

More Than Cosmetic Changes Partnership with Ephrata Nazarene Bears Fruit

Sierra Hale likes where she is in life right now. She and her husband, Eric, are raising Sierra's five children in a modest two-bedroom apartment in Columbia. She works second shift as a quality control inspector at Kegel's Produce, sells Mary Kay cosmetics on the side, and worships regularly with her family at Ephrata Church of the Nazarene. Her life is stable, and things are almost routine.

Two years ago "stable" and "routine" weren't words that could be used to describe Sierra's life. "I was in crisis mode for many years," she recalls. Without a plan and always dealing with the next thing, she was single, in a bad relationship, pregnant with her fifth child at age 24, mired in debt, and unable to afford housing or to meet her children's needs.

But thanks to a caring church family, expertise provided by COBYS Family Services through Community Connections, and her own resourcefulness, Sierra was able to turn things around. Although her transformation began with a relationship formed through Mary Kay, the changes in her life are far from cosmetic.

In her work as a Mary Kay sales director, Roseanne Bair comes in contact with many young women, and increasingly she was feeling called to provide more than sales advice and beauty tips. Roseanne invited Sierra to attend revival services at her church in July 2013. "That's where she made her personal commitment to Christ," says Roseanne.



Sierra Hale (left) and her mentor Roseanne Bair met through their work with Mary Kay. With support from Roseanne, Ephrata Church of the Nazarene, and COBYS, Sierra has made changes that are more than skin deep.

Sierra began bringing her children to church regularly, and she felt loved and accepted there. "I wouldn't trade my church for the world," she says. "People there are so caring. I've never felt that before."

Initially members of Roseanne's Sunday school class rallied around to help, but they soon learned it would take more than love to address Sierra's complex situation.

The church faces a "constant stream of people coming and asking for help," explains Pastor Rocky

Hambrick. The church would assist a family with their utility bills, and six months later the same family would be back for more help. "We just didn't

feel like we were doing a good job" helping people to overcome some of the obstacles in their lives, he says.

Char Snyder, the congregation's Faith Community Nurse, who assists many of the people who come to the church in crisis, decided to look for help. She had read about COBYS' Community Connections program, where COBYS provides a caseworker to partner with congregations to help

people with complex physical, social, and emotional needs. She and Pastor Rocky met with COBYS staff to learn more and decided to give it a try, with Sierra as the first case. Roseanne became Sierra's mentor.

COBYS Caseworker Matt Stoltzfus first met with Sierra and church representatives in March 2014. Everyone seems to agree that Matt was helpful right from the start. "Matt Stoltzfus is a tremendous guy," says Pastor Rocky. "We have been so impressed with him."

Char agrees: "Matt is just an awesome man of God." She appreciates how he combines gentleness with an ability to "lay it on the line"

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Mission Statement

Motivated by Christian faith, COBYS Family Services educates, supports, and empowers children and adults to reach their full potential.

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The Best Thing About Working for COBYS

In the course of normal conversation or when I am interviewing potential employees, I am often asked, "What is the best thing about working at COBYS?" I am tempted to say the best thing about COBYS is our Executive Director, just to see their reaction. So far, I have resisted that temptation.

What do I like most about working at COBYS? My answer always has been, and still is, the staff. Of course I am a firm believer in the services that we provide to kids and families. That is what our ministry is all about. But our people are the reason those services can be delivered with excellence and compassion.

I could go on and on about the commitment our staff has to kids and families who are going through difficult times. I could tell many stories of how COBYS employees have taken extra time and effort to ensure that our clients are receiving the best care possible. I am thankful that while the work we do is stressful and difficult, we still enjoy being together. We laugh together. We genuinely care for each other. I am blessed to work with many people who take their responsibilities seriously and themselves not so seriously.

But the excellence of our staff goes beyond the work that happens at COBYS. After a very quick, and by no means comprehensive, survey I found that



members of our staff are involved in a variety of church activities. Ten teach Sunday school, four volunteer in the nursery or with children's ministries, twelve serve on a committee, six work with youth or young adults, one leads a women's small group, two are leading overseas mission trips, three help with Vacation Bible School, and another recently spent part of the day packing meals to be sent to the hungry of the world.

One has led a small group of girls for the past six years, shepherding them from seventh grade through high school graduation; another is the secretary for her church; one does payroll for church staff; yet another regularly serves Wednesday evening meals; one directs the choir and leads music; and four sing in the choir.

One staff voluntarily does home improvements for people who need a hand, another assists a developmentally disabled man who has no family, three serve as coaches or board members for sports teams, one chairs the Family Life Committee for a local fire company, three serve in other leadership capacities in community groups, three serve on their school's PTO, one volunteers at a Girl Scout camp, another serves as co-coordinator for a local food cupboard, and still another works with refugees in Lancaster.

And I would like to specifically mention Director of Development Don Fitzkee. In July Don will assume the role of Chair of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board. Don will have significant leadership responsibilities in the denomination for the next two years. Additionally, he will be preaching at the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference on Tuesday, July 14. (You can watch a livestream of the service at brethren.org, beginning around 7 p.m.)

What do I like best about working at COBYS? Working each day with people who care deeply about serving others, both at COBYS and in other areas of their lives.

Mark Cunningham, Executive Director

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when firmness is needed.

“Matt got tough on me one time,” says Sierra, “because I actually needed it. Otherwise he was a sweetheart. I knew he wanted

me to be successful and figure it out.”

Pastor Rocky liked the way Matt explained to Sierra that “if I see I’m working on your problems more than you are, then it is time for us to part ways.” But work hard she did.

“Sierra latched on to Matt’s faithful, steady guidance,” says Rocky.

There was a lot of work to do. “Sierra was totally in crisis from the get go,” recalls Char. She was in

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Ephrata Church of the Nazarene: A Regular Customer

Ephrata Church of the Nazarene has become a regular customer for COBYS Community Connections services. In addition to Sierra Hale, the church has referred three other cases so far. While Sierra clearly is the greatest “success story,” even in cases that achieved lesser results COBYS’ services were helpful to the church.

“We just really appreciate the role that COBYS has played,” says Pastor Rocky Hambrick. “They have been our coach through the whole thing.”

COBYS now is an ongoing partner in Ephrata Nazarene’s response to people in need. Generally, if someone approaches the church with what appears to be a one-time material need, the church helps, as appropriate. When someone returns a second time for help, COBYS is enlisted to delve into deeper issues.

The congregational mentors play key roles in the process. “The agreement is that the mentor is the long-term resource,” says Matt. “I load up the family with all these resources on the front end and then it’s up to the person and the mentor to see it through.”

The church has some very caring and committed people willing to serve as mentors, explains Faith Community Nurse Char Snyder, who is the congregation’s primary contact with COBYS, but these volunteers often lack the expertise in social services that COBYS brings. First-time mentor Roseanne Bair found COBYS’ support to be invaluable and a real learning experience.

In addition to Sierra, the church has made three referrals. Matt and the church worked extensively with a young woman who abused alcohol, was in arrears on her rent, faced consequences of a DUI conviction, and was in danger of losing custody of her daughter.

Matt came on board with the case last August and helped the young woman maintain housing and deal with debts. While he worked with attorneys on issues related to her alcohol charges, mentor Joanna Lucas worked out a payment plan with the landlord for the apartment rent. For a period of

three months, while she was without a driver’s license, church members provided transportation so that the young woman could keep working.

“Anything I told her to do,” said Matt, “she would do it.” She installed an app on her phone to monitor expenditures, worked out differences with a local bank, has maintained her housing, and is paying down legal fines, says Matt.

Challenges remain, says Char, but the young woman’s financial and legal situation has stabilized.

In another case a husband and wife attended two churches, including Ephrata Nazarene, and sought financial help from both. Matt met with the couple and determined

Ephrata Church of the Nazarene Pastor Rocky Hambrick and Faith Community Nurse Char Snyder appreciate the support COBYS provides as the church serves people with complex needs.

that they had sufficient resources if managed properly and did not need the churches’ help. While the intervention did not result in life changes for the family, it did prevent the churches from giving money where it wasn’t needed.

“I was the messenger,” said Matt. “The churches didn’t have to be the bad guys.”

In a similar case, Matt referred a couple with legitimate debt problems to another agency for help. But when the couple was unwilling to make necessary changes, COBYS discontinued services and the church ceased providing financial support.

“Really, what I think this program comes down to,” says Matt, “is that it provides stability and accountability.” Those who are willing to make changes receive the support they need to achieve their goals. But those unwilling to do their part can no longer expect financial support from the church.

“Many times,” says Pastor Rocky, “Matt could say things that we couldn’t say. We’re here to help people and they don’t always want to hear truth-telling from us. But Matt wouldn’t bat an eye.”

“That’s what has been so freeing for us,” says Char. “Now we have a framework to work in.”





20th Praise Dinner Is One for the Record Books

The 20th annual Praise Dinner, sponsored by The Wenger Foundation, Inc., was one for the record books. Held April 16 at the Lebanon Expo Center, the event attracted 850 people and raised \$130,069 for the four participating ministries—a new record and \$25,000 more than any of the past five dinners.

COBYS received gifts totaling \$25,695 from more than 180 donors, which was over \$7,000 more than last year and the largest amount since 1999, the first year that COBYS participated in the Praise Dinner.

“We are rejoicing in the tremendous generosity of the many people who gave through this event,” said COBYS Director of Development Don Fitzkee.

Wenger Foundation President (and COBYS Board President) Rose Walmer cited the 20th anniversary, an increase in ticket prices from \$100 to \$125, and a program that was a “good draw” as factors contributing to the growth.

Marie Monville, widow of Amish schoolhouse shooter Charles Roberts, provided an inspirational and timely message on God’s faithfulness in the face of trial, made more poignant by the recent death of 26-year-old Megan Walmer, a member of the Wenger family and a primary planner of the Praise Dinner. Megan’s parents, Wally and Rose, lit candles to recognize Megan’s absence.

After providing an uplifting set of music prior to Monville’s message, award-winning gospel musicians The Browns topped off the evening by singing “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.”

Business sponsors covered the \$40,000 it takes to stage the event so that all donations benefitted participating ministries. Along with The Wenger Foundation, sponsors included Brightbill Body Works; John Byler; Country Fare Restaurant; Roger & Marjorie Gerhart; Good’s Disposal

Service; Kline, Kreider & Good Auctioneers; Tom B. Morrissey TV & Appliance; Roger & Carolyn North, North Group Consultants; Sight & Sound Ministries, Inc.; Bill & Nancy Smeltzer; Jim & JoAnne Speers; Gene Wenger’s Meats & Fine Foods; and other anonymous donors.

Other ministries benefitting from the event were Evangelical Seminary, Friendship Community, and On Fire Youth Ministry.

Plans Underway for Sept. 13 Bike & Hike

Plans are underway for the annual COBYS Bike & Hike, which will be held Sunday afternoon, September 13, at the Lititz Church of the Brethren. Brochures and information will be mailed in late July.

The event includes a three-mile walk, 10- and 25-mile bicycle rides, and a 60-mile motorcycle ride, and for the second time a silent auction.

Walkers and bicyclists donate a \$25 registration fee, obtain support from sponsors, or both. Motorcycles are \$35 per cycle, plus \$25 for an additional passenger. Those who pre-register by September 4 receive a \$5

discount. Individuals who raise \$25 or more in pledges do not need to pay the registration fee.

Each participant receives a free t-shirt, ice cream and refreshments, and a chance to win a door prize. Those who raise certain levels of support earn additional prizes. Plan now to participate!

We currently are seeking business sponsors and donors of supplies, prizes, and auction items. To learn more, contact Don Fitzkee at 717-656-6580 or don@cobys.org.



A Good Time Was Had by All

Attendance & Giving Up at Family Fun Walk

It was a beautiful day at Peter Becker Community for the COBYS Family Fun Walk on Sunday, May 3, and the results of the event were even nicer than the weather.

Participation grew by 25 percent—from 75 last year to 94 this year. And by the time all the pledges are in, income is projected to exceed \$10,000, up from last year's figure of \$9,949.

"We were thrilled with the participation," said Director of Development Don Fitzkee, "and everybody seemed to be having a good time."

Joan Kabakjian set a new individual record by raising \$1,630. The other grand prize winner was Donna Parcell, whose daughter Sarah walked in her place while Donna was on a short-term mission assignment in Nigeria.

The walk was an event for all ages. Both the Quakertown (\$1,179) and



Joan Kabakjian (above right) set a new individual record as top fundraiser. Sarah Parcell (left) stood in for her mom, Donna, who raised \$625 to win the second grand prize, but did her walking in Nigeria. Also pictured are Julianna, Ken, and Daniel Kabakjian. At right, members of the Gouldey family sport COBYS logo tattoos.

Indian Creek (\$1,002) Church of the Brethren youth groups earned a gym and pizza night by raising at least \$1,000. On the other end of the age spectrum three nonagenarians participated, including 92-year-old Earl Rineer, who walked the full three miles.

Fourteen businesses and friends sponsored the event with cash or in kind donations

(see sidebar). More photos from the walk are posted on the COBYS Facebook page.



Appreciated.

COBYS Family Services recognized three couples at its annual Resource Parent Appreciation Banquet. Held May 4 at Casa di Fiori at the Inn at Leola Village, the event had record attendance of 102.

Ervin & Mildred Zeiset (right) and German & Jean Irizarry (not pictured) were recognized for 10 years of service and Jason and Delores Hoover (left) were recognized for five years. Collectively, these families have cared for 21 foster children, adopted 5 children, and provided short-term respite care for 15 children.

Held in conjunction with National Foster Care Month, the event shows appreciation for the sacrifices that foster/adoptive resource parents make to care for children. Families had opportunity to win appreciation gifts donated by 13 area businesses. The Lancaster Red Rose Chorus entertained with some light-hearted barbershop music.

Currently COBYS has 69 approved resource families caring for 63 foster children from Lancaster and Berks Counties. COBYS holds free monthly informational meetings in Lancaster and Wyomissing for families wanting to explore foster care or adoption.



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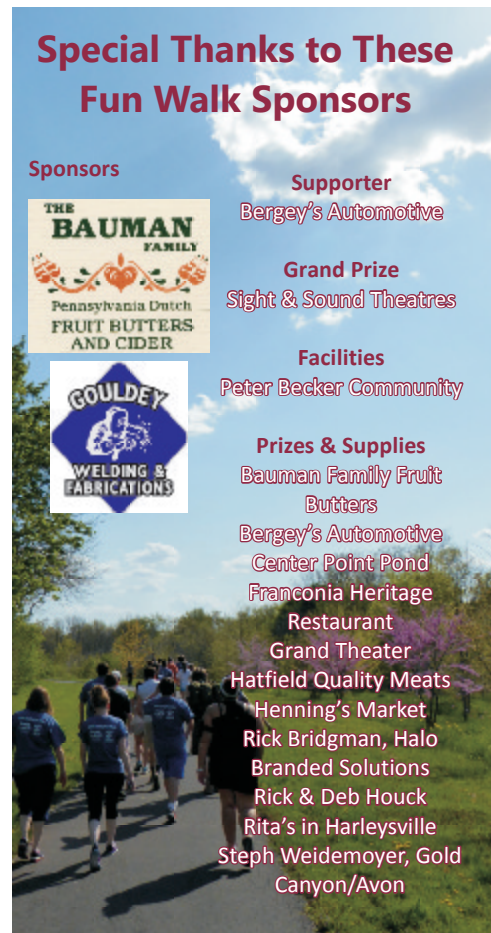
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New United Way Funding Approach Pays Dividends for COBYS

United Way of Lancaster County’s new approach to funding is paying off for COBYS Family Services. Instead of providing annual funding to a specific list of organizations, this year the United Way shifted to awarding three-year “collective impact grants” to groups of non-profits (“collaboratives”) who work together to address problems.

“The strategic changes of United Way have been extremely positive for us,” says COBYS Director of Family Life Services Abby Keiser. “It’s just been exciting to be able to continue to build relationships and work together at similar tasks and goals, instead of everyone doing their own thing.” The new funding strategy, she says, breaks down barriers between organizations.

Under the old model, COBYS did not receive United Way funds, except in cases where individuals designated their donations through the Donor Choice program. The new model opens doors for COBYS to partner with other organizations and receive United Way support.

All told, 40 collaboratives submitted proposals totaling nearly \$9 million. Of those, 16 were awarded \$2,484,000. The grant period begins July 1. COBYS is a partner in three of those funded collaboratives, which will receive a total of \$354,654 in year one. COBYS will receive a portion of that amount in year one and stands to receive about \$130,000 over three years if the funded programs continue to meet established goals.

Each collaborative is headed by a lead agency who submitted the

grant proposal in behalf of the partner organizations. Collaboratives in which COBYS is a partner are described below.

Abby notes that COBYS was a partner in two other collaboratives that were not funded, but partner organizations continue to explore ways to move those projects forward. “There was so much passion behind the projects that we were presenting,” says Abby, “that we want those projects to continue even though they were not funded.”

The United Way is seeking to address what it calls its “four bold goals” through the new funding approach. By 2025 United Way in Lancaster is seeking to halve the poverty rate, get all children ready for kindergarten, make sure everyone has medical insurance and access to care, and help every worker achieve a post-high school credential.

Name: Systems Aligned in Learning

First Year Amount: \$207,000

Lead: Luthercare

Partners: COBYS, Fizika Group, Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality, Lancaster County Council of Churches, the Library System of Lancaster County.

Purpose: Using a van to go to the homes of childcare providers, where resource experts will deliver essential services to the most vulnerable children in Lancaster County.

COBYS’ Role: Educating and supporting in-home daycare providers through small group course instruction and on-site coaching so they can help children enter kindergarten ready to learn.



Name: Impacting Generations

First Year Amount: \$127,500

Lead: Pressley Ridge

Partners: COBYS, School District of Lancaster (SDOL), Susquehanna Valley Pregnancy Services.

Purpose: Supporting teen parents and their children with a focus on educational attainment of parent and child.

COBYS’ Role: Providing two 14-week Incredible Years parenting courses per year for teen parents in the SDOL.

Name: Solanco Family Life Network

First Year Amount: \$20,154

Lead: New Hope Community Life Ministries

Partners: COBYS, Naaman Center, Quarryville Library Center, Solanco Neighborhood Ministries, Solanco School District, Solid Rock Youth Ministries, Southern End Community Association.

Purpose: Providing early intervention, parenting skills, career planning/training, family counseling, tutoring and before-/after-school programs, nutritional support, and support with budgeting and heating bills.

COBYS’ Role: Providing Dina Dinosaur Child Training programs for children in Southern Lancaster County, ages 4-8, with challenging behaviors.

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default on student loans, in trouble with the electric company due to unpaid bills, in a car that needed major repairs she couldn't afford, about to lose her housing due to being in arrears on rent, and at risk of having her children placed in foster care.

She needed a plan and Matt was the guy with the plan. The main things Matt provided, says Roseanne, were structure and accountability. "He had a six-month plan. We took it step by step, and he made her responsible. He was really good at saying, 'These are the pieces I'm going to do and these are the pieces you are going to do.'"

One of the first steps was to establish a budget, but even then Sierra was in too deep to make ends meet. Matt helped her tap into community resources, including a food bank and heating assistance, and helped her search for a higher paying job. He provided credit counseling, served as a liaison with the collection agency that was seeking payment of past debts, and negotiated a settlement amount to satisfy the electric company.

In August 2014, unable to afford rent, Sierra had to surrender her apartment. A church family provided temporary housing for Sierra, and other church families took in her children—including Pastor Rocky and his wife, Sharon, who cared for baby daughter Jordan for a few months. The church provided free daycare for some of Sierra's children in their Grandview Heights Christian Academy & Daycare and, for a time, employed Sierra as a childcare worker.

By November Sierra was piecing things back together. But now,



Eric & Sierra's May 3 wedding "put the cherry on top" of all of Sierra's recent accomplishments.

reunited with most of her kids, she and her family were overstaying their welcome with the gracious church family who had signed up for a few weeks of temporary housing for a grown woman and had ended up with a mom and kids for several months. Things needed to change. Matt worked with Sierra to set a firm deadline to obtain housing, even if it meant going to a shelter.

With a deadline looming, Sierra became "extremely resourceful," in Roseanne's words, and by the December 1 deadline she had moved into an affordable apartment in Columbia and begun a new job. Matt formally concluded his services in December.

"It was bittersweet to have my case closed," says Sierra, "after working so closely with Matt. I gave him a big hug at the end."

Since December things have been going well for Sierra and family. While she still is paying off lingering debts, Sierra and Eric are faithfully following an "envelope system" of budgeting and making ends meet. She is enjoying a new sense of financial freedom that she hadn't previously experienced. "Financially, I'm good," she says.

And she remains active at church, where Char Snyder sees her as someone with great potential to win others to Christ. "I look at this one as really being a triumph," says Char. "We can see that Sierra has really latched on to truth."

And on May 3 Sierra and Eric got married. Roseanne played a leading role in helping to plan the wedding and reception at the church and Pastor Rocky performed the ceremony. He continues to provide post-marital counseling and Roseanne and her husband, Chuck, are supporting Sierra & Eric as friends and mentors.

"Getting married kind of puts the cherry on top," says Sierra.

Here's How It Works

Through the Community Connections program COBYS Family Services provides a caseworker to local churches to help them link families with needs to available services. The church pays an hourly rate for casework services.

The process works like this:

- 1) A COBYS caseworker meets with church representatives to answer questions, discuss expectations, and establish a partnership.
- 2) The church then can refer people who agree to participate.
- 3) The caseworker, a mentor from the church, and the client hold an intake meeting to assess needs.
- 4) A Family Service Plan, which includes short-term goals, is developed.
- 5) The caseworker meets with the client regularly for up to six months to help them achieve the goals of their plan.

Learn more about Community Connections at cobys.org. Or contact Mary Sourber at 717-656-6580 or connections@cobys.org.

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Khalil Needs a Family

Many children in Pennsylvania are legally free for adoption, but do not have an identified permanent home. These children often are called “waiting children.” COBYS adoption staff seek adoptive homes for these children through a service called Child Specific Recruitment.

Khalil needs a family. He is a handsome teenage young man who is described as “sweet” and “caring.” Khalil is quite tall and likes to shoot basketball for fun. He enjoys watching movies, playing video games and card/board games, and eating. Khalil is fond of Chinese food and enjoys sweet treats. He is an



avid sketch artist and creates drawings that he enjoys sharing.

Khalil has been in foster care for

the majority of his life and desires to have a permanent adoptive family.

He needs a family who can provide him with stability and predictability to help him feel secure. Khalil would love to have a family to go to the amusement park with or just come to support him in his school activities.

If becoming Khalil’s adoptive family is not possible for your family right now, consider being a mentor family for him—someone to visit with him, take him out in the community, and form a supportive relationship.

To learn more about Khalil, please contact Sheryl Bernot at sheryl@cobys.org or 717-656-6580.