

Parenting: from the Single Point of View

Every home looks a little different, just like the adults and children who live there. Children in foster care need a safe and loving home with adults who care for them, whether the parents are single or married.

Hannah Hardy is a foster and adoptive single parent who had a longtime passion for children that led her to pursue foster care and adoption. She has a four-year-old adopted son, Matthew, and is currently fostering six-month-old Baby Y. Her insight into the journey of foster care and adoption is unique to being a single parent, but also universal to the experience of foster and adoptive families.

How long have you been a foster parent with COBYS? How long did you foster Matthew?

I started fostering in August 2017, so a little over four years. I fostered Matthew for two years and five months before he was adopted.



What led you to decide to become a foster/adoptive parent?

I have always had a heart for children. As a teen and young adult, I wanted to foster and adopt one day but figured it would be after I was married and had biological children. After graduating college and working a few years, I started feeling called to foster more and more. I had the personal goals of having my own house without roommates and being debt free, that I thought I should reach before starting to foster.

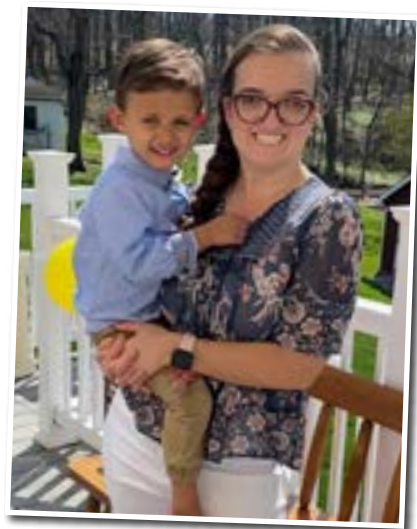
I bought my home in March 2016, and after settling in, I started to research about fostering and talk to people I knew who fostered. I attended a COBYS information session in the winter of 2017 and then went through training to get approved as a foster parent.

What do you think is unique about fostering/adopting as a single parent?

As a single foster/adoptive parent, I can give my full attention to the children that I have in my home. Granted, I work, am involved in church and have family and friends outside the home, but when I am at home, all of my

energy goes towards my kids. I see this as a blessing! I have never been married, so I don't know firsthand, but I know it takes work, as does every relationship. As a single parent, I can focus solely on my children and on the relationship they have with each other. It is also nice that I only need to manage my schedule when it comes to visits, court and caseworkers.

When I get placement calls, I am the one to determine if this child is a right fit for my home and if I feel I can give the child what he/she needs. I don't have to factor in another person's ideas, comfort level or opinions. It might seem selfish, but it is just how it is as a single parent. Just as there are those unique blessings, there are also times where it would obviously be easier to have another adult in the home. I find most of these times are when I need an extra set of hands.



What kind of traits do you think single parents need to be successful in fostering/adopting?

You have to be independent, a strong voice for yourself and your kids (foster or adopted), confident in your ability as a single parent, but also be willing to ask for help. Most of these traits I had before I started fostering, but they have shifted since I became a parent. Probably the thing I have learned most is to ask for help, even with little things, so that I can focus on the big things.

What does a good support system look like to you?

Single parents absolutely must have a strong support system. People who can strengthen you emotionally and spiritually, and people who will help practically with things. My support system is made up of my family, friends, and foster/adoptive community. My family supports me through encouragement and prayer. They all live at least six hours away so they can't help on a day-to-day basis. My church family and friends help me emotionally, spiritually and practically. They remind me that no matter what "God's got it", God knows my future and knows the future of the little ones I care for. My small group at church sets up a meal train for me when I get a new placement. My foster/adoptive

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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Being Thankful



The effects of Hurricane Ida that came through on September 1 were felt at the COBYS main office. The creek next to the building rose over the banks, was in our building, and was within an inch or so of flooding the bottom floor. When I got to work on the morning of Thursday, September 2, there was some water in the middle section of that floor, but the outer offices were completely dry. I am not sure how that happened. Nothing was damaged. No furniture (which had been raised off the floor) needed to be moved. A shop-vac took care of the water that was there. Other

than that, we were good to go!

I have been thinking about thankfulness recently. I learned that my car that my daughter drives (she is still in school, so until she gets out, I pay for the upkeep of that vehicle) needs \$1,500-\$2,000 of work done to pass inspection. I also learned that my car needs about \$1,500 of work done. I found myself being grumpy for about a day. Then I started thinking about the blessings in my life, and trust me, they are numerous! And as I focused on the positive things, my mood changed almost instantaneously. I am 57 years old. I know this. I know that I am supposed to focus on the blessings in my life. I Thessalonians 5:16 says, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." I KNOW what I am supposed to do. I KNOW that I am supposed to be thankful. I KNOW that focusing on the blessings and the positive things in my life make me and those around me feel better. And yet, I find myself failing. This thing called "faith" truly is a journey.

It is not lost on me that as I am thankful that the flooding in our building wasn't worse, there are many who have lost much, including lives, in that weather event. Our mild inconvenience is nothing compared to what many experienced. And even if the entire floor got flooded, in the big picture, it would still only be a mild inconvenience.

Sometimes it takes a larger event to jolt us back into remembering to be thankful in all things. For now, that has happened for me. My prayer is that you continue to be thankful for the blessings in your life.

Mark Cunningham,
Executive Director



COBYS Core Values -LIFTS

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

Single Point of View from pg. 1

community has helped me so much emotionally through this journey. Just to have people that understand the ups and down of foster care and that know the system is so important. We don't "commiserate", but we do share in each other's blessings and struggles.

You have experience with fostering, reunification, adoption and now fostering after adoption. Are there unique things about each?

At the beginning of each case, there are so many unknowns. When I got the call for my now adopted son, I was told he might only be with me a few weeks. Four years later and he's still here! With my foster son who was reunified with his birth mom, no one thought he was going to be returned to her when he was. I got a call one afternoon after court that I was to take him to the office the next morning for reunification. I have had my current placement for almost five months and the goal is reunification. When I had my first placement, it was only me I had to worry about emotionally. The ups and downs were hard and sometimes devastating, but I could handle it because it was only me that was hurting. When my second placement was reunified, it was a complete shock. At the time, my son was young enough that the baby leaving our home abruptly didn't seem to bother him. Fostering now is very different. My son is four, he asks lots

of questions. Now I worry about him and how foster care is affecting him.

What would you like people to know about relationships with biological parents of children?

Building a relationship with biological parents has always been important to me. I try my best to let bio parents know that I care about their child, but also them. I print them pictures, get them birthday flowers and Christmas gifts. With my current placement, we have a journal that goes back and forth at visits so that I can update the parents. I also ask for pictures of the bio family so that I can put them in the child's room. I continue to have a good relationship with my adopted son's maternal family. I email her every month with an update and pictures. We also see his bio mom and her family four times a year.

What is one thing you have learned about yourself through your journey of being a foster and adoptive mother?

I have learned that I am strong and that I am a good single parent but that I cannot do this alone. First and foremost, I need the Lord. His strength is what makes me strong. People say to me "I don't know how you do it" or "I could never do what you do." But it's



not me, it is Christ in me. On my own, I could never shoulder the weight of foster care or motherhood. Foster care is by far the hardest thing I have ever done but it has also brought me my biggest blessings. I also cannot do this without the people around me who support me.

What encouragement would you offer to single people who would like to foster or adopt?

First, PRAY. Dig deep and determine your motives for fostering. Be called to foster/adopt. Begin to gather and build your support system even before your first placement. If you feel called to foster and feel that this is what God has for you, don't let anyone tell you that you can't do it because you are single. As I am teaching my son right now, every family looks different. That is okay! Talk to another single foster parent about their journey. I love to be a resource for other single foster/adoptive moms. It's okay to be a single, working foster/adoptive mom. Some people assume that foster moms should not work; not true!

The Faces of COBYS

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

Beth Daigneault, Adoption Caseworker
We provide six different units of service within our department: Child Specific Recruitment, Child Preparation, Child Profiles, Finalization, Post-Permanency and Family Approval Documents! We dig our hands into a little bit of everything.



What is one difficult reality about the work we do that you would like people to know?

Hannah Vigil, Foster Care Caseworker
A difficult reality about work at COBYS is that it requires employees to fully give of themselves to others each day. COBYS employees invest socially, emotionally, and physically with both clients and families. This work is incredibly difficult but extremely worthwhile.



25th Annual Bike & Hike Sets New Record

COBYS Family Services held its 25th annual Bike & Hike on Sunday, September 12. The popular event and the beautiful day brought out more than 325 walkers, bicyclists and motorcyclists to raise critical funding to support the organization's ministries of foster care, adoption, counseling and family life education.

More than \$160,000 was raised this year, making it the highest grossing Bike & Hike to date, topping the previous high of \$148,000 in 2018.

"We are amazed at this fundraising effort by hundreds of COBYS supporters along with their friends and family in the local community and across the country," said Anne Stokes, director of development. "While the dollar amount certainly is an achievement, what we are most pleased about is that those who donated recognize the importance of our services to the community and trust COBYS to provide quality care with compassion, dignity and hope."



108 riders participated in the 65-mile motorcycle ride through the countryside to Camp Swatara and back.



A 25-mile and 10-mile course welcomed 53 bicyclists for a ride through the beautiful farmland of Lancaster County.



Thank You!



On the sidewalks of Lititz, superheroes abounded!



Executive Director Mark Cunningham offers a word of thanks and a prayer.



Director of Development Anne Stokes shares an overview of COBYS and sends the walkers out on a new route through the beautiful borough of Lititz.



The top three fundraisers were Don Fitzkee and Lancaster Church of the Brethren with \$11,050, Floy Fitzkee of Manheim, with \$9,070 and Londa Brandt of Manheim, raising \$8,525. Additional gratitude goes to Mari Cunningham and the Cunningham family of Lancaster, for raising more than \$20,000 for the adults, children and families served by COBYS.



COBYS is grateful to all participants and those who sponsored them, our corporate partners and individual donors. A special thanks is offered to the Lititz Church of the Brethren for again graciously hosting the event and other congregations for raising significant funds for COBYS. Groups from Little Swatara Church of the Brethren combined to raise over \$2,500, Mountville COB raised over \$3,300 and James Wenger of Mountville raised \$2,705. Individual, congregational and business philanthropy offer foundational support to our ministries, allowing us to continue providing our essential services as we have been doing for more than 40 years.



ICE CREAM SUNDAES!

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2020-2021 Annual Report

COBYS has maintained its essential service delivery over the last year that was defined by challenges related to the coronavirus pandemic. While the way services were delivered became a mixture of virtual and in-person, the level of care never wavered. As we move beyond the pandemic, positive changes to service delivery will be maintained. We continually evaluate the services we provide and adjust staffing levels and services delivered to ensure fulfillment of our mission, that **motivated by Christian faith, we educate, support, and empower children and adults to reach their full potential.**

COBYS employed 126 staff, including 56 full-time and 70 part-time employees during the year. During the past fiscal year (July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021), COBYS served children and families in these ways:



Adoption. The COBYS Adoption unit provides a range of services that assist children and families during the foster care process, in finalization of adoptions and in the life-long journey for families who have experienced adoption. During the coronavirus, adoption services continued with virtual service delivery, including

completion of adoption finalizations by courts through virtual hearings.



The following units of service were provided:

- Child Specific Recruitment30
- Child Preparation.....69
- Child Profiles119
- Family Profiles39
- Adoption Finalizations.....25
- Post Adoptions Services70

To date, 604 adoptions have been finalized by COBYS.

Counseling. This past year a large portion of counseling sessions were delivered through telehealth, maintaining much needed services while demonstrating the value for patients in having telehealth as well as in-person options available in the future.



Foundation to continue efforts in equipping unlicensed therapists to become licensed. Through these efforts, we will be able to hire at least two more therapists over the next three years to serve children and their families.

During the past year, Counseling provided and engaged in:

- 7,507 therapist hours of individual and group counseling services

- 163 successful discharges even in the midst of the pandemic
- 159 new patients added since July 1, 2020
- The completion of training in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) for two therapists, an evidence-based treatment model for children and adolescents who have experienced trauma

Counseling received a three-year grant from Lancaster Osteopathic Health



Foster Care. The Foster Care department provides safety and stability for foster children in need of compassionate care. This includes providing resources and accompanying children as they navigate varying emotions experienced through the removal from their families.

Foster Care statistics for the past year:

- 19,227 days of care were provided to 119 children
- 12 sibling groups and 6 medically needy children were served
- 64 children were discharged from care, 19 of these to parents or other relatives

- 17 foster children were adopted, while 1 child aged out of the foster care system and 27 were discharged to other placements
- 74 children were placed with COBYS resource families
- 112 resource families were served, including 12 new resource families who were approved
- 7 pre-service training classes held, training 29 families interested in becoming a resource family

This was a challenging year for the foster care team, but they continued to learn new ways to connect with children and families virtually as well as provide necessary resources as inevitable system delays became reality. It has been a joy to begin experiencing in-person visits

again with children in our care. We also began to see an increased number of children in care that had decreased during the pandemic.

We are thankful that families continued to hear the call to become foster/ adoptive parents amidst the pandemic. We built upon our first experience providing Zoom classes for our pre-service training to create a hybrid format of live and pre-recorded trainings to families. Families responded to the great need for pre-teens and teens by expanding their age preferences to include older children. We are looking forward to resuming in-person gatherings with our resource families.



Family Life Education. This year Family Life Education (FLE) switched to (almost) entirely virtual classes. Removing the barriers of transportation, travel time and childcare has proven very successful in retaining class participants. We also began a new evidence-based curriculum, the Blues

Program, targeted to teens with anxiety and depression.

FLE statistics for the past year:

- Number of classroom hours.....694
- Number of participants served.....675 (620 adults, 44 youth)
- Number of courses held.....43 including Incredible Years Autism, a Kinship Program, Blues Program and Cooperative Parenting & Divorce

- Number of workshops held.....25 workshops related to communication, kinship and managing personal stress
- Service delivery locations were mostly virtual though classes were held in-person at Conestoga Valley School District, Ephrata Area School District, Lititz Early Learning Center and Stumptown Mennonite School



Permanency. COBYS is contracted by the Lancaster County Children and Youth Social Service Agency to act as the county caseworker, working with parents and families on their court approved plans for reunification. We help them access court-required services to work towards children returning to custody of parent(s). We also assure the safety of children in their out-of-home placements.

The program promotes a stronger and more stable family unit and helps families understand their needs and requirements. The goal is for families to reunify whenever safely possible.

During this past year, staff in our Permanency Unit walked alongside children and families, resulting in the following:

- 105 kids from 75 families were served
- 9 kids from 9 families were reunified
- 20 kids from 15 families were transferred to adoption
- One child was released to a legal guardian through subsidized permanent legal custodianship
- Two children were released to self/ signed out of care as they turned 18 years of age

There was a very low number of children reunified with their biological parents during the year. This was largely due to the coronavirus pandemic which caused court system delays and lack of in-

person resources available to biological parents. Numbers of reunifications are expected to increase next year, however, there has also been a backlog of cases where termination of parental rights will occur so that children are able to be adopted. As a result, these numbers will also see an increase in the coming year. Both outcomes occur with the best interest of children in mind.



Financial Support. COBYS Family Services has been blessed through increased private dollar giving this past year by individuals, churches, businesses and other groups. We hope that these increases will be maintained for future years, as we use these resources on a yearly basis to cover the gap in funding between what state and county contracts, as well as grants, provide and what is needed to deliver our trademark quality and compassionate care. Our focus remains on active engagement with generous supporters. We are

always happy to connect with you, your congregation, your business or community group to provide a deeper understanding of our ministries, the very real and life-impacting

issues we are addressing each day, and the ways you can help meet these needs. Please contact Director of Development Anne Stokes at anne@cobys.org and 717-656-6580.

Year-to-Date Private Giving Summary (Five-Year Comparison)

	7/1/2016 - 6/30/2017	7/1/2017 - 6/30/2018	7/1/2018 - 6/30/2019	7/1/2019 - 6/30/2020	7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021
Bequests	\$1,003.29	\$700,422.95	\$26,949.71	\$580,090.69	\$39,337.75
Campaign	\$11,974.60	\$7,103.00	\$25,125.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
General	\$706,513.37	\$727,509.15	\$696,170.44	\$624,739.22	\$725,209.74
In Kind	\$24,440.91	\$45,281.01	\$33,222.65	\$29,066.53	\$16,348.07
Total	\$743,932.17	\$1,480,316.11	\$781,467.80	\$1,233,896.44	\$780,895.56



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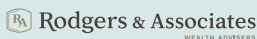
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Support COBYS during this 10th community-wide day of giving



NOVEMBER 19, 2021

How to “ExtraGive”

Set Your Alarm. The first 20 organizations to receive 50 “unique gifts” will earn a \$500 Midnight Madness prize. We are looking for people to give at the stroke of midnight to help us win in this category for the tenth year in a row!

It’s the Little Things. Even small gifts (like mustard seeds) can have a big impact. Gifts given throughout the day may be randomly chosen to receive prizes. For the complete prize list, see extragive.org/prizes.

Visit with COBYS. We will be at the Brethren Village giving stations from 10am-1pm on November 19:

Welcome Center Board Room and the Fieldcrest Game Room

Learn more at ExtraGive.org. If you would like to participate but don’t have access to a computer or can’t make it to a giving station, contact Rebekah Hamilton at 717-656-6580, ext. 161 or rebekah@cobys.org.

www.extragive.org/organizations/cobys-family-services