

administrative *update*

2016 SWAN/IL Winter Statewide Meeting
SWAN Prime Contract — www.diakon-swan.org

Tracking Cost and Time for SWAN Services

In order to better understand the costs and time involved with providing SWAN units of service, the state mandated that Diakon/FDR gather essential information about the expenses and time commitment required to complete certain tasks. Going forward, the state will use these metrics to evaluate potential changes to current prices paid for SWAN direct units of service.

On January 4, 2016, Diakon/FDR released a utility in the SWAN Portal for affiliates to track the cost and time efforts necessary to complete SWAN units of service. Collecting this information is a requirement of the 2015–2020 SWAN prime contract for all services referred on or after January 1, 2016.

Cost and time data is collected within the SWAN Portal benchmarks. For specific tasks within each service benchmark, affiliates now must record their practice and travel time, mileage and expenses for tolls and parking. To assist affiliates in navigating the benchmark updates, Diakon/FDR updated the SWAN Portal Affiliate User Guide, found within the SWAN Portal Help documentation, to demonstrate this new feature.

Supplementing the Portal user guide, “Instructions and Guidelines for SWAN Cost and Time Tracking” was emailed to affiliates in December. This document provides detailed information about what actions must be tracked within the SWAN Portal.

Two informal sessions are being hosted during the 2016 SWAN/IL Winter Statewide Meeting so affiliates may ask questions and receive clarification on these new requirements — including one-on-one instructions if needed. Additionally, the SWAN regional technical assistants are equipped to provide support.

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Updated Post-Permanency Brochure

A new Post-Permanency brochure is now available for download at www.diakon-swan.org/swan/documents/item/225. Affiliates may print this document for distribution and add their contact information in the space provided.



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Updates on the 2016 SWAN/IL Summer Statewide and Conference

As many of you know, we changed our venue this year for the SWAN/IL Summer Statewide Meeting and Permanency Conference to the Kalahari Resorts & Conventions, 250 Kalahari Boulevard, Pocono Manor, Pennsylvania. We are excited about the move, but note that it requires some timeline adjustments. If you are planning to attend the conference, keep in mind these deadlines:

- The Matching Reception will be held on Tuesday, June 14, from 6–8:30 p.m. Table reservations will be mailed the week of January 19, and **the deadline for responses from the network is March 11. Walk-in table registrations will not be accepted.**
- The conference brochure will be mailed to families by February 23. This will mean a quick turnaround for responses from families for the family scholarship application — **which has a March 15 deadline.**
- Award nominations are **due by February 19.**
- Conference registration deadlines are very early compared to other years: **Early Bird is April 29, and the last day to register is May 12.**
- The last day to register children and teens for child/teen care is **April 29.** (No walk-ins will be accepted for either group.)

Registering Children with PAE Before Matching Events

Is it possible to make something great even better?

We extend big congratulations to all the agencies that continued the drive to find permanency for our waiting children through matching events in November. Based on the large number of follow-up calls to the SWAN Helpline, we know that many matching events during the month were successful. Affiliate and county staff comment that the network's matching events are invaluable and at times have resulted in more matches than state-sponsored events. This is a very good thing that helps make the network the powerhouse it is.

Our waiting families often speak daily with SWAN Helpline staff because they are so comfortable with this relationship and know that we obtain a lot of information from those calls. Recently, Helpline staff provided an insight that could make the local matching events even stronger: Children presented at these events are not required to be registered with PAE, but families assume they are registered if they are looking for a family. If children are not registered, they can be difficult — if not impossible — to track down after the matching event, thus families are baffled that *all* waiting children are not PAE-registered.

Any child with a primary or concurrent goal of adoption can be registered as active or on hold with PAE. Based on a review of records, we know that children registered and active with PAE achieve permanency 70 percent of the time. Children registered as active are posted to www.adoptpakids.org, where they are exposed to all interested families. Registering the child on hold allows the county to control who sees the child and when. If you know a child will be presented at a matching event, registering them with PAE can help the many families attending the event find them quickly.

Using the JIFF Assessment Tool

The Juvenile Inventory for Functioning (JIFF) is now available to affiliates as the preferred assessment tool for youth age eleven and older and their caregivers. The JIFF replaces the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS) and the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scales (FACESIII).

The JIFF has proven effective in giving youth a voice in the assessment process, as they are more comfortable answering interview questions on a computer. Utilizing the JIFF, youth have disclosed thoughts of self-harm, bullying and drug use — information that their families had not known previously. Workers who currently have access to the online CAFAS system will also be able to access the JIFF at <https://app.fasoutcomes.com>.

Reaching More Post-Permanency Families

Presently, approximately 35 percent of the 2015–2016 SWAN Post-Permanency budget funds have been encumbered. Affiliates are encouraged to continue to reach out to previous families while marketing to potential new families. Based on conversations with affiliates, the SWAN Post-Permanency Quality Scale Survey provides suggestions on reaching families and can be downloaded at www.diakon-swan.org/swan/documents/item/241.

Update on Finalizations

During the first quarter of state fiscal year (SFY) 2015–2016 (July–September 2015), 229 children, including 17 older children (age 13 and older), completed the SWAN adoption finalization service.

Based on data from the SWAN Portal, older children who complete both Child Preparation and Child Specific Recruitment (CSR) units of service are more likely to achieve birth family-related permanency than those who complete only Child Preparation or only CSR. About 20 percent of the older children who completed both services from SFY 2010–2011 through SFY 2014–2015 were reunified with their biological parents or were living with relatives, compared to approximately 14 percent of older children who had only Child Preparation or only CSR.

The Role of Choices When Giving Youth a Voice

“It’s not about us without us.” The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board incorporated this slogan as one of their cornerstones. A growing number of legal processes also emphasize involving youth in their own treatment and permanency planning. It’s important that everyone — from judges to caseworkers to affiliate workers — empower the youth before them to not only use their voice, but also to help them use that voice in a meaningful way.

Working with young children, we often hear that it’s best to give choices whenever possible and make sure that those choices are reasonable. For example, “Do you want to pick up your toys now or after lunch?” rather than “Do you want to pick up your toys now or never, ever again?” As children get older, the choices and options given them become more sophisticated. Likewise, if an older youth says “No way, I don’t want to be adopted!” we need to listen, but that doesn’t mean that the discussion ends there.

We work with the youth to “unpack the ‘no’” and sensitively re-evaluate the question and their response regularly. SWAN services, particularly Child Preparation and Child Specific Recruitment, carefully explore what the youth believes, needs and wants for their future. Youth can learn that they don’t have to let go of their past to have a future.

“Adoption” can be a scary word, loaded with a variety of connotations for adults; imagine how much more so for youth whose lives are in upheaval. “I don’t want to change my name,” “I’m not a baby,” “I want to keep seeing and visiting with my family” and “I’m afraid no one will want me” are common, often internalized and unspoken beliefs. We need to make sure that, as much as possible, the choices we give them are reasonable, acceptable and in their best interests. Beyond giving choices, we also need to help them think through what they’re saying and the implications down the line.

Giving youth a voice, with guidance and fair parameters, is critical in moving them to permanency. SWAN staff across the board can offer ideas to help make these practices natural and positive for everyone!

References: Casey Family Programs and Sue Hoag Badeau (2009). Permanency Values Training: Who *Wouldn’t* Want a Family? Handout 8: “When a Teen Says ‘No’ to Permanence, Adapted from the study *New York State’s Longest Waiting Children 1998*.

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