Focus on Our Families – The Wentzel Family

“Focus on Our Families” is a series of articles that will feature foster and adoptive parents and their experiences, so those inside and outside of the organization will have a better understanding of the importance and the rewards of foster parenting and/or being an adoptive parent.

From the first time they met, Nicole and Jacob Wentzel had at least one common interest. That interest was children. They each knew they wanted to form a family.

As time passed, Nicole and Jacob married. Nicole became a special education teacher and Jacob honed his skills as a cabinetmaker. Soon they were blessed with a daughter and son. Even though they seemingly had the perfect family, Nicole and Jacob “always knew that we would expand our family through adoption.”

Adoption was not a foreign concept to Nicole and Jacob as Nicole’s parents, a cousin, as well as friends, were adoptive parents. Nicole and Jacob witnessed firsthand the gratification and significance of giving permanence and a ‘forever’ family to a child.

Nicole and Jacob decided to pursue foster to adopt as their means to adopting a child.

As part of the Foster to Adopt program, individuals or couples have the goal of adopting a child or children and are approved as foster parents as a means to that goal of providing permanency to a child or children.

Nicole stated, “Friends of ours adopted through CONCERN and had a great experience”, so in March 2016, Nicole and Jacob arranged for CONCERN’s Greater Berks office to provide an information session in their home. Nicole continued, “CONCERN made everything convenient by coming to our home and working around our schedules.”

After learning more about CONCERN and the foster to adopt process, (continued on page 4)
CONCERN Receives Grant

The Power of the Purse in Berks County Fund, administered by the Berks County Community Foundation, has awarded CONCERN’s Greater Berks Regional Office and its Intensive Family Reunification Services Program a grant in the amount of $15,000.

CONCERN’s Intensive Family Reunification Services Program utilizes short-term, intensive, family and home-based interventions designed to reunite families with their children who are in out-of-home placement as quickly and safely as possible. This program is designed to reduce the length of time a child is in foster care by strengthening the family unit.

The project “Enhancements to CONCERN’s Intensive Family Reunification Services Program to Better Empower Working Mothers” is designed to help mothers achieve success by assisting them in reunifying with their children by reducing the barriers in obtaining education and finding employment while providing assistance in accessing community resources to strengthen the family system.

Grant dollars will be used to fund GED preparation and testing, housing security deposits, home transition and furnishings, business attire for interviews and jobs, monthly bus passes to get to and from work and appointments, and other related miscellaneous expenses.

The overall expected outcomes will be achieved by having the women learn skills for entering the workforce, obtain stable housing, and maintain a healthy routine for providing for their children. This, in turn, will reunify six families and reduce significant risk factors for future out of home placement.

The grant will be led by the Supervisor of Community Based Programs and Community Residential Rehabilitation Nicole Kacmar, along with Parenting Educator Meredith Congelio, and Community Based Program Caseworkers.

The Power of the Purse in Berks County was started in 2012 by a group of women to improve the lives of local women and children. The fund functions as a women’s giving circle, where members’ donations are pooled to create a bigger impact than each member could make alone.

Each year, group members review grant applications, visit nonprofits and vote to determine which programs will receive grants. Since the group began, it has awarded over $225,000 in grants to local organizations.
Back on the Airwaves

Since November, CONCERN staff has been interviewed on various radio shows on three separate occasions and on Sunday, May 5 and Saturday, May 25, CONCERN staff made their way back to the airwaves during National Foster Care Month.

In a pre-recorded 15 minute interview simulcast on Cumulus radio stations WMGS/Magic 93 FM, WBSX 97.9 FM, WBHT 97.1/95.7 FM, NASH 93.7, and WARM 590 AM/FM throughout Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, Northeast Regional Office Caseworker Aimee Scaduto and Director of Fundraising & Marketing Art Silverman discussed various aspects of foster care and the need for foster parents on the program Sunday Magazine hosted by Marcy Kester.

On May 25, Bambi Harmon, Maryland Office Assistant Region Director, had the opportunity to appear on Class Act Productions’ First Table live panel webcast to discuss CONCERN, treatment foster care, the differences between abuse and neglect, CONCERN’s role in preventing re-abuse, and the intersection between foster care and mental health/trauma.

Other panel participants included a mental health provider, a County Director of Veterans Affairs, and a veteran.

Thoughts from the President/CEO

When I began my tenure at CONCERN in October 2016, I frequently ended my dialogue using the expression “... and we continue to move forward.”

I stated this mantra at meetings, in correspondence to staff and foster parents, and in my messages in our publications. Nearly three years later, this mantra is just as important today as it was then.

We cannot forget the past because without it, it is difficult to move forward. The past gives us indicators of what to do, what not to do, what went right, and what went wrong. Using the past as a guide, we begin the planning that forms the foundation for our future.

Today at CONCERN, we continue to move forward armed with a new business plan and forecasts for the upcoming fiscal year, which began on July 1. This plan was carefully designed with input from all levels of the agency with our clients and programs being at the forefront of our decision-making. This plan is our blueprint for the year, where all staff and foster parents will continue to play a vital role in our success.

We begin the new year with more than 400 staff and nearly 350 foster parents in nearly 200 homes. We could not even contemplate moving forward without these dedicated individuals who provide our clients with the hope, opportunity, and change we aspire to achieve each day.

We also begin the year fiscally sound with more than 20 programs, and with a promise of additional programs in the coming year, so we can continue to provide a continuum of services to children and families.

We cannot be all things to all people, but we can be the best at what we do to those we serve. This continues to be our pledge as we continue to move forward!
Focus on Our Families

(continued from page 1)

Nicole and Jacob decided to wait until their children were a little older before beginning the process. About a year and a half later, Nicole and Jacob decided the time was right to move forward. In November 2017, a two-week old baby girl was placed in their home and by August 2018, Nicole and Jacob had finalized their adoption and her two older siblings simply adore her.

“Our life has been significantly changed since starting the process with CONCERN. I can’t say enough about how supportive and amazing the staff is. Because of our amazing experience, we have been able to bring more attention to the foster care system by sharing our story. We will continue to support CONCERN and their families.”

Nicole continued her kind words about CONCERN by adding, “Everyone who works at CONCERN is so friendly and supportive. We recommend them to all of our friends and family. CONCERN has changed our lives.”

The Wentzels have continued their support, along with encouraging their church to do the same, by providing the children in our Greater Berks office holiday gifts and by having a back-to-school drive that provided backpacks and school supplies.

As for Nicole’s advice about adoption to others, she says “I’m not going to tell you it’s [adoption] going to be easy, but I’m telling you it’s going to be worth it! Not everyone will understand your journey. That’s fine. It’s not their journey to make sense of it. It’s yours.”

If you wish to experience the joys of becoming a foster and/or adoptive parent like Nicole and Jacob Wentzel, please visit CONCERN’s website for more information at www.concern4kids.org.

Upcoming Events

October 17, 2019 - CONCERN Charity Bingo will be held at the Fleetwood Grange at 6:30 PM and will feature trendy purses, totes, and accessories from Thirty-One and also items from Coach. Admission of $20 includes twenty games of bingo, a hot dog, beverage, and door prize. Additional food and raffle prizes available for purchase.

October 25, 2019 - The CONCERN Education Series will take place at Prince George’s Community College. Co-sponsored by the National Association of Social Workers - Maryland Chapter, the topic of this training is “You Can’t Make Me! Strategies for Challenging Behaviors.” CEUs and lunch are included.

November 2, 2019 - Punchlines & Pasta, a comedy show featuring up and coming comedians, will take place at the Fleetwood Grange beginning at 6:00 PM. Tickets are $30 and will include the show, a spaghetti dinner and dessert, as well as a variety of raffles. This is a BYOB event.

November 15, 2019 - The CONCERN Education Series will take place at Alvernia University. The topic of this year’s training is “Suicide Risk Assessment, Prevention and Intervention Strategies for Children and Adolescents.” CEUs and lunch are included.

For more information or to attend any of these events, contact Jane Zettlemoyer at 610-944-0445, ext. 301 or jzettlemoyer@concern4kids.org.
CONCERN to Pilot Child Protection Training Program

The Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance has created a new training curriculum and they have tapped CONCERN Treatment Unit for Boys (CTUB) Lehighton Campus as one of 16 agencies to pilot the training.

The “Reporting Requirements for Children Served in Residential Care Facilities” training, which began in April, will expand upon the mandated reporter training requirements in the state Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) related to reporting suspected child abuse and focuses its attention in the congregate care setting like CTUB addressing the unique issues faced by staff in these settings.

The issues and situations faced by direct line staff and management in these programs continues to be challenging and clarifies the sometimes gray areas regarding recordable incidents, reportable incidents, and reporting suspected child abuse. This is to ensure incidents and disclosures are documented and reported accurately and in a timely manner as required under the CPSL.

Ryan Nesgoda, CTUB Lehighton Campus Director, states “I am happy that CTUB can be at the forefront for this training as it is yet another step forward in continuing to ensure the safety and well-being of our clients and clients who reside in congregate care.”

CONCERN Celebrates Administrative Professionals Day

During the last week of April, CONCERN service sites, as well as the corporate office, took the opportunity to show their appreciation for the work carried out by administrative professionals and to highlight their importance to the organization.

With celebratory cards, small tokens of thanks as well as lunch, CONCERN supervisors showed their gratitude for jobs well done and being such an important ingredient to the success of our mission.

Without their dedication and various levels of expertise, our offices would not be as efficient and productive as they are every single day.
Exemplary Trauma-Informed Care

For the consecutive second year, CONCERN’s Mansfield and Towanda Behavioral Health service sites have been designated as North Central (PA) Trauma-Informed Care Centers by Behavioral Health Alliance of Rural Pennsylvania (BHARP).

This year, they have achieved this designation by meeting “Exemplary” standards!

By definition, “Trauma Informed Care is an organizational structure and treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma.”

The process for this recognition began in 2016 when CONCERN was selected as the provider of choice for Tioga and Bradford Counties and began full participation in the BHARP’s Trauma Initiative in collaboration with Community Care Behavioral Health (CCBH).

CONCERN has had a long term goal of being a Trauma-Informed agency and this goal continues to be met.

The BHARP designation entailed making changes to the physical environment of the Mansfield clinic to be trauma informed and ensure that our clients feel safe and comfortable. The most subtle of changes can make all the difference in a therapeutic environment. This included changes in the type of lighting, making waiting areas more comfortable, and installing a trauma informed bulletin board with regular postings such as wellness, trauma awareness, and engagement.

In letters to Gordon May, CONCERN’s President/CEO and Jenny Bowen, CONCERN Behavioral Health North Central Region Director, Brittany Skrzypek, CCBH Quality Manager, stated, “The North Central Trauma-Informed Care Center Assessment Committee would like to thank you for the work and time your agency has devoted to ensuring the individuals in our community have access to evidenced based trauma-informed care. We look forward to seeing your agency’s growth in this initiative.”

Two Ways to Shop at Amazon & Help CONCERN

Visit CONCERN’s website – www.concern4kids.org – for some easy online shopping.

Your online shopping at Amazon can result in a 0.5% rebate to CONCERN. Go to CONCERN’s website and click on the Amazon logo located at the bottom of each web page. Amazon “click through” shopping is a free service that supports CONCERN at no additional cost to you. All dollars raised will benefit CONCERN’s Special Needs Fund.

Or go directly to smileamazon.com and sign up to benefit CONCERN!
AmazonSmile is the same Amazon you know. Same products, same prices, same service. Support CONCERN by choosing us as your charitable organization and then shop. No need to go through CONCERN’s website and AmazonSmile will automatically give 0.5% to CONCERN every time you shop!
Saying Goodbye is Never Easy

Saying goodbye is never easy, especially when it involves such a beloved and distinguished staff member, but on May 31, CONCERN did say goodbye to longtime Business Manager Eileen Walters who retired after 39 years of service.

Eileen joined CONCERN as a Business Office Support Staff in 1980 and from 1981 to 1990, she was the Assistant to the Director of Finance. In 1990, Eileen moved into her current position of Business Manager where she was responsible for the oversight and management of the accounting and financial aspects of the agency.

While Eileen was primarily thought of as the agency's chief numbers cruncher, she was so much more than that. Eileen led by example through her hard work and dedication. She was engaging, fair, and offered keen insight into problem solving. However, it was her close relationships with her staff and others inside and outside of the agency that made Eileen truly special.

Her dedication was such that she not only took meetings until her last hours of her employment, but she also mentored her successor Glenn Miller, who joined CONCERN in January and will more than capably continue Eileen's legacy of successfully leading CONCERN's Business Office.

Eileen has left an indelible imprint on CONCERN and profoundly touched the lives of all who encountered her. Her retirement has been both well earned and well deserved and we wish Eileen a future filled with much health and happiness.

Bring Your Child to Work Day

On Thursday, April 25, three children, two grandchildren and a niece of CONCERN staff members came to work to find out exactly what their parent, grandparent, and aunt do all day long while they are at school as part of the “Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day.”

This 26-year old tradition began as “Take Our Daughter to Work Day” and since 2003 has included boys. Some companies, like CONCERN, allow not only children, but also grandchildren and nieces and nephews to take part in this learning experience.

This day is not just a day about curiosity and skipping school. It is a day to inspire the children by example and allow them to imagine and think about their own futures, not just in terms of occupation, but in workplaces where all are welcome.

The day included introducing everyone to staff members, assisting their family members, and participating in a scavenger hunt to learn more about CONCERN. For their hard earned efforts, lunch, snacks, and CONCERN ‘goodie bags’ were provided.

Thank you to all of the children for a great day, as well as to staff members Carri Prior, Executive Assistant and Helene Knapp, Medical Coordinator, for organizing the day’s activities.
Recruiting by Billboard

There is perhaps no better time of the year to recruit foster parents than by coinciding the effort with the celebration of National Foster Care Month. And what better way to spread the word about the need for foster parents than by billboard and the thousands of cars that pass them each week?

During the month of May, CONCERN's Greater Berks Office Recruiter Julia deVos contacted Lamar Advertising and received three discounted billboards that were posted around the city of Reading, PA. In addition, for the second year in a row, Sharon Symuleski, Northeast Regional Office's Office Supervisor, was instrumental in negotiating a donation from Lamar Advertising of 17 billboards that were posted throughout Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties.

These billboards were projected to yield more than one million total impressions for the month.

A Gift that Keeps Giving

Jessica Showalter, Independent Consultant for Usborne Books and More from Leola, PA, believes that encouraging children to read is a great gift and one that keeps giving. Jessica wanted to share that gift with the children in CONCERN's Greater Berks office's care.

Jessica organized a fundraiser that included a donation from her parent company with the result being a donation of 104 books that could be enjoyed by infants, children, and teenagers.

Likewise, Amber Backo, who is an Independent Consultant for Usborne Books and More from Pipersville, PA, approached CONCERN with a similar generous offer to host a fundraiser. Amber's efforts resulted in a donation of 156 books for the children and teenagers in our care.

Usborne Books and More is a division of Educational Development Corporation that distributes books through independent consultants who sell directly to the consumer via home shows, direct sales, book fairs, and websites.

Thank you to both Jessica and Amber for providing the gift of learning to our children.
Recruiters Don’t Just Recruit Families

The job of a foster family recruiter is fairly straightforward – it is to recruit foster families for the various foster care programs CONCERN offers children and youth. To be successful, this involves a great deal of public engagement. A by-product of this public engagement often results in a donation to benefit this same population.

On Wednesday, May 29, Southeast Office Recruiter Laurette McNear presented “Foster Care in Montgomery County” as part of the Eastern Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce Women’s Business Network Luncheon at the Abington Township Public Library. The result of this well received presentation was a $1,000 donation from TruMark Financial Credit Union.

Randi Marmer, Assistant Vice President of Public Relations for TruMark Financial, stated, “Several employees recently heard you speak at a Women’s Business Network Luncheon and they were impressed by the work your organization does in Southeastern Pennsylvania. TruMark Financial takes pride in its community outreach program and on Fridays employees are permitted to wear jeans for a donation to a specific organization with the proceeds for June being designated to CONCERN.”

Thank you to TruMark Financial Credit Union and all staff who participated in this “Jeans Friday.”

Interns Instrumental in Recruitment Process

Each year, CONCERN typically has approximately two dozen interns from local colleges and universities to further their education and complete their degree requirements. Internships are available across our foster care, community based, residential and behavioral health service lines.

While all interns perform valuable services for us, several are typically assigned to work with foster parent recruiters. Since foster parents are truly the backbone of our foster care programs, recruitment is vital to our success.

This past academic year, we had three interns onboard through our Greater Berks/Lehigh Valley offices. These included Paulena Newhard (MSW candidate from Marywood University), Helena Chernyak (BSW candidate from Cedar Crest College), and Margaret Sees (BSW candidate from Kutztown University).

Paulena, Helena, and Margaret engaged in virtually every aspect of recruitment from attending informational meetings to assisting with in-home interviews and writing Family Approval Documents. Paulena even presented the Module 8 Reasonable and Prudent Parenting training. Each intern represented CONCERN in a professional manner, especially when asked to represent the agency at recruitment events such as Boo Fest Peep Fest at Halloween, the Lehigh Valley Pet Expo, St. Patrick’s Day parades, and book store events.

Thank you to all of our interns for a job well done and best of luck in all of your future endeavors.
CONCERN congratulates the many children in care who are active in their schools and communities and achieve personal and public goals. The following is just a small representation of the achievements of our youth over the past several months:

**Youthful Achievements**

Emily E., 15, is typically a reserved kid who does not like to speak up. However, during a team meeting she articulated her thoughts and feelings on some very important issues regarding her life. Emily has also made the honor roll and will be graduating from 8th grade. She has been participating in the Bowie State mentoring program.

Jordan R., 8, received all A’s on his final report card.

Kylie U., 6, did well in school this year and has been promoted to 1st grade.

Payton W., 11, and Saidee W., 10, will be attending Camp Bindenwood this summer.

Skylar U., 5, and Austin U., 4, are taking swimming lessons this summer.

Lee H., 16, and Alonzo H., 13, went to see “Avengers: Endgame” at the movie theater and loved it.

Kathleen H., 4, can write her name as well as the names of all of her foster family members.

Christopher S., 19, loves to go for walks and sometimes walks up to 8 miles a day.

Kayden U., 7, is attending a playground group this summer and is having a good time.

Nicholas B., 5, is attending Vacation Bible School this summer at a local church.

Skylar B., 2, went to Lake Tobias with her foster family and loved seeing all of the animals.

Armani P., 5, and Aliyah P., 3, travelled to Ocean City, Maryland with their foster parents. They enjoyed seeing the wild horses.

Nova S., 1, loves to cuddle with his foster parents and the nurses who provide his care.

Vivienne S., 11, did very well on her last reporting period of school. All her grades were 90% and above. She is doing cyber school and is thriving.

Jermayne R., 6, is making progress in the oral/motor therapy that he attends weekly. He is now eating more foods by mouth.

Eve G., 2, has recently celebrated her 2nd birthday. She can say over 50 words and has started asking to use the potty.

Daylin K., 8, and Naryan K., 6, recently had their bridging ceremony for Boy Scouts.

Brandon G., 20, graduated from Danville High School and was crowned Prom King. Brandon will be returning to Danville High School for another year and will be working with a job coach to work out in the community.

Kali A., 8, was promoted to the 2nd grade with excellent grades. Kali really enjoys school and her favorite subject is science. She has adjusted well to the foster home and has created a bond with another female child in the home.
An Extra Special Celebration

CONCERN’s foster parents and staff routinely celebrate the successes of the children in care, recognizing the “star” potential in each of them.

Since 2010, the Southeast Regional Office has taken this celebration to another level by taking one day of the year to recognize their personal achievements and successes.

On Friday, June 28, the “You Are a Star Awards Ceremony and Luncheon” took place at the Giant Food Stores Community Room in Willow Grove where over 50 foster parents, their biological children, staff and, of course, the children in care gathered to celebrate.

Southeast Supervisor Amy Gramlich served as Master of Ceremonies and opened the program by stating, “This is a very special day to celebrate our children and their successes throughout the year.”

Amy then proceeded to handout 29 awards and certificates in three categories - **Little Star, Shining Star, and Superstar**.

The **Little Star Awards** were given to children ages three and under who regularly displayed good behavior and were pleasant, helpful, and kind. The **Shining Star Awards** were given to children four years of age and older for exhibiting strengths in their school, home, and/or community.

Not every child needed to be in care to receive an award as the **Superstar Awards** were given in special recognition to the biological children who share their homes and their families to help a child in foster care.

The final award of the day was given to honor the memory of the office’s late Regional Director Diane Devlin who helped to create this event and who often cited this as one of her favorite days of the year. The **Diane Devlin Award** is presented to the client who makes a difference every day, going above and beyond in the home, school, and/or community.

This year, the award had a unique recipient as Amy stated, “This year, we couldn’t narrow it [the award] to just one person, as every person in this room makes a difference to everyone else in this room, so this award goes to everyone.”

CONCERN President and CEO Gordon May closed the program by sharing his experiences of being in foster care as a child and subsequently being adopted by his grandparents, thanking everyone for attending, and inviting everyone to attend a buffet luncheon to extend the celebration.
Mission Statement

CONCERN brings hope, offers opportunity, and inspires change.

Vision Statement

To encourage growth and promote positive healthy lives!

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Lehigh Valley Regional Office
Bethlehem • (610) 691-8401
Northeast Regional Office
Wilkes Barre • (570) 800-2332
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Residential Services
Treatment Units for Boys
Coatesville Campus • (610) 384-8733
Lehighton Campus • (570) 386-2990

Gordon H. May, MSW, President/CEO

cconcern4kids.org

CONCERN is on the Move

Effective July 1, CONCERN’s Northeast Regional Office has relocated to Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania.

Our new office is located in the Jewelcor Center at 100 N. Wilkes Barre Blvd., Suite 212, Wilkes Barre, PA 18702 and our new telephone number is 570-800-2332.