

Family Life Education: Incredible Years Autism Class

Making Connections

Parenting under perfect circumstances is not easy, and perfect circumstances never occur. Rather, the journey of parenting is filled with challenges. One specific challenge is parenting children on the Autism spectrum. COBYS Family Services assists families in this space by offering the Incredible Years Autism and Language Delays program. Bobbi Petherick participated and Zach Heaton will be participating in the class to help with challenges they face in parenting three-year old Elliott. Bobbi provided the following insight.

Why did you choose to receive services through our Family Life Education program?

My son was receiving support through early intervention and during that time was diagnosed with Autism. His speech therapist recommend this program to our family.

What was the most helpful part of the Incredible Years Autism class?

I found the discussion and insight from other parents to be insightful and helpful. Our instructors were parents themselves and it was easy to relate and connect. They were encouraging and were prepared with material and discussion topics.

"It's ok if something doesn't work. This really encouraged me each week to try the suggestions given, and if it didn't work, that's ok. Try something else."



"I found the discussion with the other parents to be insightful and helpful."

How did you apply the guidance you received through the class to actions in your home and family life?

We continue to relate back to a theme that was discussed in several of the classes which was, it's ok if something doesn't work, continue to find new things and try. This really encouraged me each week to try the suggestions given, and if it didn't work, that's ok. Try something else.

What kind of improvement did you see in Elliott and your family once you received services?

We have focused on giving clear and concise messaging to our son. Keep-

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Children diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder generally have deficits in social communication and interaction, as well as restricted repetitive behaviors.

1. Difficulties in social-emotional back and forth communication.

- Does not respond when name is called.
- Does not start a conversation.
- Cannot smile in response to another person's smile.
- Does not seek out physical contact and affection.

2. Difficulties in using non-verbal communication for social interaction.

- Limited use of eye contact.
- Struggles to understand and use gestures.
- Speech volume, pitch, tone, rate, rhythm, and/or stress seem off.
- Cannot use or understand facial expressions.

3. Differences in developing and maintaining relationships at his/her developmental level.

- Cannot adjust behavior to suit the context.
- Cannot join in imaginative play.
- Trouble making friends.
- Absence of interest in others.

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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Kindness Matters



Verna Moseman, a friend of COBYS and a member of the Lititz Church of the Brethren, died on January 5, 2021. I know that might not be the best opening to an article, but please keep reading, it gets better.

Approximately 30 years ago, Verna and I served on a district commission together. I was newly married and recently graduated from seminary. My wife was also newly married (interesting how that works) and recently graduated with a degree in physical therapy. We had many bills and little income. Like many young couples, we were broke.

At one of the commission meetings, someone brought a snack to share that included Ritz crackers. This was a special treat for me as we weren't in a position to afford such a luxury. Generic brand? Sometimes. But not the real thing! Verna heard me mention that Ritz crackers are the best, and someday, if I was in a better financial position, I would buy Ritz crackers, rather than the generic brand.

Two months later, after the next meeting was over and I got in my car to leave, I noticed that someone had put a box of Ritz crackers on my seat. Asking Verna if she was the one who put them there, she smiled and said, "no." It was obvious to me that she did.

One of COBYS core values is life is sacred. And one of our fundamentals that goes along with that core value is be kind to others. Verna was kind. And her simple act of kindness has been remembered for 30 years.

Be kind to each other. We never know how our acts of kindness may affect someone many years later.

Mark Cunningham,
Executive Director



Wanted, families with:

- Compassion
- Acceptance
- A heart for kids
- A servant spirit
- Generous hearts
- Open arms
- Love
- God's call to serve



COBYS is looking for loving families

If you have ever considered becoming a foster or adoptive parent to children in the foster care system, now is the time.

Learn more. Eat ice cream. Meet COBYS' staff. Meet foster families.

Fostering Hope: Families Wanted
Foster Care and Adoption Awareness Event
Saturday, May 22, 2021
10 am - 2 pm (drop-in)

Oregon Dairy Market & Restaurant
Contact: careforkids@cobys.org



Giving **Twice** as Nice
A Double Portion of Joy



Double Your Impact....

This year, instead of the traditional Wenger Praise Dinner, the Wenger Foundation invites you to consider donating to their 70k for 70 Years campaign. \$70,000 in matching gift funds has been committed by a generous group of sponsors in honor of the 70th anniversary of Foundation founders, Carl and Margaret Wenger. The hope is to raise an additional \$70,000 from individual donors like you. Funds can be designated to COBYS Family Services' Family Life Education program and three other nonprofits.

Donations should be made by May 31, 2021 and can be given by check or online with a "Praise Dinner Gift – COBYS Family Services" designation.

For all the details and to donate, visit, www.wengerfoundation.org.

PRAISE DINNER 2022 ~ SAVE THE DATE

THE WENGER FOUNDATION
25th Annual

Praise Dinner

RESCHEDULED TO NEXT YEAR:
Tuesday, April 19, 2022

Lebanon Expo Center, Lebanon, PA

FEATURING:

~ The Singing Contractors
~ Dr. Jim Ehrman

Reservations for the Praise Dinner will open early next year.

The Faces of COBYS

Which of the COBYS core values (LIFTS) do you personally value most?

Ashley Landis,
Foster Care, Admin.
Assistant

Servanthood resonates with me the most. My position is often filled with tasks that feel small or menial, but when I remember Christ's example of servanthood, it brings a new perspective to my responsibilities. When I look at my tasks as a way to serve others, it suddenly gives my job new meaning and purpose.



What's something cool about your department that you'd like people to know?

Heather Martin,
Senior Foster Care
Caseworker

Not only are we all co-workers, but we're real life best friends! We also have zoom chats every other day because we can't go that long without seeing each other.



Which of the COBYS core values (LIFTS) do you personally value most?

Kristin Kuhn,
Foster Care/Resource
Home Coordinator

Integrity – In my role, I especially value and want families to know that I will always be truthful and forthcoming with them when I am calling with referrals. We are asking them to care for and love on a child and I know they are entrusting me to provide them with all the information we have and can possibly obtain before the placement.



Connections



Thank you. We are so grateful for the interest and support we received for our first livestream, virtual banquet. Even virtually, we hope we strengthened the connections you have with COBYS.

We had no idea what to expect from a “banquet event” where you don’t meet in person. We weren’t sure how many people would “show up” to watch.

But you did. You certainly did. Here’s what we do know:

- A week after the livestream there were more than 250 views of the livestream and/or video, accounting for many more individuals tuning in.
- 40 banquet bags were purchased of various sizes (many including multiple totes), so at least 200 people potentially still enjoyed Gene Wenger’s ham loaf during the banquet.
- More than \$31,000 has been donated to COBYS, specifically designated to the Banquet, with thousands more general donations being contributed over the last several weeks.



Executive Director Mark Cunningham and Director of Development Anne Stokes hosted the online, livestream event on Thursday, March 11, 2021.

Although we weren’t able to meet in person, in some ways COBYS supporters were able to get a more personal look at some of the work we do every day. Short videos of COBYS’ staff explaining what and why



In the row above from left to right, some of the COBYS employees who shared stories in videos shown during the banquet about what they do every day at COBYS Family Services: Adoption Coordinator Melanie Rankin, Senior Foster Care Caseworker Alyssa Hosler, Foster Care Coordinator Courtney Beiler, Family Life Education Supervisor Holly Hardin, Senior Adoption Caseworker Morgan Adams, Adoption Coordinator Stacie LaBarbera, Foster Care Caseworker Morgan Spencer (with Mark Cunningham), and Permanency Supervisor Ruby Nolt.

Banquet

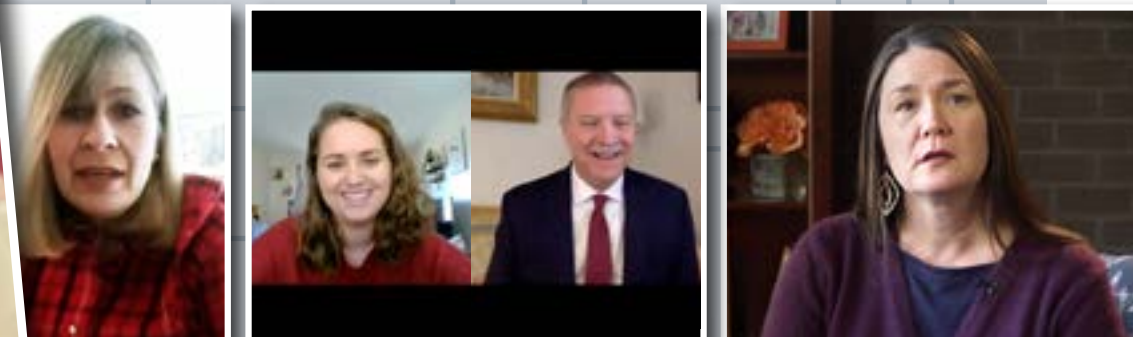
they do what they do provided a glimpse of the impact COBYS has on the people we serve.

The foster care, adoption, counseling and family life education services we provide profoundly impact the lives of children, individuals and families who are in need of support. Banquet attendees learned how COBYS works to fulfill a calling to provide Christ-like care to our clients and each other. This care is made possible in part because COBYS supporters share the call to help with financial donations, bridging the gap from providing basic services to potentially life-altering care.

We thank all who donated to COBYS through this event.



COBYS adoptive parents Lindsey and Caleb Stiger shared their stories of joys and challenges of foster care and adoption as well as reflections of the process of adding two adopted children to their family.



**To watch or donate, visit:
www.cobys.org/banquet2021**

COBYS Core Values

The acronym LIFTS represents five core values that the COBYS team uses to guide the way we live out our mission in the work we do every day.

L Life is Sacred. Believing that all people are created in the image of God, we recognize the inherent worth of each client by exhibiting empathy, compassion and respect.

I Integrity. We strive to be honest, authentic, and trustworthy in saying what we mean, matching our behaviors to our words and taking responsibility for our actions.

F Faith. Jesus is Lord of our organization. We trust him to provide for our ministry's needs and to empower transformation in our own lives and in the lives of those we serve.

T Teamwork. Respecting our unique contributions, we value and care for each other, both personally and professionally, and enjoy working and growing together.

S Servanthood. Servanthood leadership is reflected perfectly in the life and person of Jesus Christ. We seek to integrate the highest standards of professionalism with Christ's example of joyful service.

L·I·F·T·S

As a way to engage and learn from each other's experience, the opportunity was opened up to all COBYS staff members to share a personal reflection on one of the fundamentals, which is then distributed by email to all staff and board members. The following was shared recently by Senior Adoption Caseworker Jamila Witmer on the Fundamental: Pray for each other, identified under the Core Value of Faith.

A couple months ago, I was confronted with the idea of how much our view of God affects how we pray. *One member of my small group asked another to imagine God asking her, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked this question frequently in the gospels, prompting people to name their desires and needs, even though he could see the depths of their hearts better than they could. It reminds me of the image of a parent gently asking their child to "use their words" to say what they want, even when they might already know what the child wants. If we could pray with this image of God in mind- as our Father who eagerly waits for us to tell him our heart's desires- I wonder if some of us would pray more often, and with more faith.*

What if we imagine God asking that question about someone we love or care about: "What would you like me to do for [insert the person's name]?" God knows better than we do what that person needs, so sometimes we have to slow down and listen to the Holy Spirit to know how to pray for that person. But sometimes the need is right in front of our face and our heart is broken by what we see. In the work that we do, this happens a lot. I'll be the first to admit that sometimes I end the workday with a heavy heart, and I don't turn those needs over to God to let him carry the load for me. But when I do, I'm "using my words" to invite God to come into a situation and meet the needs of my clients.

So now... slow down for a minute... think of the person who is heavy on your mind right now, whether it is a loved one, a coworker, or a client who is going through a rough time.

Now imagine the God of the universe, who made the heavens and the earth with just a word, who put life into humanity with just a breath, and who loved us enough to give up his power to become human. This God is with you, and with the person you just thought of. So go to him and entrust the situation into his very capable and very loving hands.

May we hold this truth in our hearts throughout this week and beyond, trusting that God loves those in our lives even more than we do and he is eager to act on their behalf if only we ask.

Matthew 7:7-12

⁷ "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Mathew 11:28

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Making Connections

continued from page 1.

ing our language simple. An example is, "brush teeth then play with trains." vs. "let's brush your teeth then you can play with your trains." Keeping it short, to the point helps a lot.

Would you say that there is less conflict over completing tasks between you and your son now than there was before taking the class?

There is less confusion and [more] peace of mind now that I know what my son wants and/or needs. For him, I think it felt overwhelming. He did not understand what I was saying because I was speaking in full sentences. Now that I am speaking in shorter sentences and connecting those words with his communication device (he uses a Nova 8), we are connecting more frequently. We understand each other's needs and/or wants. I can say "clean up, toys into the bin," and he cleans up. If I ask, "would you like a snack?" instead of saying, "It's snack time, would you like to eat a snack now?", he can more easily understand and reply, "yes." The one phrase that I took away from the class that we use several times a day is "this then that." For example, "brush teeth, then go

"There was no judgement. It was open dialogue that provided resources. You take what works for you and your family."

outside," or "toys away, then paint time." This phrase has really been a game changer for us.

If others are experiencing family struggles, what would you say are some reasons they should reach out to receive Family Life Education services?

There are many unknowns and much misinformation regarding Autism. It can be overwhelming and a parent might not know where to turn. This is why attending this class was so helpful. There was no judgement. It was open dialogue that provided resources. You take what works for you and your family. The instructors spoke from professional and personal experience, and you hear from other parents. So, you are not alone, and there are places that can offer help.

Our goal as parents is to provide our children with the tools necessary to be successful in life. By attending this class, we learned valuable tools that we can use to help build a connection with our child. You will learn ways to connect, engage and understand your child. Once you start to understand your child, you will have more connections, and you will see them bloom. You will have more time enjoying each other's company, versus trying to understand each other.

Would you recommend the class you took provided by COBYS to others?

Yes!

Responses edited for clarity.

Fundamentals

Nearly two years ago, the COBYS leadership team identified twenty-six fundamentals to elaborate on what it means to live out our five core values and the practical ways that we can apply them daily.

Life is Sacred:
Be kind to others
Respect others
Listen generously
Be your best self
Practice empathy

Integrity:
Communicate honestly
Strive for excellence
Be responsive
Strive to do the right thing
Finish well

Faith:
Expect miracles
Listen for God's voice
Pray for each other
Practice grace
Practice blameless problem-solving
Extend forgiveness

Teamwork:
Give credit where credit is due
Work collaboratively
Be intentional about building relationships
Be flexible
Enjoy each other

Servanthood:
Serve joyfully
Address conflict
Care for what is entrusted to us
Practice humility
Be aware/Change the toilet paper roll and wash the dishes.

Restricted Repetitive Behaviors, Interests or Activities for Children with Autism

1. Stereotyped or repetitive speech, motor movements or use of objects.
2. Insists on sticking to routines, patterns of behavior, refusing to change.
3. Fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus.
4. Over or under response to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment.



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SAVE THE DATE - SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2021



Our 25th Year

*Hi Ho Silver Anniversary
We ride (or walk) again!*

**Sunday, September 12, 2021
Lititz Church of the Brethren**



Be on the lookout for more information this summer!