

'We've Got Your Family Covered'

COBYS Is Catalyst in Launch of Solanco Family Life Network

For a meeting focused on a logo with an umbrella, there sure were a lot of sunny dispositions in the room at the Quarryville Public Library early in the morning on June 15.

Some 35 people, representing

schools, governmental agencies, community organizations, and churches, were on hand for the official launch of the Solanco Family Life Network (SFLN)—an umbrella organization that is bringing together a broad coalition of groups to meet the needs of families in southern Lancaster County. The new SFLN display features a yellow umbrella with a red heart and the tagline

"We've got your family covered."

Through an 18-month grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), COBYS Family Services Community Mobilizer Rithy "T" Ung has served as a catalyst in the development of this group, which addresses challenges such as addiction, poverty, and the breakdown of families.

At the June meeting SFLN leaders Joe Bernotsky and former Solanco School District Superintendent Dr. Marty Hudacs recounted how what began three years ago with a few people gathered around a breakfast table to discuss community issues has grown into a network of more than 90 people representing nearly 50 partner organizations.

The effort picked up steam when COBYS approached school district leaders with the idea of utilizing a \$125,000 PCCD grant to form a Communities That Care (CTC) coalition. The grant period began in January 2015.

CTC is a community prevention operating system that uses a public health approach to prevent youth problem behaviors, including underage drinking, tobacco use, violence, delinquency, school dropout, and substance abuse. The Penn State University EPISCenter provides expertise and gathers data to continue to monitor effectiveness of this evidence-based process.

Current Solanco Superintendent Dr. Brian Bliss, who chairs the SFLN



Solanco Family Life Network members unveiled a new kiosk at the Quarryville Library, where people can seek help or refer others for help. Pictured from left are Neil Uniake, New Hope; Rithy "T" Ung, COBYS Community Mobilizer; Teresa Dolan, Solanco Neighborhood Ministries; Brad Thorne, Wrightsdale Baptist Church; former Solanco School District Superintendent Dr. Marty Hudacs; Joe Bernotsky; and Nicole Leuke, South End Community Agency.

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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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Fostering Hope is the quarterly newsletter of COBYS Family Services, a Christian family service agency, affiliated with the Atlantic Northeast District of the Church of the Brethren.

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Competitive Croquet

I sometimes have issues with being too competitive. Like most people, I find that winning is more fun than losing. But at times, my desire to win has diminished the experience of my teammates and those I am competing against.

I know this about myself. So, many times when I enter a competition, I consciously tell myself to act appropriately and enjoy the event, regardless of the outcome.

I did this a few weeks ago when Director of Development Don Fitzkee and I played in a croquet tournament to benefit COBYS. Yes, you read that correctly, a croquet tournament. Until a few years ago, I didn't even know such a thing existed, and I suspect it may be news to some of you too.

The Whack & Roll is an annual event sponsored by the Mennonite Heritage Center in Harleysville. The Center is the main beneficiary, but 26 additional non-profits also benefited, thanks to the generosity of Bergey's Automotive, who donates \$500 to each organization. The Bauman Family Fruit Butters and Cider supported the Heritage Center by donating the COBYS registration fee, so we came out \$500 ahead, with a free lunch guaranteed and the opportunity to win up to \$5,000 more for COBYS with superior play. We enjoyed our lunch.

COBYS was represented by Don and me and a second team comprised of COBYS supporters Gene Wampler and Kevin Bedell. (Photo, from left, Mark, Gene, Kevin, Don.)



While the tournament game resembles the backyard game we grew up with, there are some differences. This is a team competition, with each match featuring three twosomes. The winning team is the one that gets both players through all the wickets first, or is furthest along when time expires. Playing with a teammate allows for quite a lot of strategic thinking!

Don and I won our first match rather handily, which made it easy to behave. We were feeling not smug, but pretty good, about our chances of being one of the 27 teams to advance to the afternoon playoffs. Then in our second match we were soundly trounced by a brother/sister team. I was gracious in defeat. Despite our loss, we squeaked into the playoffs as the 24-seed. If we could win the next match, we would live to play again and take home at least another \$500 for COBYS.

Our competition was one team comprised of two younger men and another made up of two men that had significantly more life experience—and croquet experience—than we did. The action was fast and furious. (Okay, maybe not fast and furious, but amazingly interesting and surprisingly tense.) When the horn sounded, we were tied with the octogenarians for first place. (I had cleared one more wicket than their best player, but Don was one behind the lesser player, but who's keeping track.) The tie breaker was which team had a ball closest to their next wicket. Unfortunately, the other team was closer and we were done.

The competitive side of me really wanted to go to the next round. But because I had a talk with myself prior to the event, I wasn't too disappointed. We played pretty well, we had fun, we talked to some really nice people, and COBYS received a generous donation and some visibility. I still would have liked to win, but that didn't happen. And that's okay. You know, maybe I am growing up just a little.

But I sure wish we had beaten those two old guys.

Mark Cunningham, Executive Director

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Executive Committee, says that becoming a CTC community acts like a certification or stamp of approval that will help to attract future funding to address challenges. “We can say we are a CTC community,” he explained to the group. “We are approved and have a plan. We are a community that has its act together.”

The CTC process has been implemented in communities throughout Pennsylvania and beyond, says T, but in few places has the progress been as rapid as in Solanco. “Typically it takes three years to get to the point where this group is,” he says, “but this group has been able to do it in 18 months.”

Participants in the process, including Neil Uniacke from New Hope Community Life Ministry, Joe Bernotsky, and T, point to a strong faith component in the process as one factor that has contributed to the success. “I don’t take credit for how this group came together,” T told Network members at the meeting. “I truly believe it is God who is at the center of this.”



The great strides in Solanco have caught the attention of the PCCD, which scheduled a press conference at the COBYS Family Life Center in Lancaster in late June to tout the work COBYS is doing through this grant and others. PCCD, says T, is considering designating the Solanco CTC as a “best practices” model for others to emulate. “It has been a non-contentious group of people coming together to do good, and do more, and do better,” says T. “It’s impressive.”

Building on the earlier work of



Solanco School District Superintendent Dr. Brian Bliss, who chairs the Executive Committee of the SFLN, explained how completing the Communities That Care process sends the message that “we are a community that has its act together.” (Below) The SFLN logo features an umbrella, symbolizing both the coming together of many organizations to serve and the protection offered to those receiving service.

Hudacs and others, the Solanco Family Life Network has been organized, expanded, and branded as part of the CTC process. A comprehensive Community Risk and Resource Assessment has identified areas needing attention, including efforts to reduce drug use and lift people out of poverty. The assessment revealed that half of households in the community earn less than \$30,000 annually, and 30

percent of youth who completed a standardized survey indicated that they live with someone

who uses drugs. Next steps include formulating measurable goals to meet identified needs.

Through its monthly meetings the SFLN already has been meeting needs. When a member of the group presents a need—a family that can’t afford heating oil, a child acting up in school who needs a mentor—it gets taken care of. “When a need is brought up here,” emphasizes Joe, “a contact is typically made to meet the need.”

Beyond the face-to-face contacts, Director of Solanco Neighborhood

Ministries Teresa Dolan took the lead in producing a Community Services Directory that helps people know where to get help. An e-mail network also connects people with needs with service providers.

“Connecting” is a key concept. The predecessor organization that grew into the SFLN was called Connectors. The Network’s core value document explains, “SFLN provides a venue through which individuals and organizations—faith-based, secular, and governmental—can work together. By collaborating and joining forces, we can create a synergy where the whole is greater than its parts.”

“The whole idea of the Network,” says Dr. Hudacs, “is to remove the barriers that prevent people from getting the help they need.”

“Over the past three years we’re building this plane as we’re flying it,” says Joe. “I think just this past six months we have kind of landed, and now this is the official launch of what the network will look like.”

A key feature of the launch was the unveiling of a kiosk in the library where people can use a touch screen computer to connect with the SFLN

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Revamped Website Now Up and Running

www.cobys.org

COBYS Family Services unveiled its new website on Tuesday, June 21.

Designed by Nixonmedia, the site includes a number of “new and improved features,” including:

- A fresh new look with bolder text and photos;
- Responsive design that enables the site to adjust to any size screen;
- Ability to register online for Family Life Education programs;
- An improved interface to make it easier for donors to give;
- A search button and easy to use drop down menus to help users find what they need to know about our programs and services;
- Testimonials from some of our resource families and education clients;
- Greater integration with our Facebook and YouTube pages; and
- Brilliant photography, much of it courtesy of three professional photographers who provided free sittings and electronic photos to COBYS and some of our adoptive families last summer and fall.

Special thanks to Abby Rutter Photography, Ephrata; Anna Gray, Grayceful Impressions, Jonestown; and Matthew Tennison, Tennison Photography, Lancaster. Mark Myers and Marisa Smith provided additional photos used on the site.

Thanks also to Tara Petrilli, who designed our previous site and has been donating her time to do all site maintenance for the past nine years.

Please visit us at cobys.org and give the site a test run. Be sure to try out the Donate Now button while you are there! Let us know what you think!



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website at solancofamily.com. Brad Thorne, the Family and Youth Coordinator at Wrightsdale Baptist Church and designer of the site, demonstrated how users can learn about the Network and refer people with needs.

The kiosk is strategically located next to a new youth area in the library. Funds that COBYS was able to tap helped purchase the computer for the kiosk and also a traveling display that will be used to help get the word out.

Referring to the launch event, Dr. Hudacs explained, "Up to this point it's been building and theoretical. We knew what we were doing, but there was nothing really concrete to show people. What we are celebrating here is that we now have something concrete and visible to capture what we've been doing. . . ."

T points to some other concrete "wins" for the community and COBYS through the CTC collaboration:

- With funding from the United Way COBYS has partnered with others to offer new evidence-based programs in southern Lancaster County, including training for in-home childcare providers, the Incredible Years Dina Dinosaur Child Training Program, and the new Girls Circle and Mother and Daughter Circle programs to support teen girls. New county funding will enable expansion of some of these programs;

- Through its involvement in the SFLN, CAP of Lancaster was led to initiate a Head Start program in Quarryville;

- The Network helped catch the attention of Lancaster General Hospital, which will partner with COBYS and two other agencies to host a forum on heroin addiction in the southern end this fall; and

- Many positive relationships have been formed that raise the visibility of COBYS and its services and help other

service providers to understand the needs of the Solanco community.

"Everybody feels good about the meetings when they walk away," summarizes T. "That's a good coalition." T had reason to feel especially good as he walked away from the June 15 meeting—his last.

By design his Community Mobilizer position concludes June 30. He can take satisfaction in knowing that the Solanco Family Life Network that he helped to encourage now has families covered under that yellow umbrella with the red heart.



Thanks for Serving!

COBYS Family Services recognized six foster/adoptive resource families at its May 2 Resource Parent Appreciation Banquet. A total of 126 parents, staff, and board members attended the dinner, which is held in conjunction with National Foster Care Month. The program included a dramatic portrayal of the story of Esther by Piercing Word Ministries.

Honored for 10 years of service were Nelson & Treva Bollinger (above right). Recognized for five years were (from left) Jason & Brenda Breckbill, Wayne & Amy Coty, and Brad & Mimy Rollman, along with (not pictured) Rebecca King, and Eric & Melissa Newswanger.

Collectively, these families have provided foster care for 20 children, adopted 7 children, and provided short-term respite care for 27 children.

Currently COBYS has 85 approved resource families caring for 80 foster children. This is the highest number of children in foster care with COBYS in two decades.

COBYS holds free monthly informational meetings in Lancaster and Wyomissing for families wanting to explore foster care or adoption. Sign up for one on our website, or contact Resource Home Coordinator Rachel Eshbach at 717-656-6580 or rachel@cobys.org.

21st Praise Dinner Is Another Good One



(Left) Performing for the first time as a trio, the award-winning former quartet The Taylors inspired with their gospel music. Jake Walmer (above), representing the third generation of Wengers involved in the dinner, welcomed the crowd. Pastor Mike Sigman (below) preached on the feeding of the 5,000.

After receiving an unusually high amount of donations at last year's special 20th annual Wenger Foundation Praise Dinner, COBYS was expecting the number to drop back a bit this year to more typical levels. Instead, 190 COBYS givers all but matched last year's amount with donations of \$25,849, nearly equal to last year's \$26,038.

"We were really thrilled that the giving was so strong again this year," said Director of Development Don Fitzkee. "There are so many generous people!"

Held April 21 at the Lebanon Expo Center the Praise Dinner featured a buffet meal, gospel music by The Taylors, and a message on the story of Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 from lead pastor Mike Sigman of Grace Community Church in Lancaster. Country Home Catering didn't feed 5,000 at the dinner, but the crowd of 800 was impressive enough. All told the event raised

\$121,481 for the four participating ministries.

Business sponsors covered the \$40,000 it takes to stage the event so

"When we do what we can with what we have, Jesus will take care of the rest."

—Pastor Mike Sigman



that all donations benefitted participating ministries. Along with The Wenger Foundation, special thanks to: the John & Judy Byler Charitable Foundation; Brightbill Body Works; 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; Wengers of Myerstown; and other anonymous donors.

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

Weather Bad, Giving Good

Family Fun Walk Expected to Set Record



(Above) Damp weather didn't discourage the large contingent from Coventry COB. (Right) Joan Kabakjian, pictured with husband Ken and son Daniel, raised nearly a third of the event's donations. (Below) Ice cream puts a smile on everyone's face.

A few suggested that hot chocolate might have been a better refreshment choice than the traditional ice cream at the May 1 Family Fun Walk, but despite cool and dreary weather that dampened attendance, the event is expected to establish a new income record.

Held at Peter Becker Community in Harleysville, the 22nd annual Fun Walk attracted 70 participants—down from 94 last year—and is on track to set a new income record by the time pledges are in. The previous record, set last year, was \$11,250.



Income as of June 21 was \$11,138.

The Family Fun Walk consists of a three-mile walk, followed by ice cream and fellowship. Participants make a donation, obtain support from sponsors, or some of both. Each participant receives a t-shirt and opportunity to win a door prize.

Top fundraiser Joan Kabakjian was the big reason for the growth in income. With the help of some super sponsors who pledged to match her pledges up to \$1,500, Joan raised \$3,310, the most ever for this event and more than double the previous record, which she set last year. Joan received a grand prize of a Cracker Barrel rocking chair.

The other grand prize winner was Donna Parcell, who received two tickets to Sight & Sound Theatres' production *Samson*. Donna raised \$580, despite being in the Middle East over the time of the event.

Contributing to the drop in attendance was the absence of

youth groups. For the first time in at least 13 years no youth groups earned a gym and pizza night by raising at least \$1,000. Indian Creek Church of the Brethren saw its 13-plus year streak come to an end.

Thirteen businesses and friends supported the Fun Walk with cash sponsorships or prizes (see below).

More photos from the event are posted on the COBYS Facebook page.



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20th Annual Bike & Hike Seeks to Raise \$120,000

Plans are underway for the COBYS Bike & Hike, which will be held Sunday afternoon, September 11, at the Lititz Church of the Brethren. Brochures and information will be posted online and mailed in late July. A financial goal of \$120,000 has been set for the 20th annual event.

The Bike & Hike includes a three-mile walk, 10- and 25-mile bicycle rides, and a 65-mile motorcycle ride, which this year travels across the Susquehanna into York County. A silent auction runs throughout the afternoon.

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 2 receive a \$5 discount. Individuals who raise \$25 or more in pledges do not

need to pay the registration fee. Last year nearly 500 participants raised more than \$118,000 to support COBYS ministries.

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.

We currently are seeking business sponsors and donors of supplies, prizes, and auction items. To learn more about the event, contact Development Associate Nicole Hurst at 717-656-6580 or nhurst@cobys.org.