

It's Personal: COBYS Staff Share Their Connections to Foster Care and Adoption



Sara Odicio, therapist, was adopted from a Chinese orphanage at thirteen months old. Along with another adopted sister, Sara grew up in Chester and Lancaster counties. She has used her experiences to share her story through writing engagements and podcasts with the hope of providing educational insights that are relatable and practical. Over the past five years, Sara has served adoptive families in many capacities such as case management, mentoring, support groups, clinical therapy and individual coaching.

Johanna Zorbaugh, resource home coordinator, was adopted as an infant, and over the next decade she would see her other siblings get adopted as a toddler and teenager. She has continued a relationship with her biological family and learned to create an identity from a dual family background.



Stacie LaBarbera, adoption coordinator, was inspired to become a resource parent in 1999 after working with many families at COBYS. A few years later, she and her husband, adopted their now adult daughters, giving her wide-ranging experiences in the world of foster care and adoption.

Abby Keiser, director of family life services, began her initiation into foster care and adoption as a subcontracted therapist to COBYS. Following this work Abby and her family opened their home as a resource family to a teenager. Abby eventually re-joined COBYS and uses her professional and personal experience to guide the counseling, family life education and resource home units.



From its founding more than 40 years ago, COBYS Family Services has been an organization built on a commitment to serve. To serve the children, adults and families who need us most through our ministries of foster care, adoption, counseling and family life education. Our staff is held to a high standard, and for many their work is not a job but a calling, a part of their identity. Many individual staff have direct life experience with foster care or adoption. We're excited to share some insights from a few individuals on how their experiences influence the direct services they provide.

We share reflections from these staff members in hopes that you see one more aspect of the "COBYS Difference" in the care given to those we serve; and that how we provide that care is personal.

What impact does your experience with foster care and adoption have on your life and work experience?

Sara: I found a great therapist for myself who worked with me in recognizing and making meaning from the hurt parts of my story. I continue to grow personally in my own healing as I learn alongside the families I support. Working with a population that I can closely relate to is an honor and privilege that can be hard at times and very humbling. I find myself motivated and passionate in the work with families, but I also attest my personal relationship with Christ as

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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The Little Things in Life (That Aren't so Little)

Almost every evening, Mari, my wife, and I do word puzzles together. You may have heard of Wordle, the popular puzzle where you have six attempts to figure out a five-letter word. We also play the equally fun but lesser-known variations called Hurdle and Quordle. We do a few mini-cross word puzzles and a spelling game. Sometimes we get done in 15 minutes, sometimes it takes us closer to 30. The times it takes us longer are generally the times where the crossword clues are heavy with pop culture. We are not as up to date as we once were! (And I am okay with that.)

I look forward to this more than one might expect. First, I love spending time with Mari. I also enjoy the puzzles, so this is a perfect way to spend part of the evening.



I recently was talking with a friend who shared how much he enjoys hearing his three-year-old granddaughter asking him if he will play with her. His answer is always a resounding, "Yes!"

I expect that you can think of something (or a few somethings) that seems unremarkable, yet you find it remarkable. It's the little things in life, right?

I wonder if we should rethink that saying. Those "little things," those things like doing puzzles with your spouse or playing with your granddaughter, aren't so little. They drive us. The reality is they are enormous things.

At COBYS, we like to do "little things" for clients. Things that maybe other organizations don't do. That might mean arranging one of the required visits with a foster child to include bowling, building more rapport between child and case worker than just a face-to-face meeting in the home. Or it could be purchasing a Steelers Terrible Towel for the young fan who wants to feel more like a part of the team, or a dress for a young girl who doesn't have one for a special occasion.

We believe those "little things" aren't so little. We believe they are part of what makes the COBYS experience different, and in some cases, life changing. When you partner with COBYS, you are joining us in doing some "little things" for those we serve. But let's face it, we all know those little things aren't so little.

Mark Cunningham, Executive Director



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the foundation that allows me to hold both the joys and sorrows of the work as it hits close to home for me.

Johanna: My personal and professional experience has shown me that the world is not rainbows and unicorns. Instead, I also see the dark realities within our communities. As a professional, it is my passion to search for homes open to providing support to children from hard places.

Stacie: My personal experience helps me to relate to the families we are working with in Post Permanency Services. I have gained incredible patience, flexibility, and strength. I understand that parenting children with trauma backgrounds can be incredibly frustrating and feel isolating. It is a roller coaster of highs and lows. Parenting an adopted child has taught me about my own insecurities and fears as a mother.

Abby: Our empathy has grown toward the everyday stress resource parents encounter and we have a deeper understanding of the issues/chaos it brings to a family.

What one thing would you like people to know (misconception or otherwise) about foster care and adoption?

Sara: I would like people to challenge the idea that adoption is a one-time event. Through working with families

and exploring my own growth, I have learned that adoption will confront you in various ways throughout different life experiences and developmental stages. I have been hit with hard feelings of adoption grief and loss in unexpected moments of my life whether it be a joyous moment like my wedding day, or a hard night battling anxiety during my high school

years. If your adopted child asks the same questions over and over again or wants to hear their story from beginning to end for the 100th time, or even appears to be uninterested in any discussions surrounding adoption, meet them where they are currently at – understanding that they are on and will continue to be on this life-long journey called adoption.

Johanna: It is important for families to understand that most of the children we work with are not orphans and have parents that are fighting to get them back and doing what they need to be doing for reunification to occur. At COBYS, we encourage our resource families to not only share God's love and grace with the children in their home, but also with their biological parents as they navigate this challenging time.

Stacie: Although joyous, adoption is also seeded in a lot of loss and grief. Once the adoption is finalized, that does not mean the adoption story has ended. Parenting a child who comes from hard places is a lifelong journey.

Abby: Foster care is not "one size fits all". Every child is unique which means each resource family needs to adjust to the child and learn how to connect with that individual child. Resource parents also need to find a "place of safety" with someone to talk and process any issue. This requires vulnerability.



The community's role in foster care and adoption.

Johanna: God did not create every family to serve as a foster family, but there are other ways to support those involved in foster care. If you know a foster family, please pray for the children, parents and the child(ren)'s biological parents. Raising children takes a village and these families need your help. Reach out and support these families by providing hands-on care such as occasional childcare, providing transportation to visits, providing a meal or mowing the lawn.





Sunday,
September 11,
2022

Lititz Church
of the Brethren

Despite the rain, COBYS Family Services annual Bike & Hike was held on Sunday, September 11 at the Lititz Church of the Brethren. Although the unfortunate decision needed to be made to cancel the motorcycle and bicycle rides due to wet roads and safety issues, thanks to generous sponsors, donors and participants **more than \$160,000 was raised and pledged, the second highest amount in the event's 26 year history.**



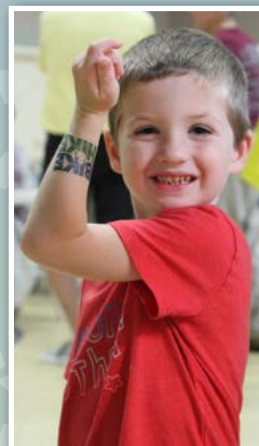
Thanks to early donors, the Kickstart Fund met and exceeded the goal of \$25,000, reaching a total over \$26,000 and provided a solid footing for the event and care provided by COBYS. All this walking and fundraising helps COBYS continue to offer services with compassion, dignity and hope – the COBYS Difference.

Together, we are making a life-altering difference in the lives of the kids and families we serve.

Walkers trekked through the streets of Lititz in what was a steady mist at the time of the departure. But the damp day didn't stop hundreds from joining us for this year's bigger and better ice cream sundae bar.

COBYS is so grateful to all who participated and helped raise critical funding to support the organization's ministries of foster care, adoption, counseling and family life education.

Top 2022 fundraisers included (l to r): Londa Brandt, Mari Cunningham, Floy Fitzkee and Don Fitzkee.



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Celebration



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2021-2022 Annual Report

Like the world around us, and the lives of many people we serve, this past year at COBYS Family Services can be described as unpredictable. Changes in needs for services, regulations, and staffing are among many things that have been unpredictable. However, what has been predictable is the COBYS response. Bolstered by years of collective experience, our 108 employees and the COBYS organization has responded to these changes by continuing to deliver expert care, the COBYS Difference. We have increased attention on trauma-focused care, whether that be specifically through foster care case management, mental health counseling, training and education for resource parents or our parenting education. We do all this in order that we might fulfill our mission, that ***motivated by Christian faith, we educate, support, and empower children and adults to reach their full potential.***

During the past fiscal year (July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022), 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. Impacts on services this year included a backlog in the court system due to the pandemic and staff turnover.

The following units of service were provided:

- 14 child specific recruitments
- 62 child preparations
- 134 child profiles
- 17 family profiles
- 22 adoption finalizations
- 38 families served with post adoption services

To date 626 adoptions have been finalized by COBYS.

Counseling. This past year has brought more “normalcy” for Counseling, with about half of sessions being provided in-person and half by teletherapy at the request of clients.



One therapist, Alyssa Roberts, LPC, received her license, and two therapists will be licensed in the next few months. Additionally, two new therapists were hired through a collaboration with Touchstone Foundation, increasing capacity to meet an ever-growing demand.

During the past year, Counseling provided and engaged in:

- 8,740 total counseling appointments
- 161 new clients served
- 135 successful discharges of clients
- The completion of TBRI 101 (Trust Based Relational Intervention) training for all therapists to enhance their work with foster/adoptive resource parents



Foster Care. Foster Care provides stability and safety for foster children in need of comprehensive and compassionate care. This often includes providing resources, advocating for the child’s needs, and accompanying families as they navigate new experiences and varying emotions.

Foster Care statistics for the past year:

- 21,645 days of care to 154 children
- 39 sibling groups and 9 medically needy children were served
- 102 children were discharged from care, 48 of these to birth parents or other relatives
- 17 children were adopted, while 1 child aged out of the foster care system and 36 were discharged to other placements
- 99 children were placed with COBYS resource families
- 105 resource families served, including 15 new resource families who were approved and 21 who concluded service
- Six pre-service training classes held, educating 32 families interested in caring for children in foster care.

There continues to be a high need for resource families to be available to care for sibling groups and teens, as they account for 60% of all referrals we receive. Our Information Sessions for those interested in becoming resource parents have been redesigned with an increased focus on the COBYS Difference in how we train and support families to proactively address the challenges inherent in foster parenting. On-going training for resource parents is also being enhanced, in collaboration with Family Life Education (FLE) staff, with a focus on attachment and trauma-informed care, as well as specific resources for “resident” children already in a home, as they navigate the realities of being a sibling to a foster child.

Family Life Education. This year FLE continued to offer the majority of classes in a virtual format as we have found this to be very successful in retaining class participants by eliminating transportation and childcare concerns. We also began two new evidence-based, trauma-informed models of care curricula for vulnerable children and youth, CORE Teen Training and TBRI.



FLE statistics for the past year:

- 722 classroom hours
- 524 (478 adults, 46 youth) participants served
- 52 courses held including: Incredible Years for Resource Parents, a Kinship Program, the Blues Program, Seeking Safety, and CORE Teen
- Eight trainings for 11 agencies of Blues Program Trainer Of Trainers sessions



Financial Support. Generosity abounded from donors to COBYS Family Services this past year. While giving from individuals, churches, businesses and other groups remained strong, the need for funding to support delivery of our increasingly complex care also continued to grow. General giving and giving to the COBYS Care Fund allows us to focus on the big and little needs of care. This means we make sure kids are placed in safe and loving homes, receive trauma-focused care, along with things like a birthday celebration, a new pair of shoes, a Bible, and age and seasonally appropriate clothing.

Our focus remains on active engagement with generous supporters and growing our donor base. We are always happy to connect with you or your congregation to provide a deeper

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 the 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:

- 136 children from 97 families served
- 23 children from 16 families were reunified
- 31 children from 24 families were transferred to adoption
- Two children from two families were released to a legal guardian through subsidized permanent legal custodianship
- One child was released to himself as he turned 18

During this year, there were many more reunifications of children with their biological family, likely the result of parents having increased access to services as the pandemic declined, allowing them to achieve goals related to reunification. Overall, there were many more children and families served this year, resulting in increased caseloads for caseworkers at the county and organization levels due to staff shortages.

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 Executive Director Mark Cunningham at mark@cobys.org or Director of Development Anne Stokes at anne@cobys.org or 717-656-6580.

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

	7/1/2017 - 6/30/2018	7/1/2018 - 6/30/2019	7/1/2019 - 6/30/2020	7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021	7/1/2021 - 6/30/2022
Bequests	\$700,422.95	\$26,949.71	\$580,090.69	\$39,337.75	\$189,056.70
Campaign	\$7,103.00	\$25,125.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
General	\$727,509.15	\$696,170.44	\$624,739.22	\$725,209.74	\$739,363.21
In Kind	\$45,281.01	\$33,222.65	\$29,066.53	\$16,348.07	\$9,893.75
Total	\$1,480,316.11	\$781,467.80	\$1,233,896.44	\$780,895.56	\$939,313.66

COBYS Family Services

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A Look Inside

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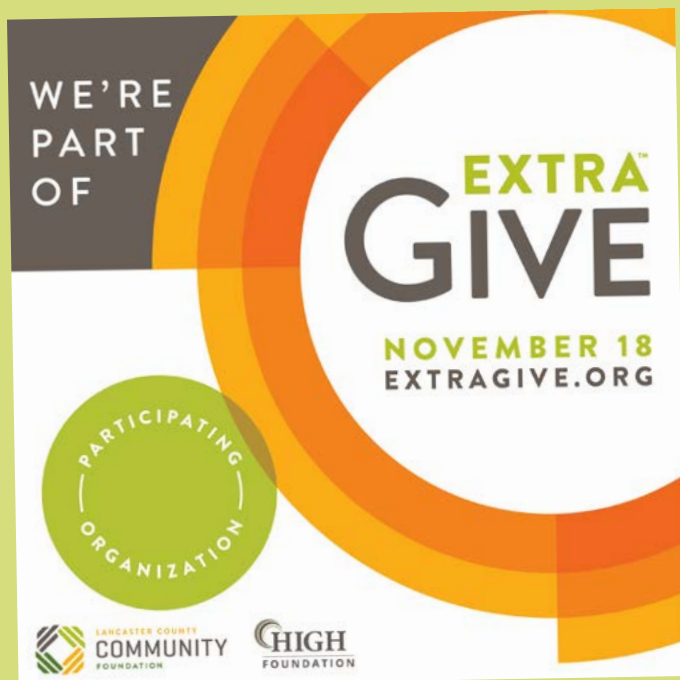
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Support COBYS Nov. 18, during the community-wide day of giving



How to "ExtraGive"

Every Gift Matters – Even more. New this year, COBYS will be awarded stretch pool funds based on the number of "unique" donors (a unique email = a unique donor). So even small donations from many sources add up!

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 a \$500 prize.

It's the Little Things. Even small gifts starting at \$10, like small acts such as doing puzzles together or small "extras" for kids (see the article on page 3), 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.

Learn more at extragive.org. If you would like to participate but don't have access to a computer or have questions, contact Steve Nichols at 717-656-6580, ext. 161 or steven@cobys.org.

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