrix to assess children/youth's preparedness for adoption, their attachment development, and the extent of their grief and loss. Based on the assessments, SWAN provides direct services for the children/youth, such as child profiles and child preparation for permanency (sometimes called the 3-5-7 Model). Preparation services help children/youth work through the grief and loss they have experienced before and after entering the child welfare system. Through this program, children/youth answer five important questions:

1. Who am I?
2. What happened to me?
3. Where am I going?
4. How will I get there?
5. How will I know when I belong?

The SWAN OCMI holds and participates in matching events across the state including matching

parties (done in collaboration with the National Adoption Center) and the annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference. OCMI also holds matching events through less formal activities such as minor league baseball games and laser tag. These events allow the children/youth and prospective adoptive families to interact through participating in an activity.

Integral to the search process are the children/youth. Children/youth work closely and collaboratively with their SWAN OCMI recruiters to identify kin and non-kin resources that could become visitation or placement resources. Children/youth participate in the development of their Life Books and Life Maps. They attend numerous matching activities and recruitment efforts, such as being featured on Wednesday Child segments, SWAN-sponsored events, and the Annual Permanency Conference where they present themselves, their interests, likes, and desires for families. Most importantly, children/youth are given a voice by being allowed to read and review Family Profiles on prospective adoptive families who have expressed an interest.

To ensure that progress is made on every case, monthly meetings are held with the Department of Public Welfare (DPW), SWAN prime contract staff, and all SWAN OCMI recruiters. Updates are provided on all children/youth served, barriers to the permanency process are identified and, where necessary, DPW and/or the SWAN prime contractor intervene to eliminate barriers. Some of the typical barriers identified include the need for on-going services, timely access to behavioral health services, and on-going support to the family through the pre-placement and adoption process.

Each year, the OCMI identifies the number of children/youth that can be served. The goal is to find matches for all children/youth that will eventually lead to adoption finalizations. To date, 331 children/youth have been involved with the OCMI. Of those children, 249 were matched with families, 137 were placed with families, and 49 had their adoptions finalized.

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## SWAN (continued from page 2)

In the summer of 2013, Pennsylvania proudly debuted a new media campaign called #MeetTheKids. The campaign consists of three television commercials and a 13-minute documentary. The stars of this campaign are 12 youth from the OCMI who discuss foster care and their need for permanent families. Of the youth featured, six have been matched with waiting families. One of the youth, Jamari, was featured on “The Today Show” in November in honor of National Adoption

Month. The campaign has received a great deal of positive feedback and will continue in 2014 with the creation of three more commercials and a new documentary featuring different OCMI youth.

To learn more about the older children/youth served in the OCMI, take some time to #MeetTheKids: [https://www.facebook.com/adoptpa/app\\_601735633191973](https://www.facebook.com/adoptpa/app_601735633191973). To learn more about SWAN go to <http://www.adoptpakids.org>.



Melinda Lis, MSW

## The Use of R.E.D. Teams to Drive Permanency

By Melinda Lis, MSW

Director, National Resource Center for Adoption

In March of 2012, the District of Columbia’s Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) implemented an overall, broad-based strategic framework to improve outcomes for children and families by working to ensure that children are safe, families are strengthened, children’s developmental needs are met, and children achieve permanence. The strategic framework has “four pillars”:



- **Narrowing the Front Door** focuses on keeping families together and removing children/youth from their homes only when necessary for their safety.

- **Temporary Safe Haven** focuses on CFSA’s efforts to make a plan for permanence for children/youth from the first day of entering out-of-home care and promotes that while children/youth are in custody, they should be placed in the most appropriate, family-like setting that enables continued connections with their family, school and community.
- **Well-being** focuses on CFSA’s commitment to work collaboratively with other systems on the healthy development of all children/youth in care, including attention to appropriate educational, mental health, and physical health benchmarks and needs.
- **Exits to Positive Permanency** recognizes the services families and children/youth may require for stability post-legal permanency or emancipation. Although the Agency hopes that all children/youth efficiently exit care to a permanent home and a life-long connection, this pillar also recognizes the need for older youth to develop the tools necessary to be self-supporting adults.

(see R.E.D. - page 4)

## R.E.D. (continued from page 3)

The Consultation and Information Sharing Framework used in R.E.D. teams (review, evaluate and direct) supports the four pillars in practice. R.E.D., a group decision-making process, was pioneered by Suzanne Lohrbach and Robert Sawyer in Olmsted County, Minnesota. R.E.D. was developed to provide both structure and process in the review of alleged reports of child maltreatment, evaluation of the available information, and direction regarding the agency response.<sup>1</sup>

R.E.D. embodies a method for organizing and analyzing incoming information regarding a report of child abuse or neglect. The team includes staff from a variety of disciplines and professionals, inside and outside of the Agency. A designated facilitator leads the team using an established framework to help the team gather and sort available information:

- A preliminary **genogram** to identify known family members and their connection to the child(ren) of concern.
- **Danger/harm:** The detail of the incident(s) bringing the family to the Agency's attention and any known history of past social service involvement/child harm.
- **Complicating factors:** Conditions/behaviors that contribute to greater difficulty for the family.
- **Strengths/protective factors:** The assets, resources, and capacities within the family, individuals, and community.
- **Safety/belonging:** Any existing strengths demonstrated as protection over time and any pattern/history of exceptions to the abuse/neglect.
- **Risk statement(s):** The preliminary articulation of the perceived risk to the child(ren) and the context in which the risk is most concerning.
- **Gray area:** Information that requires further query to understand its meaning.
- **Next steps:** Immediate actions regarding disposition.

This structured framework results in a clear statement of concern regarding the children/youth which is used to guide practice, delineate next steps, and influence critical decision making. Recognizing the impact that the framework has on critical thinking and coordinated decision making, CFSA expanded the use of R.E.D. teams in 2013 to assist with safety planning, group consultation, and critical thinking around permanency. There are now 10 types of R.E.D. teams utilized within CFSA—two of which are specific to permanency.

The goal of the Permanency R.E.D. team is to increase timely permanency outcomes for children/youth. This R.E.D. team utilizes the consultation and information-sharing framework to assess the barriers and complicating factors to achieving timely permanency and identifies the action steps needed to move a case to permanency. Follow-up meetings are held to ensure the completion of action steps and steady movement toward permanency.

In addition to the permanency R.E.D. team, D.C. also established the BIG R.E.D. The BIG R.E.D. is held with nine supervisors and focuses on systemic barriers that impact permanency. Supervisors use the Consultation and Information Sharing Framework to present cases to upper management. The BIG R.E.D. provides an opportunity for supervisors to practice critical thinking and creative problem solving for complex family issues. Having supervisors apply this framework to cases in their unit and receive input from upper management helps them more effectively coach their staff on how to utilize R.E.D. teams to achieve outcomes.

CFSA utilizes the R.E.D. Team to bring discipline, critical thinking and team coordination. Utilizing this framework at the point of entry and throughout the life of cases helps to ensure sound decisions are being made, thus resulting in positive outcomes.

<sup>1</sup> Sawyer, R. & Lohrbach, S. (2005) Differential Response in Child protection: Selecting A Pathway. American Humane Association, 20 (2 & 3), 44-53.



Shown below is NRCA's latest tip sheet on permanency support and preservation services. Additional tip sheets can be found on at: <http://www.nrcadoption.org/resources/childwelfaretopics/>.



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**TIP  
SHEET**

## Permanency Support and Preservation

Based on the competencies identified in the *Adoption Competency Curriculum*, the following check list and coaching tips were developed to help guide discussions regarding the realities of adoption and are intended to support the work of practitioners.

### Practitioner Check List

- ✓ Provide, during family preparation and assessment, information regarding permanency support and preservation services available within the state, as well as who provides the services.
- ✓ Engage families in developing an individualized plan for family support.
- ✓ Ensure families understand the funding sources and resources for all possible services for their families.
- ✓ Discuss and describe the permanency support and preservation services families and children request most often. Help parents understand the ongoing needs of children/youth who have experienced trauma.
- ✓ Help families understand adoption developmental stages and survival behaviors and their effects on adoption preservation.
- ✓ Help families understand and view crisis as a normal, predictable part of the adoption process.
- ✓ Provide families with information and tools to help them during a crisis. Explain the importance of having a contingency plan to support stabilization of the family during the time of crisis.
- ✓ Support families as they adjust to adoption. Encourage families to take the time to discuss adoption disruption and dissolution and their impacts on children/youth, parents and other family members.

### Coaching Tips for Supervisors

- Provide to staff a current resource list of available services across the state. Ensure staff is familiar with service providers and their specialties.
- Ensure staff is helping families to develop empowerment skills and the ability to network with community-based resources that offer support to families—area churches, schools, and community centers.
- Provide to staff a package of resources and funding sources for permanency support and preservation services. Review the list of funding sources and resources with staff frequently.
- Track the type and frequency of services provided by contracted providers/or those delivered by state agencies. Have some knowledge of national statistics about service delivery from research/literature. Search for evidenced-informed services to share with staff.
- Ensure staff provides families with information about services and needed training necessary to fully support them during the adoption process and after adoption.
- Ensure staff assists families in connecting with parent support groups. Provide information regarding local support groups where there are no or minimal support groups, provide information regarding creating adoption support groups.
- Ensure staff has referral and resource packages available for families before the adoption that contain contact information; develop mentoring families and assign during the preparation and assessment phase.
- Assist staff in developing solution-focused strategies that empower the family to seek support early, utilize peer support, educational groups, and specialized clinical support.



## New Tool: Readiness Assessment Tool for a Community-Based System of Care



While a number of child welfare systems are building continuums of ongoing support for adoptive families and guardians, there has not been a consistent pathway that assesses a community's readiness or assets for developing a robust ecosystem of post-permanency activities. The National Resource Center for Adoption (NRCA) *Readiness Assessment Tool for a Community-Based System of Care* is designed to guide States, Territories and Tribes (STTs) in building a coordinated and integrated system of care to assist families and children/youth both before and after they obtain permanence. The assessment highlights components needed for the development of an adaptive and coordinated system of resources, communication, civic engagement, and advocacy for the development of a meaningful permanency support and preservation program. STTs can utilize the tool to assess their community-based system of care and determine where they can enhance their system through increased community engagement/partnership.

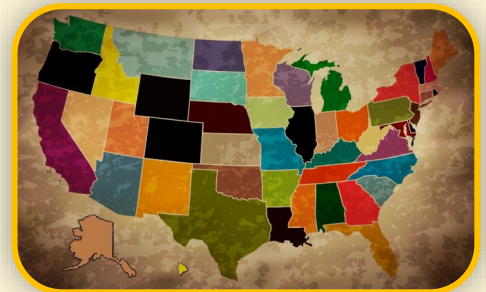
The assessment consists of six components: (1) Vision and Governance; (2) Theory of Change and Ecosystem; (3) The Importance of a Backbone Organization; (4) Leveraging Community Assets; (5) Parents as Civic Entrepreneurs, and (6) Evaluation.

A description of each of these components along with the assessment tool can be found at the NRCA website or by going to the following link: <http://www.nrcadoption.org/national-resource-center-for-adoption/>.

## Five New Stories Posted on Adoption Tapestry

*Adoption Tapestry: Adoption Stories Around the Nation* is a project by the National Resource Center for Adoption (NRCA) that weaves together domestic child welfare adoption stories from around the nation, allowing listeners to develop a picture of the adoption experience. It is our hope that the three to four minute audio stories will help to strengthen the links between individuals connected through their unique permanency stories, inform practice, enhance our communities understanding of permanency, and preserve our families' voices and insight for future generations.

There are now 10 states on the map with adoption stories. NRCA will continue adding stories to the map throughout the year until we have a least one story from every state. If you would like to share your story, please email [nrc@nrcadoption.org](mailto:nrc@nrcadoption.org) to obtain additional information. You can hear the stories already posted on the map by going to: <http://www.nrcadoption.org/map>.



## Recent Adoption Research Summaries

Check out the NRCA website for Recent Adoption Research Summaries (RARS). One article will be highlighted on the NRCA website the first of each month. The purpose of RARS is to transfer knowledge to State, Tribal, and local systems about evidence-based/evidence-informed approaches related to adoption. View these summaries on the NRCA website at: <http://www.nrcadoption.org/resources/recent-adoption-research-summaries/>

## MALDI Alumni Association Forum



The 2014 Minority Adoption Leadership Development Institute Alumni Association (MALDIAA) Forum was held February 24-25 in Romulus Michigan. The first, MALDIAA Forum brought together graduates from the four Institutes that were held from 2005 through 2013. The purpose of the Forum was to learn how MALDI has led to individual leadership development; as well as organizational change and or capacity building within state, county and tribal jurisdiction child welfare systems.

In addition to the alumni presentations, the Forum included key presentations from the Honorable Judge Judy A. Hartsfield, Wayne County Probate Court; Dr. Ann Stacks, Merrill-Palmer Institute; and Dr. Nancy Rolock from University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee.

The National Resource Center for Adoption developed the MALDI program to provide and enhance leadership skills of potential and emerging leaders of color selected from state, county and tribal child welfare agencies from across the nation. These emerging leaders were selected from regions with the highest number of children awaiting adoption and/or high-disproportionally rates.

Their presentations at the Forum highlighted their leadership development and the impact of their projects on families served through the child welfare system. To view these presentations go to:

<http://www.nrcadoption.org/programs/maldi/maldi-alumni/>.

## Webinars

The following are now posted on the NRCA website at: <http://www.nrcadoption.org/webcasts-2/>:

- “Understanding and Complying With Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994, as amended” - Part 1 and 2
- “Re-visiting the Adoption-Guardianship Discussion: Helping Caseworkers Better Understand and Communicate the Permanency Implications of Adoption and Guardianship” (co-sponsored with the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections)