This guide is dedicated to the memory of Karen Oldham, a dear friend, colleague and a devoted advocate for making every moment of a child’s life special and unforgettable. If we were to have asked Karen her thoughts about planning an adoption awareness event, she would have provided these helpful tips that we should all try to follow:

~ You can never have too many decorations;
~ Give generously of yourself;
~ Our children should always be in our hearts and guiding of our work;
~ Always try to incorporate music where possible; and
~ When all else fails – be sure to have a bag of Peanut M&M’s around because “M&M’s make friends!”
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FOREWORD

Every day throughout communities across the United States, more than 100,000 children and youth in foster care await families they can forever call their own.

In Pennsylvania, a committed network known as the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, SWAN, exists to address the needs of foster children and youth. SWAN includes caseworkers from county children and youth agencies, juvenile court judges, foster and adoptive parents, private adoption agencies, the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange and many others, all working together on behalf of children who need permanent homes.

“Be inspired by our waiting children”

SWAN’s Legal Services Initiative, LSI, plays a significant role in addressing delays within the legal process that slow a child’s move to a permanent family. By design, a paralegal’s role in each county is flexible and varies to suit the needs of their individual county. Over the years, many of these SWAN LSI paralegals have been asked or have taken the initiative to organize, coordinate and support events that commemorate adoptions, celebrate families and children and bring awareness to the ongoing need for foster and adoptive family resources.

Established by the Department of Public Welfare in 1979, the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange, PAE, helps county children and youth agencies find adoptive families for Pennsylvania’s waiting children. PAE is a major component of SWAN as it serves the counties, affiliate agencies and the general public and interfaces with other state and national adoption exchanges. PAE supports numerous efforts, such as matching and awareness events, in order to connect families who want to adopt with children waiting for a permanent home.

With our Pennsylvania waiting children in mind, we began our endeavor to create a tool to be used by fellow paralegals, county and affiliate workers and additional colleagues in the SWAN network. Our hope was to share our stories, our successes and lessons learned. This guide is intended to get you started and offers suggestions from those who have planned or participated in these amazing events. Keep in mind, this guide is just that—a GUIDE. Your own creativity has no limits and neither does the positive impact of these events.

Be inspired by our waiting children, by their hope and their resilience. Be proactive in spreading the word about foster care adoption. Celebrate our families and children as they begin their FOREVER together!
HISTORY

November’s National Adoption Day is a major event across the country and a wonderful time to get involved with the effort to make a difference in the lives of foster care children awaiting permanent homes in your community. Traditionally held on the Saturday before Thanksgiving, National Adoption Day is the most important single event of National Adoption Month. So how did National Adoption Day and National Adoption Month come to be?

Adoption Week

The roots of National Adoption Day date back to 1976 when then Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts wanted to bring awareness about the foster care children waiting for permanent homes in his state.

“It was a way to highlight the need for adoptive families for children in state care and to celebrate the families who had adopted children,” said Janice Halpern, director of Public Relations and Fundraising for Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange1, in a newspaper article about an adoption in Massachusetts.

This was the first major effort to promote awareness of the need for adoptive families for children in foster care (from www.adopting.org). Later that same year, President Gerald Ford proclaimed that adoption week would be nationally celebrated, and in 1984 President Ronald Reagan proclaimed the first National Adoption Week.

Adoption Awareness Month

Because so many communities and organizations wanted to participate in National Adoption Week, more time was needed for all the events and celebrations. So President Bill Clinton proclaimed November as Adoption Awareness Month in 1995.

Adoption Awareness Month’s primary focus is to create awareness for adoption of children in foster care and those children still awaiting permanent families. Activities and celebrations during November help remind people about adoption and the ongoing need for permanent families for children in out-of-home care. These activities and celebrations are kicked off each year with a presidential proclamation, and at the local level, your city’s mayor can also issue a proclamation for National Adoption Day.

More than 30,000 children have been adopted from foster care on National Adoption Day. This special day is celebrated nationwide with events to commemorate and finalize adoptions of children in foster care and celebrate their adoptive families.

The first National Adoption Day was held in 2000 by a coalition of organizations dedicated to the cause. The National Adoption Day Coalition worked with courts, child advocates, foster care agencies and law firms to complete hundreds of foster care adoptions in nine cities nationwide. The coalition is made up of nonprofit partners, including The Alliance for Children’s Rights; Casey Family Services; Children’s Action Network; Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute; Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption; Freddie Mac Foundation; National Adoption Awareness Month; and Lifetime Adoption Foundation.

Help kick off a National Adoption Day event in your own community! Promote awareness for foster care children and the need for loving families to adopt through events, campaigns, educational opportunities and celebrations.

WHERE DO I START?

You have been asked or have volunteered to plan an adoption day event for your agency. Like planning any event, getting started can be the biggest challenge.

This section gives you a place to begin, a menu of opportunities to choose from, highlights from previous events and a host of helpful planning tool and tips. Please keep in mind that these are only suggestions or points of reference. Your event or combination of events can be as large or small, as simple or elaborate as you and your agency decide! Put your creative hat on and let’s get started…

Answer these questions to help guide your event planning efforts

Who?
- Who do you want to reach with your event?
- Who do you want to honor, celebrate, support, inform or collaborate with?
- Whose presence is needed for that to happen?
Don’t let a lack of money be a barrier!!

Many successful adoption day events haven’t had any. They’ve been held with the support of donations.

Knowing your desired audience will help you develop your attendee list.

**What?**
- What is the purpose of your event?
- What is the desired outcome: adoption finalizations, increased community awareness, family fun?
- What will happen during the event?

Knowing your intended purpose will help you select the type or combination of event types from a menu of event opportunities. Answers will also help you plan activities that will occur during the event.

**How?**
- How will your event be funded?
- How will you get the planning done?

Knowing if your agency has funds for your event will help you determine your need for donations or sponsors.

**When?**
- Will your event or multiple events occur in November? Another month? Once monthly? During the week? Weekend?

**Where?**
- Will your event occur at the agency? Courthouse? Banquet hall? Community organization? Indoors? Outdoors?
- Knowing where your event will occur and limitations on capacity, will help you determine the maximum number of attendees?
- Knowing if your event will be outdoors, will help you plan for potential weather challenges- need for rain date, outdoor coverage such as tents.

Regardless of your county’s size, the funds you have available (or not) or the number of people to help with planning, these events are a success because of their purpose.
Purpose
The purpose of an adoption day celebration is to celebrate the joy of adoption and honor those children and their families whose lives are enriched by adoption. It is also a time to raise awareness about the many children in foster care who are still waiting to be adopted.

Size of Event and County
The size of the adoption day celebration may vary by county. These are some factors that can influence your event:

- Budget
- Number of adoptions that occurred in the county
- Type of celebration: awareness vs. recognition

Location
Another important element to consider is your event’s location. Where will the adoption day celebration take place? Be creative.

Courthouse - Courtroom - Lobby - Courtyard

“Lehigh County’s annual adoption event has been held annually every November since 2002 in our courtroom. It is a joyous occasion that has blossomed over the past 8 years into an incredible celebration and recognition of children who have patiently waited for a forever family; adoptive families who have opened their hearts and homes to waiting children, and professionals who have been instrumental in weaving their lives together.

“The event begins with a proclamation by the county executive of National Adoption Month in Lehigh County followed by a program that is filled with heartwarming stories of matches usually made in heaven! The presence of newspaper and television reporters is indicative of the day’s importance, and noteworthy interviews find their way to the press. The celebration closes with a luncheon for all of the honorees and their guests to memorialize their coming together. It is an extraordinary day that is enjoyed by all!” – Cheryl Bleiler, Manager, Lehigh County CYS.

“I look forward to each monthly adoption day...”

Allegheny County holds adoption day ceremonies monthly in addition to an annual event. Josh Lewis, former director of the Adoption Legal Services Project, ALSP, summarizes the annual adoption day event by illustrating how highly organized this day is each year.
“The courthouse is filled with children and families coming together to celebrate, with the court providing food and entertainment for the families to help them commemorate and enjoy this very special day. Every year, all of the juvenile court judges participate in this event, which includes up to 10 courtrooms concurrently hearing adoption cases! The endeavor has required collective efforts of many staff and volunteers, including SWAN LSI paralegals who typically help to assure that the families find their way to the judge assigned to hear their case. “

“I look forward to each monthly adoption day in Allegheny County. These events provide a time for all of the professionals who work in child welfare to come together and celebrate with the adoptive children and families. Seeing the tears of joy on the faces of a new legal family after an often long and difficult journey through the dependency system provides a concrete reminder of why I chose this line of work.”

Local Park

Festivities could be held at a local park or picnic site. Suggest that your county plant a commemorative tree to remember the celebration in honor of the family, symbolizing the growth of the family.

Banquet Facility (recognition dinner)

Lycoming County held a banquet reception two years in a row for all families who finalized their adoptions in that year. Rick Saylor, director of Lycoming County CYS, stated that each dinner was very well received by families, staff and children. Saylor added, “Judge McCoy read a book to the children each year, and a magician was added to entertain the children the second year.” “The event was a great success,” However Saylor also stated, “I would not recommend this kind of an event if you do not have a large amount of families or if distance plays a factor. It can be difficult for families to travel to the area, especially during the week.”

“As a guardian ad litem, GAL, my primary focus is the best interests and welfare of the child. Adoption day events give me the opportunity to be part of an extremely happy occasion that focuses upon the best interests and welfare of the child. I am proud to be part of such events and I look forward to attending because I consider the adoption day to be another "birthday" for the child because it’s a new beginning for the child. It is the best and most rewarding part of my job because the child receives what every child deserves - a safe, stable, loving and ‘forever’ home.” John Pietrovito, GAL, Lycoming County.

Amusement Park (Adoptive Family Networking)

Each year, all of the children who were adopted during that fiscal year in Westmoreland County, along with their adoptive parents and families, are invited to attend a celebration held at Idlewild Amusement Park. They ask each family to bring a covered dish to share with everyone who attends. Families get the chance to meet and possibly make connections with other families.
When asked about this event, Dawn Marino, SWAN LSI paralegal stated, “The most memorable moment of the day that stands out in my mind was when a family of ten drove into the park and I handed the tickets to them. I recall the excitement of the children in the car and thinking how nice it was to help provide an opportunity for this family to enjoy a day at an amusement park.”

**Attendees**

Know your audience! Use this opportunity to build collaboration among local adoption agencies, courts and advocacy organizations. Who are the people who will attend your adoption day celebration?

- Families
- Adoptees
- Caseworkers
- Judges
- Volunteers (include CASA)
- County Commissioners; Politicians
- Child & Family Profile Writers
- Adoption Advocates
- Policy Makers
Adoption Day Awareness Event

Purpose
The purpose of an adoption awareness event is to focus on the children in Pennsylvania who are waiting for their forever families. This is an educational event that provides resources and information about all aspects of adoption. Awareness events can also be used by counties to generate interest and recruit new foster parents, foster-to-/adopt families, kinship care providers, adoptive parents and other resources for our waiting children.

Suggested Activities
- Set up booths for affiliates to display information and answer questions
- Invite PAE to participate in the event
- Show the Waiting Child CD and PAE posters to spotlight Pennsylvania’s waiting children and create awareness of their need for permanency.
- Set up displays created by foster and adoptive families
- Invite your local library to display adult and children’s books on adoption, foster care, infertility, etc.
- Create a display that highlights local statistics on waiting children, permanency achieved, current number of families serving your children and the specific needs for resources in your county.
- Create a display that show statewide statistics on waiting children, permanency achieved for Pennsylvania’s children and the specific needs for resources in Pennsylvania.
- Have an affiliate present brief matching moments similar to those presented at SWAN/Independent Living quarterly meetings.
- Invite a guest speaker such as a youth, former foster child or adult adoptee.

Audience
These events are usually open to the public. Advertise events through flyers, newspaper ads or articles and local radio and TV stations. You may want to consider inviting foster or other families who have adopted privately or through your agency and ask if they would speak at the event about their experiences. If they are uncomfortable speaking, they could write a brief summary of their story to display at the event.

Matching Events

Purpose
A matching event is designed to aid caseworkers and affiliate agencies in matching children who are awaiting permanency with prospective resource families. This event gives prospective families a chance to really get to know the children who are waiting for adoption more intimately.
than the typical autobiographical packets allow, and if appropriate, the waiting children get to meet families who are waiting to adopt.

**Event**
Matching events can be held in many different ways. Here are three steps to help you:

- **First Step**
  Decide what size you want your event to be. It can be as large or as small as you want to serve the needs of the county and affiliates you hope will attend.

- **Second Step**
  Secure a location that is assessable to the children and families you want to attend the matching event. Examples could be a local church hall, fire station social hall, local restaurant banquet room, conference room at the CYFS agency

- **Third Step**
  Advertize your event. Create invitations and flyers to provide to agencies and families, contact local media sources and provide a press release for them to use and post your event details on the SWAN list serve through Google Groups and on the www.adooptpakids.org website.

**Suggested Activities**
- Guest speakers
- Matching moments
- Question and answer session with the waiting children
- Photo displays of waiting children and families
- Matching party
- Show the Waiting Child CD,

**Audience**
Matching events can be open to the public but are usually more geared towards children awaiting adoption, families already interested in adoption and agencies that provide adoption services. Invites are typically made directly to an adoption agency through a letter, flyer or, email. The agencies would then invite prospective adoptive families and select children awaiting adoption for the event.

**Real Life Examples**
Affiliate agencies often sponsor their own matching events. Most of these events have table displays that showcase waiting children for prospective adoptive families to view. Sometimes guest speakers are featured to speak to the group about the adoption experience. They always feature the opportunity to speak with someone about a child who is waiting for permanency or a family who is waiting to provide permanency.
The results of these events are matches and placements

The PAE sponsors matching events at both the Winter and Summer Statewide meetings. Rooms are set aside for affiliate and county agencies to create table displays of children or families who are waiting for permanency. At the June 2010 Summer Statewide a breakfast event was held in the matching room where waiting children and prospective adoptive families could learn about one another and then got to mingle with each other. Jane Johnston, PAE division manager, noted that two years ago, PAE began featuring presentations created and given by the children themselves for the prospective adoptive families.

Karen Lollo, SWAN PAE coordinator, added, “The teens who volunteer to do presentations at the Summer Statewide matching brunch are very excited to be there. With their caseworker by their side, they have the opportunity to meet families and get to know them a little. At both events, families are eager to meet caseworkers to talk about the children they’ve read about on the adoptpakids website. The results of these events are matches and placements.”

~ Awareness Events ~

In 2004, SWAN began what has become one of the largest recruitment and awareness events in the state’s history at Williams Grove Speedway in Mechanicsburg, PA. The mission of the event was to create awareness of the need for resource families in the community. The event featured photos of youths in need of adoption on sprint cars during a race and placed adoption informational displays throughout the speedway. More than 10,000 community members became aware of the importance of adoption for youth who wanted nothing more than to have a permanent family.

The event was a wonderful example of an adoption awareness success! Over the next five years, more than 25 hard to place youth were matched with families, 10 resource families were licensed, 100 new calls were received about adoption, and thousands more were made aware of SWAN’s true mission of bringing youth and families together for a lifetime.
“The most important piece in planning an event like this is to look at the bigger picture and utilize any and all resources available in the community to create awareness on the largest possible scale,” said Elisa Esh. “Not only were sponsors in attendance, but drivers, their teams, race fans and waiting families came out, showcasing the unique personalities of these youth to the entire community. Without a doubt, it helped youth featured at the event, but it also provided a chance for permanency for more than 700 other youth without an identified resource in Pennsylvania.”

Recently, several awareness events have been held at minor league baseball games throughout Pennsylvania, notably at games for the Harrisburg Senators and the former Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Red Barons. These events draw wide attention to SWAN and our waiting children, while allowing the children to enjoy and even participate in their special day as they threw out the first pitch!

~ Finalizations ~

Adoption day finalization events are a wonderful way to celebrate the creation of a forever family for a child. Finalization events schedule a number of children and families for a final adoption hearing on the same day. Finalization events patterned after National Adoption Day (www.nationaladoptionday.org) are routinely scheduled in November (on or around the Saturday before Thanksgiving). However, adoption day finalization events can and have occurred throughout the year. Some larger areas in Pennsylvania host monthly adoption day events. Finalization events are often spotlighted in the media, while also highlighting the need for children to achieve permanency with a forever family.

A celebration at the courthouse can be a big undertaking, so you will likely need to form a committee to help. You will need to seek the permission of the judge(s) and assistance from court administration or court scheduling to block off the entire day or arrange a sufficient amount of court time for the finalization hearings. Jurisdictions that have hosted finalization events usually clear the court docket and ensure that only finalization hearings are scheduled for the
duration of the event to ensure a joyous and celebratory courthouse atmosphere for the children and families.

You will want to develop a good understanding of the children and families who are available to finalize as part of the event. Some things to consider when indentifying children and families:

- Does a family wish to participate in the adoption day event (some families may prefer a more subdued court day)?
- Has the termination of parental rights, TPR, been granted?
- Has the appeal period expired?
- Are the child and family profiles at or near completion allowing ample time for the completion and filing of adoption petitions and other court paperwork?
- Have adoption subsidy and/or post-adoption agreements been discussed, and will parties achieve agreement prior to the scheduled event?
- Will the event include public and private adoptions or only public child welfare adoptions?
- Please remember that a family’s participation in the event should not delay permanency for the child. Timeliness should also be considered when identifying which children and families might participate.

When using the courthouse as a venue, consider the space available (in the courtroom, waiting room and common areas) to determine an optimal size (number of people, refreshments and activities) for the event to avoid overcrowding.

**Ideas for the finalization event**

Activities that occur as part of an adoption day finalization event can be as simple or as complex as you, the committee and the venue allows. Some jurisdictions select themes for the day and plan activities and characters to fit the theme.

It is common for the county commissioners to have an Adoption Day Proclamation in advance of the event that declares November as National Adoption Month, highlighting the specific adoption day within the county and spotlighting the number of children still awaiting permanency locally, statewide and nationally. *(See Resource section for sample Proclamations- ATTACHMENT A).*
The judge or county agency director may offer opening or welcoming remarks to the children and families to kick off the event.

Refreshments are an easy way to make the day festive. Refreshments can be as simple as beverages, cookies and an adoption cake or as extensive as the venue and your budget will allow.

Activities to keep children busy while waiting for the finalization hearing are a nice touch. Examples: Balloon artists and crafts.

**Fun Tip**
Remember to take pictures of the child, family, judge and others after the finalization hearing.

**Audience**
Adoption finalizations are a closed proceeding. The attendees for the finalization are the children, adoptive families, guests invited by the adoptive families, judges, court staff, attorneys, children and youth staff and volunteers to assist with the day. Other potential attendees may include the county commissioners and the media. If the media intends to do a story on the event, remember that confidentiality of the families must be maintained unless a family grants permission for an interview and releases are signed.
REAL LIFE EXAMPLES
Pennsylvania counties have a long and proud history of participating in adoption day finalization events. Here are just a few examples of their adoption day celebrations.

**Butler County Adoption Day**

“Compile a team of people who will collaborate well with each other, staff, community members, and the court. Start planning! Don’t be afraid to break down the bigger vision into smaller tasks that are more manageable.”- Renee Murray, SWAN LSI coordinator (former Butler Co. LSI paralegal)

Every November for the past four years, Butler County has celebrated adoption day. The planning and preparation to ensure the event will be a success begins well before November. Early in the year, letters are sent out to local businesses in Butler County asking for their financial support. The adoption day committee meets and starts discussing how the money would be best spent in order to celebrate the families. The committee has spent the donations purchasing items for gift bags for the children and families as well as on entertainment for the event day. The committee also spends quite a bit of time reaching out to local eateries to ask if they could donate food or beverages for the event day.

“Compile a team of people who will collaborate well with each other.”

Once November comes around, the festivities kick off with an adoption day proclamation by the Butler County commissioners. On the day of the event, adoptions are finalized, and international adoptions are recognized as well. The families enjoy refreshments, gift bags, entertainment, and family portraits with Judge Kelley Streib. It’s a special day that wouldn’t be possible without the support of the children and youth staff, judges, attorneys, community partners and most importantly, the resource families.

“My favorite outcome from Butler County’s Permanency Initiative has been our local roundtable’s creation of an adoption day celebration. It has become the favorite day of the year with many county employees commenting on how happy and festive the courthouse becomes. It is a day the entire staff looks forward to and devotes precious time for planning. The community effort is rewarding as well with thousands of dollars and donations that help make it special. It’s that rare day the MasterCard commercial would call “priceless.”- Joyce Ainsworth, Executive Director, Butler County Children and Youth Agency.

**Lawrence County Adoption Day**

In celebration of National Adoption Day, Lawrence County Children and Youth Services has held an adoption day celebration on a selected day in November for the past two years. The celebration has been held at the courthouse immediately after scheduled adoptions for the day.
The new adoptive mothers are presented with a bouquet of flowers, and the entire family is given the opportunity to have pictures taken with the judge. A reception is held in the courthouse where cake, cookies, punch and sandwich trays are served along with gifts given to the adoptive child and adoptive families. A professional photographer photographs the new families. Service providers offer information on post-adoption services and plan activities for the kids that range from face painting to arts and crafts. Others who have participated in the adoption day celebration are the county commissioners and judges who have congratulated the new families. Lawrence County CYS has also created informational displays to talk about adoption, including providing information to educate the public about adoptions and a display acknowledging community organizations that have made donations to make the day a success.

Each year, the hard work put into organizing this event has been greatly rewarded with the happiness that the event seems to bring to each family and the joy it brings to each party involved in the celebration.

“When planning an adoption day event, make sure to utilize the skills and connections of individuals within your agency. Discovering the hidden talents that others have, from party-planning skills, to soliciting donations, to those with a creative flair who may be able to help decorate or take pictures of the event, it is amazing what can be accomplished. I would also recommend reaching out to your community, and community businesses, who are always very happy to be involved in such a positive event and in the process are educated further about the issue of adoption.” ~ Brooke Milliron, SWAN LSI coordinator (former Lawrence Co. SWAN LSI paralegal).

Planning Ahead: Timeline

As you can imagine, organizing your event or a combination of events will take time and energy. Advance planning and preparation will be extremely beneficial, not to mention a stress reliever! Whether your event occurs monthly, is a quaint gathering of a few families and staff, or is an all out yearly extravaganza, the leg work you put in and organization skills you apply will truly pay off.

To help you get started thinking about each aspect of planning, we have included a comprehensive event planning checklist and timeline. This tool can be used to stay focused at each phase of the planning process leading up to and including the day of your special event.

Please see a Sample Checklist – Event Timeline Attachment B.
Helpful Tips
While you are bound to learn many lessons on the way to planning your own adoption day event, some of your colleagues have shared some of the following helpful hints or words of wisdom:

- **Location:**
  - When considering venues, if children and youth will attend, family friendly locations are of utmost importance. Chose wisely so that those attending and those supporting your event are comfortable.
  - Know your location’s capacity. The size of your venue will also limit or expand your desired number of attendees.
  - Anticipate extra attendees and guests. It’s almost a given that additional guests will show up. Having additional seating and tables preset for these situations will ease the pain.
  - If outdoors, determine if a rain date is needed. If so, be sure to include that in the invitation.
  - Consider handicapped accessibility needs.

- **Invitation Letters: See Attachment C**
  - Be clear and concise to avoid confusion or capacity issues.
  - Know your attendees’ limitations, if any, BEFORE the invitations are mailed out!!
  - When inviting families, specify if the invitation is intended for household members only or extended family as well.
  - Understand the dynamics and communication that occurs among resource families in your county when developing your guest list. If you intend to invite specific families to an event, such as those who have adopted in the past, be prepared for calls from other families who would like to attend regardless of the invitation details. Discuss these possible scenarios with your county colleagues to assure proper and diplomatic responses.

- **Thank You Letters: See Attachment D**
  - Be sure to thank all those who helped make the day possible—from the families, to the judges, to the donors and sponsors, to the support staff or planning committee. Each person had a part in making your event the best it could be!

RESOURCES

**County**

**Co-workers and County Staff**

Any adoption day event usually involves soliciting the help of many in order for the event to be successful. A great resource in your planning is to develop a committee of co-workers and other county staff who will help throughout the various stages of holding this celebration. From the planning stage, to the actual coordination of the day’s event, this committee would include people who will help: create the theme for the day, plan activities, solicit donations, coordinate the pick-
up of donations and items necessary for the event, and help in the overall flow on the day of the event.

When planning for your adoption day event, consider the resources you already have in your agency. Your coworkers and their family members may possess hidden talents, such as photography or playing an instrument, that you can use for your event for free or at very low cost and will help make the childrens’ day memorable.

“Our community sponsors showed us their unwavering support through donations of food and gift bags for children, families and guests in recognition of our first annual adoption day celebration.”
Lisa Matteo, placement supervisor, Lawrence County CYS

Judge

Involvement from the judge who will finalize the adoptions is a great resource. Invite the judge to be involved in the activities beyond the courtroom. Including the judge at the beginning of your planning will help determine how involved he or she may want to be in the day. While some judges are more formal, others may want a more informal atmosphere that could include time for photos with the adoptive family, for the Judge to talk about what adoption means to him or her or to give a small gift or memento to the child being adopted. As many adoptions may be scheduled for the adoption day, let the judge determine the flow of the day, which might lead to further communication with the court administrator about appropriate scheduling.

Lackawanna County sets aside three courtrooms each year to honor the families and children being adopted. The Honorable Chester T. Harhut stated that CYS does a marvelous job on decorating the courtrooms to make the kids feel special and the kids love it! The judge puts each child in the witness chair and makes it all about them. “This day truly highlights the importance of having a family. It also brings awareness to the public that there are so many children in Pennsylvania needing permanency,” noted Judge Harhut.

The judge should also be involved with as many other activities on adoption day as his or her schedule allows. Invitations could also be sent to other county judges who may want to participate in the celebration.

** A follow up thank you idea that can be personalized for your judge is a collage of pictures from the day with a frame noting the adoption day celebration.

County Commissioners

Your county commissioners can be a great resource if they are invited to participate in the celebration. One way is to ask them to read a proclamation announcing the significance of the day.
Community

Churches - Religious Groups - Places of Worship

Churches and places of worship are often willing to get involved, and they also have larger halls or meeting areas where you might host your event. Often, these groups may be willing to donate their space for free or a minimal fee or in exchange for a donation to their church. Congregations may be ready, willing and able to volunteer their time and energy to help support your event. Individuals may be able to contribute food or baked goods for your guests. Most churches create bulletins for their congregations, which can also be a source of free publicity for the event. Church bulletin boards are a great place to hang posters and awareness information. Churches and religious groups may also help by making gift giveaways (quilts, knickknacks) or by providing music or live entertainment. Leaders of area churches may also suggest church youth, women’s or men’s groups that can offer help and support.

Medical and Dental Providers

Local physician or pediatrician offices may contribute donations or want to become involved with your event. A pediatrician’s office may be able to get donations from drug companies or hospitals. You may also be able to hang posters or flyers in the office that ask for volunteers to help with adoption day or to advertise the event itself.

Some physicians and medical providers have permitted an “angel tree” to be placed in their offices. Angel trees are adorned with photos of children from your county agency or the PAE website who are available for adoption. Photos may also include a brief biography on the child or any other approved information.

Schools/Colleges/Universities

Schools provide unique and creative pools of volunteers. Teachers and guidance counselors make excellent and skilled volunteers who will also hold current clearances if this is a requirement for your agency. Additionally, the guidance office at local high schools may be your best point of contact for recruiting student volunteers as they may need community service hours or to complete senior class projects.

Businesses

Your local communities are filled with businesses that can provide endless resources for you: grocery stores, beverage centers, clothing stores, malls, restaurants, movie theatres, ice cream shops, florists, photographers, magicians, DJs…the list goes on and on…

Some may be willing to donate food, drink, or flowers for your event and attendees. Others may donate gift cards, certificates, tickets or special discounts used as prizes, giveaways and gifts.
Businesses also frequently have public bulletin boards for advertising events and some could provide entertainment for your special day.

Some businesses may be willing to donate at no cost to you. Others may change a discounted rate. It’s never too early to make contact with a local business. Keep in mind that many plan their charitable giving a year in advance.

Community Groups – Organizations

While we have listed multiple opportunities in your communities from which you can receive support and assistance, try to think about any additional groups and organizations that may want to partner or aid you in some way. There may be rotary clubs, women’s and men’s groups, and sports teams, just to name a few.

Service Providers

Service providers are a large category of professionals, which can include those such as SWAN affiliate foster and adoption agencies, mental health providers and parenting centers. These agencies can be great partners and collaborators for your event. Some affiliates may want to support your matching or awareness event. Other providers may place posters and flyers in their windows and lobbies or have the space available to host the event for a minimal or no fee.

SWAN

This planning packet was developed by the Adoption Day Committee, a number of who were instrumental in bringing an adoption day event to their own county.

SWAN LSI

The great news is that there are SWAN LSI paralegals situated in most of the county children and youth agencies throughout Pennsylvania. The SWAN LSI staff have demonstrated strong initiative, volunteer spirit and willingness to assist the county agency with creating awareness, celebrating families, creating matching opportunities and finalizing forever families. They are all available to attend, volunteer and help support your event. As is always the case, you are welcome to reach out to the SWAN LSI staff for more information and ideas.
SWAN Regional Technical Assistants, RTA

The assigned SWAN regional technical assistant (accessible through your LSI coordinator) may have insight into funding that could be available through OCYF to support events occurring in November as part of National Adoption Month. The RTAs and TA division managers are all happy to roll up their sleeves and volunteer to help support and attend events.

Judi Damiano, SWAN Senior Program Manager, shares that, “Planning for adoption day events is a great way for SWAN prime contract staff to collaborate and support one another in the work we do on behalf of our kids and families.”

SWAN PAE

A SWAN PAE coordinator (accessible through your LSI coordinator) comes with both the expertise of the Matching Committee and planning statewide matching events. SWAN PAE coordinators attend and support a multitude of matching and awareness events throughout the year. Their insight and participation is key to a successful matching event.

The SWAN PAE coordinators can assist you in accessing the PAE database of Pennsylvania’s waiting children, the Waiting Child CD and posters of Pennsylvania’s waiting children. The Waiting Child CD was developed for child specific recruiting and provides information about children awaiting permanency.

- Did you know that PAE also maintains the Resource Family Registry? Through the registry PAE may be able to identify local resource families to invite to a matching event.
- Did you know that you can contact PAE or your PAE coordinator to have your event posted on the www.adoptpakids.org website?
- Your PAE coordinator can also help you become part of the SWAN list serve through Google Groups. The list serve is a private group comprised of county and SWAN affiliate agencies. You can post the children and/or families you are working with to this group, ask questions or provide information about services that would be beneficial to the children and families you work with or request assistance and guidance from fellow workers about difficult situations. It’s a wonderful networking tool that everyone within SWAN should be a member of.

SWAN Helpline

The SWAN Helpline is a tremendous resource to both children and families and is the point of entry for Post-Permanency services.
Did you know that the SWAN Helpline works closely with the PAE in support of the matching process through the “Seamless System of Support” to counties and families?

Did you also know that the SWAN Helpline is willing to provide outreach and contact to resource families about matching events?

Program Technical Assistance, PTA

The program technical assistants are experts on SWAN units of service.

Did you know that SWAN PTAs train county agencies on topics such as grief and loss issues, the importance of maintaining sibling connections and Post-Permanency services? Perhaps a PTA would speak at an awareness event in your county on an adoption related topic.

Did you know that Post-Permanency technical assistants can attend matching events so they can share information with families about the supports available to them post-finalization?

The SWAN Network

In many areas of the state, adoption and permanency coalitions have formed to support awareness, training and collaboration about adoption and permanency. Perhaps your county is already a part of a coalition? Perhaps a coalition would be willing to partner with your county for an adoption day event?

One of the most valuable resources available to the SWAN network are the children and families who have participated in the matching process, the child welfare system, the court process and finalization and who are willing to share their adoption story. Perhaps families or older youth touched by the “system” would be willing to speak at an awareness event? Or help plan and support an event?
Media Outreach

Newspapers

Agencies can use newspapers to generate awareness for adoption day events. Most newspapers have community activity calendars where you can post your information about your events. Newspaper reporters may come to your event to interviews workers or families highlighting this special day. Additionally, you can send your local newspaper a summary of your event to showcase your families and what’s happening in your area.

TV and Radio

Community Calendars - Public Service Bulletin Boards
Contact your local radio stations to advertise your adoption awareness events.

Waiting Child Segments

SWAN’s media contractor funds three waiting child television segments that are designed to find adoptive families for older youth in need of families. Waiting child segments have proven to be successful over the years in helping find permanent homes for the children.

- Waiting Child airs on KDKA TV 2, a Pittsburgh CBS affiliate;
- Val’s Kids airs on WHTM TV 27, a Harrisburg ABC affiliate; and
- A Little Love airs on WBRE TV 28, a Wilkes-Barre NBC affiliate.
ATTACHMENTS SECTION
Attachment A - Sample Proclamation

National Adoption Day Proclamation

By Governor [NAME] Of [STATE]

WHEREAS: The state of [STATE] recognizes the importance of giving children permanent, safe, and loving families through adoption; and

WHEREAS: More than 114,000 children in the United States foster care system are waiting to be adopted; and

WHEREAS: More than [NUMBER] children in [STATE] are waiting for permanent families; and

WHEREAS: To help these children find permanent, nurturing families, the local courts of [CITY NAME] will open their doors on National Adoption Day, Saturday, November 19, to finalize the adoptions of local children and join other organizations to celebrate all adoptions; and

WHEREAS: This effort along with similar celebrations in all 50 states, the District Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico will offer children the chance to live with stable and loving families and encourage other dedicated individuals to make a powerful difference in the lives of a child through adoption;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ______________________, Governor of ____________, by virtue of the authority vested in me, do hereby proclaim November 19, 2011, as NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY in this state, and in so doing, urge all citizens to join in a national effort to raise awareness about the importance of adoption.

Governor

2 Additional Proclamation examples are available through the National Adoption Day website.
Attachment B - Checklist – Event Timeline

Checklist-Event Timeline

6 to 12 Months Ahead

Yes No

___  Decide event purpose (awareness, matching, celebration or court finalizations)
___  Discuss and determine desired attendees (fost/adopt families, adoptees, community members, county and affiliate staff)
___  Check proposed date for potential conflicts, court availability, etc.
___  Choose a theme
___  Determine venue if not occurring in courthouse or CYS agency
___  Determine rain date and location if outdoor event
___  Confirm date based on venue availability
___  Research/select a committees/chairpersons (paralegal, adoption staff, foster/adoptive parent representative)
___  Chairperson forms subcommittees if needed
___  Determine available budget/funds available
___  Gather cost estimates (venue rental, food, drink, gifts, advertising materials, etc.)
___  Gather ideas for entertainment (magician, music, clowns)
___  Gather cost for entertainment
___  Gather cost for decorations
___  Gather cost for other major items
___  Create donation list of individuals, community businesses and organizations (for entertainment, food/drink, venue, publicity)
___  Contact potential donors to discuss event and possible donations
___  Compile list of confirmed donations
___  Compile mailing list of donors
___  Develop alternative site (if event is outdoors)
___  Invite/confirm high profile guests (commissioners, community celebrities/personalities)
___  Create logo and invitations for event
___  Create marketing/public relations schedule
___  Develop press release and calendar listings
___  Contact and confirm photographer (check on donation of his/her time)
3 to 6 Months

- Begin monthly committee meetings
- Contact affiliates/PAE staff to attend event (if awareness or matching)
- Contact PAE to have your event posted on the PAE Website
- Post your event on the SWAN list serve
- Follow-up with donors
- Prepare invitations
- Complete mailing lists for invitations
- Order invitations, posters, if not printing in-house
- Obtain radio/TV sponsors, public service announcements, promos
- Set menu-food and beverages
- Get written confirmation of celebrity participation/special needs
- Finalize audio/visual needs
- Select/order awards/prizes

2 Months Ahead

- Assemble/address invitations (with personal notes when possible)
- Mail invitations
- Distribute posters/begin publicizing event
- Confirm TV/radio participation
- Release press announcements
- Follow up to confirm donations
- All major chairpersons to finalize plans
- Hold walk-through of event with responsible committees, chairpersons and responsible site staff
- Review/finalize budget/donation/costs

1 Month Ahead

- Phone follow-up of mailing list
- Confirm dates to pick up donations
- Pick up donations (non-perishable)
- Place newspaper ads, follow up with news media, on-air announcements
- Confirm staff/volunteers for event support (welcoming, introductions, etc.)
- Get enlarged site plan/room diagram, assign seats/tables
- Give estimate of guests expected to attend for food beverage needs
Meet with all outside vendors, if any
Review timeline
Continue assigning seats, speaker’s platform
Schedule deliveries of special equipment, rentals
Confirm setup and tear down times with event site/courthouse/CYS agency
Finalize plans with party decorator
Give caterer revised numbers
Meet with chairpersons, key staff to finalize any of the above

1 Week Before
Meet with all committees for last-minute details
Finish phone follow-ups
Confirm number attending
Finish seating/table arrangements
Secure two or three volunteers to assist with emergencies
Schedule pickup or delivery of any rented or loaned equipment
Schedule and pick up donations (perishable)
Reconfirm event site
Finalize catering guarantee, refreshments
Confirm number of volunteers
Make follow-up calls to news media for advance and event coverage
Distribute additional fliers
Final walk-through
Schedule volunteer assignments for day of event

Day Before Event
Recheck all equipment and supplies to be brought to the event
Decorate venue site

Event Day
Arrive early
Reconfirm refreshments/meal schedule for volunteers
Go over all the final details with caterer and setup staff
Check with volunteers to make sure all tasks are covered
Check sound/light equipment and staging before rehearsal
Have Fun!!
Attachment C - Sample Invitation

(COUNTY LETTERHEAD)

DATE:

NAME
ADDRESS

Dear:

November is National Adoption month! It is a time to honor and give thanks to foster families for the challenging and rewarding work that they do. It is also a time to raise awareness, both locally and nationally, about the needs and concerns of foster children and their foster families. In response to this issue, hundreds of communities across the country are holding events directed at the recruitment, training and retention of critically needed foster parents.

Here in XXXXX County, we would like to invite you to our XX annual XX Event on Day, Month, Year, at time, at LOCATION. This event will be used to thank our local foster parents and to raise public awareness about the number of children currently in foster care in our county. This year’s event is being sponsored by XXXXX County Children and Youth Services, and LIST ALL PARTNERS, JUDGES, COURTS as well as many more guests will be attending this event.

Please join us for LUNCH BRUNCH REFRESHEMENTS immediately after at Location. If you plan to attend the LUNCH/BRUNCH/REFRESHEMENTS, please RSVP by DATE, to CONTACT PERSON at xxx-xxx-xxxx, extension xxx, or by email at xxxx@xxxxx.org in order for us to plan accordingly. Please help us make a difference in the lives of children and help to celebrate National Adoption Month.

Sincerely,

________________
(COUNTY LETTERHEAD)

DATE

Name
Address

To [name]:

The XXXX County Children and Youth Services wishes to express its sincere appreciation to you for your donation of XXXX for our adoption [event details].

Your donation helped to make our Adoption Day event a success and a more enjoyable day for all the children and families who participated! Again, thank you for your kindness and generosity.

Sincerely,

____________________________
Please Join Us As

Washington County Celebrates National Adoption Month 2010

Date: Wednesday, November 17, 2010
Time: 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Location: Courthouse Square Building
Rooms 103 and 104
100 West Beau Street, Washington, PA

RSVP by November 1, 2010 to Kris at 724-228-6885
or Michelle at 724-250-6413

Refreshments, food, gifts and surprises!

Entertainment provided by: Wild World of Animals and Rainbow the Clown
Attachment F - Donation Letters/Donor List

Sample 1:

(COUNTY LETTERHEAD)

DATE:

NAME
ADDRESS

To [name]

I am writing on behalf of the XXXX County Children and Youth Service to ask if your business is able to support a donation to celebrate the children and their families in our county who found a permanent home through adoption during the past year.

Hundreds of communities across the country are holding events during November's National Adoption month that are directed at recruiting, training and retaining critically needed foster parents.

Here in XXXXX County, we are planning and would like to invite you to participate in our XX annual XX Event on Day, Month, Year, at time, at LOCATION. This event will be used to thank our local foster parents and to raise public awareness about the number of children currently in foster care in our county. This year’s event is being sponsored by XXXX County Children and Youth Services, and LIST ALL PARTNERS, JUDGES, COURTS as well as many more guests will be attending this event.

If your business can support our event with a donation of cash, food or gifts for the children, they would be greatly appreciated. Items will be accepted at ADDRESS or you can contact CONTACT NAME at xxx-xxx-xxxx. Thank you for any contribution that your business can make.

Please contact me xxx-xxx-xxxx at XXXX Children and Youth offices, between the hours of 8:30am to 4:30pm Monday through Friday with any questions you may have. Your contribution can make a big difference in celebrating the commitment of and new families created through adoption.

Sincerely,
Sample 2:

__ (COUNTY LETTERHEAD)

DATE

Name
Address

To [name]

November is National Adoption Month. On date, we will recognize and honor our foster parents in XXXX County by holding insert your type of event. This event will consist of awards, a dinner, a raffle ticket drawing, speakers to show their appreciation of foster parents’ roles in helping children in need throughout our communities. We truly value our foster parents and their efforts in making a difference in the children’s lives that they forever touch.

If you would be willing to support our event by either offering an item/gift card from your establishment, a monetary donation or a gift card for a local restaurant or business, it would greatly appreciated. Your business would be recognized for their contribution at the type of event as well as in the local newspaper publication. If you choose to send a check, please make it payable to: XXXX County Children and Youth Services. Please write on the memo line: any wording required by your agency. Also, please provide your name and business/organization in order for you to receive proper recognition. Donations/Checks can be sent to the following address:

Agency Name
Address
Attn: Contact Person

Thank you for your kind consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please contact me by using the following contact information: email address or xxx-xxx-xxxx, ext. xxx.

Sincerely,

___________________
### SAMPLE DONOR TRACKING LIST

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Attachment G - Sample Release

County of Allegheny
Department of Human Services
Marc Cherna, Director

Office of Community Relations
Karen Blumen, Deputy Director
One Smithfield Street, 1st Floor
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15222
Phone: 412-350-5787 Fax: 412-350-5491

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION
Media and Publication Requests

I / We, the undersigned, hereby give my / our permission for my / our child or myself:

NAME(S) [Please Print] AGE(S)

__________________________
__________________________
__________________________
__________________________

PLEASE INDICATE [X] IF YOU GIVE PERMISSION

( ) to be photographed / videotaped and to have the pictures used at the discretion of Allegheny County Department of Human Services for present and / or future public education / outreach efforts.

( ) to be interviewed by a DHS or media representative and to have the interview used at the discretion of Allegheny County Department of Human Services for public education / outreach efforts.

( ) for use of first and last name. ( ) for use of first name only. ( ) for use of age

Individual/Parent(s) Witness

Signature

__________________________

Address

__________________________

Date

__________________________

Signature

__________________________

Address

__________________________

Date

OCR: Office/Personal Photo Release & Statement of Permission/Statement of Permission
Adoption related books are a wonderful gift bag item for children and families participating in Adoption Day events.

Below is a list of popular books on adoption compiled by Charity Brailler, SWAN program technical assistant. Charity shares that Tapestry Books, www.tapestrybooks.com, is a great site from which to order books on adoption.

**Children's Books:**
- *Adoption* (Mr. Rogers Neighborhood) by Fred Rogers
- *Adoption is for Always* by Linda Walvoord Girard
- *All about Adoption: How Families are Made* by Marc Nemiroff
- *The Day We Met You* by Phoebe Koehler
- *Families are Forever* by Craig Shemin and Deb Capone
- *How I was Adopted* by Joanna Cole
- *Mother for Choco* by Kiko Kasza
- *My Family is Forever* by Nancy Carlson
- *Over the Moon* by Karen Katz
- *Tell Me Again about the Night I was Born* by Jamie Lee Curtis

**Tweens and Teens Books:**
- *Adopted Teens Only* by Danea Gorbett
- *Adopted: The Ultimate Teen Guide* by Suzanne Slade
- *Face in the Mirror: Teenagers and Adoption* by Marion Crook
- *All about Adoption: How to Deal with the Questions of Your Past* by Anne Lanchon
- *How it Feels to be Adopted* by Jill Krementz
- *Pieces of Me-Who do I want to be?* by Bert Ballard
- *The Secret of Me- A Novel in Verse* by Meg Kearney
- *Invisible Tears* by Abigail Lawrence
- *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew* by Sherrie Eldridge
Helpful Websites

www.diakon-swan.org (Adoption Awareness & Matching Event Planner; Past Publications; 3/25/08)
www.adoptpakids.org (PAE website)
www.nationaladoptionday.org (National Adoption Day website)
www.davethomasfoundation.org
www.courtkids.org (Comfort for Court Kids, Inc.)
www.nacac.org/adoptalk/adoptionmonth.html (National Adoption Awareness Guide)
www.childwelfare.gov/adoPTION/nam
www.adoptuskids.org
www.tapestrybooks.com
RECOGNITION

We would like to thank everyone who helped with the development of this planner, especially our committee members: Betsy Baker, Tara Erb, Jennifer Gelet, Carolyn Hoffman, Lynn Kovar, Dawn Marino, Brooke Milliron, Heather Reinsel, and Heather Warner. Your creativity, passion and hard work are truly demonstrated throughout this guide.

We would also like to extend a special thank you to all of those who contributed wonderful ideas and suggestions, thus providing us with a glimpse of what’s happening throughout Pennsylvania. We couldn’t have prepared this wonderful resource without your help!

It is the hope of this committee that you will use this planner as a guide in developing your own unique and creative adoption day events to recognize our children and forever families.

Best of luck,

Jill Ferraro-Bruce
Belinda Muschar
Natalie Witt-Washine
BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES

http://nationaladoptionday.org/about/history


Thompson, Ruth, “Hanover Family Shares Their Story of Adoption”, Wicked Local Hanover News from the Hanover Mariner, 15 February 2011