

The Zoeller Bunch

An Adoption Story

Here's the story...

For Louis and Melissa Zoeller, life in their home is always in motion. They recently finalized the adoption of three siblings, Izabel, Oaklee and Carson, completing the Zoeller Bunch of seven children. The couple, married for more than 15 years, lives with their family in Mountville. In addition to the three children just adopted, oldest, biological children Coral and Dominic provide loving sibling guidance to Sophie and Tatum, who had previously joined the family through adoption. If that doesn't sound like a busy enough household, the family animals include 11 chickens, five ducks, two dogs, two geckos and a cat. With years of experience providing foster care and growing their family through adoption, Louis and Melissa have wisdom to share about their experiences.

What are your reasons for fostering and adopting?

We started fostering because we felt a calling from God. When we first started dating, we both had a desire to adopt. We heard about COBYS from a friend, went to the informational meeting and the rest is history. After our first adoption we continued to keep our home open because we saw a need



The Zoeller family. From left to right, top row: Louis, Coral, Melissa, middle row: Sophie, Dominic, Tatum, bottom row: Izabel, Carson, Oaklee.

and we knew we were able to provide the love, support and time to continue fostering.

What are some aspects of providing foster care that have been most rewarding for you? What has been most challenging?

The most rewarding would be the increase of our family. The most challenging is learning to parent children with early childhood trauma. Also, not always agreeing with the decisions that are made for the children in care.

What impacts of the legal system have you seen on the children in your care?

At times the decisions that are made in a court room cause more short-term

trauma on the children with the whole purpose of seeing if the family can step up to parent. The system that was designed to protect the safety and welfare of children is not always serving the actual child's safety. It is difficult to walk the system knowing, at times, the judge, lawyers, caseworkers, bio parents and Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) are not in agreement on the case plan.

What have you learned about children through the process of fostering?

We have learned that no two children, regardless of age or circumstances entering care, are alike. We must meet the individual need of each child and their trauma.

continued on page 3

Mission Statement

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

Board of Directors

Becky Fuchs, President
Ken Craul, Secretary
Rachel Bucher Kay Kulp
Swank Donna Parcell
Kathy Focht Merv Wampler
Sheri Johnson Kelli Wenger

Administrative Staff

Mark Cunningham, Executive Director
Cynthia Umberger, Director of Business Operations
Anne Stokes, Director of Development & Comm.
Abby Keiser, Director of Family Life Services
Mary Sourber, Director of Placement Services
Jen McDowell, Adoption Supervisor
Holly Hardin, Assistant Director of Family Life Education
Barb Paynter, Family Life Education Supervisor
Sharon Kingsley, Resource Home Supervisor
Courtney Beiler, Foster Care Supervisor
Amy Wittmaier, Counseling Supervisor
Ruby Nolt, Krista Rankin, Permanency Unit Supervisors
Tim Strawser, HR and Business Manager
Bethany Kauffman-Raub, HR and Office Supervisor
Doug May, Communications & Development Manager

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.

COBYS Family Services

1417 Oregon Road
Leola, PA 17540
717-656-6580 • 800-452-6517
Fax: 717-656-3056
www.cobys.org

Final Thoughts

This is the last newsletter article I will write as the executive director of COBYS. Writing these articles over the past 14+ years has been interesting. I don't fancy myself a writer. Some articles I wrote in a few minutes and required little to no editing help. Others took MUCH longer and help from our communications staff.

So, what should I say? I could focus on the generosity of our donors that allows us to provide the COBYS Difference, excellent services above and beyond what are required for so many kids and families that need it. I could thank the amazing staff we have for being the hands and feet of Jesus in extraordinarily challenging situations. I could write about some of my favorite memories from my time at COBYS. All of these would be easy articles to write.

Instead, I'll say something that is maybe harder to hear. Divisions in our world today are so deep. People are saying things that are so mean to others and about others. And from my perspective, Christians are absolutely part of the mean spiritedness. I realize we don't all agree on everything. Some days it seems like we can't agree on anything. And I don't think Jesus is calling for us to agree on everything. But he IS calling us to love each other. Love each other so the world will know we are His disciples was Jesus' final commandment.

In the gospel according to John, Jesus was with his disciples at the last supper on the evening prior to his crucifixion. He had the opportunity to say a lot of things. And this is what he chose to say in John 13:33,34. "Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

So, given this opportunity to leave you with one final thought, it is to love each other.

Mark Cunningham,
Executive Director



- 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.

The Zoeller Bunch

continued from page 1

What have you learned about yourself, individually and as a couple, during your foster care journey?

We have learned we need to be on the same page as much as possible as a couple. Kids with early childhood trauma are very resilient and can be good at causing divides to get their perceived needs met. Louis, has learned that patience is a need while I, Melissa, have learned that our family and myself can survive a tidal wave of overwhelming things and come out strong on the other end. At the end of the day, we always made it through. I also learned to make my voice heard no matter what, and to create healthy boundaries, otherwise you will burn out fast.

What role did your faith play in your decision to foster children? Is there a particular Bible verse that sustains you?

As far as our faith, I have no idea how people foster without Christ. There have been more times than I can count where we needed to completely rely on God knowing best, because what we were seeing play out was not okay or right. We pray Numbers 6:24-26 over all our children each night. "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious



The Zoeller Bunch on adoption day.

"We have appreciated COBYS walking alongside our family for all these years. I have had COBYS caseworkers cry with me, laugh with me and be brutally honest with me (even when I did not want to hear it). We have had some amazing caseworkers, some of which are true friends. Although we have now closed our home, we will continue to pray that future families will step up and meet the need. We hope to remain a part of the COBYS family in one way or another."

- Melissa Zoeller

to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." The verse goes on to say that if Moses says this prayer, God will put his name on the Israelites and bless them. That is all we want for all our kids, that God show himself and make his will known to each of them so they will have joy and peace in life.

Top Needs List

- Basics:** Winter clothing (newborn – size 14/16); **URGENT NEED** for boys clothing 2T, 3T and 4T
- Teen Sweatshirts:** Plain with no hood or zipper
- Toiletries:** Deodorant, body lotion, body wash
- Baby Wipes**
- Winter Coats:** Sizes 5T – teen



We are grateful to individuals, families and churches who help "stock the closet" with supplies for our foster and adoption children.

Upcoming Events

THURSDAY, NOV. 9, 2023
5:00-6:30 pm

Community Matters Live Podcast and Conversation

The Community Room
Lancaster County Library
151 N. Queen St., Lancaster, PA 17603

Come sit in on a live recording of the "2 Adoptive Mamas" podcast and interactive discussion. See how podcasts are made. Learn about foster care and adoption, resources for foster/adoptive families and join in the conversation about the importance of the whole community supporting foster care and adoption.

twoadoptivemamas.com/podcast/

RSVP is strongly encouraged for this free event:
cobys.org/community-matters-podcast



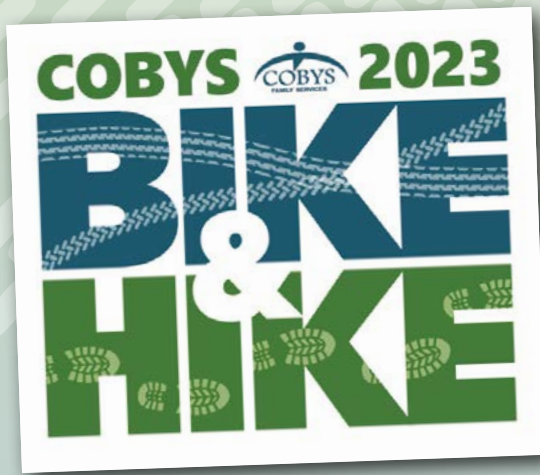
FRIDAY, NOV. 17, 2023

EXTRA GIVE
Lancaster's ExtraGive
Online giving day

Show your support for COBYS and the work we do together during Lancaster's 24-hours of giving. The number of donors to COBYS that day determine our share of the Stretch Fund, **so every donation helps and every gift matters.** Plus, opportunities for prize categories and incentives take place all day:

- COBYS Matching Gifts Times
- The Magic Minute
- Hourly Prizes
- #IGiveExtra or #ExtraGive post prizes

For more information go to:
[Extragive.org](https://extragive.org) or extragive.org/organizations/cobys-family-services



Step by Step, the Tradition Continued

Sunday,
Sept. 10,
2023

Lititz Church
of the Brethren

Thanks to generous sponsors, donors and participants **nearly \$130,000 was raised and pledged in support of COBYS ministries.** The Kickstart Fund finished just shy of the goal of \$25,000 but donors to that effort gave us a solid start for the event.

The COBYS Family Services annual Bike & Hike (or at least portions of it) was held on Sunday, September 10 at the Lititz Church of the Brethren. The iffy, unpredictable forecast and scattered rain throughout the weekend yielded the unfortunate decision to cancel the motorcycle and bicycle rides due to wet roads and safety issues. The weather did give us a break from the rain during the walking portion of the event before more rain came. Even with the changes of moving inside, the Incredible Ice Cream Celebration assured everyone a dry delicious dessert.

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.

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

Top 2023 fundraisers included (l to r):
Mark & Mari Cunningham,
Floy Fitzkee, Londa Brandt
and Don Fitzkee.



The Bike & Hike Participation Runs Deep

The option to "hike where you are" for the Bike & Hike reached new heights this year. Continued support for this event is demonstrated by the Bedell family who joined in from Alaska!

"We missed being at the Bike and Hike as we were in Fairbanks. The kids all agreed that it was a great idea to walk in honor of COBYS anyway!" - Pam Bedell



Event Sponsors



Gold Sponsors



Silver Sponsors



Bronze Sponsors

At COBYS, our focus this year across the services we deliver continues to be trauma-informed care. To meet the increasingly complex needs of our children and youth in foster care, as well as those children, youth and adults in the wider community, our staff receive on-going training in best practices, allowing them to provide the COBYS Difference in care. This report details the specifics of training and of services provided, as well as trends we observed during this past fiscal year (July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023).

Our 110 staff members are called to serve through delivery of necessary care to sometimes messy and often heartbreaking situations. 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.***

Adoption. The COBYS Adoption unit provides a range of services that assist children and families during the adoption process, in finalization of adoptions and in the life-long journey for families who have experienced adoption. Our adoption team works with children of all ages, all of whom have experienced difficult life experiences which have led to their need for Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) services.

Referrals for children and families to receive services from COBYS have been relatively consistent with last year.

The following units of service were provided:

- 16 child specific recruitments
- 73 child preparations
- 146 child profiles
- 19 family profiles
- 27 adoption finalizations
- 41 families served with post adoption services

To date 653 adoptions have been finalized by COBYS.



Counseling. This past year, the Counseling department continued to provide sessions both in person and through teletherapy. This has reduced barriers for our clients such as transportation issues and difficult work schedules that can make attending on-going appointments a challenge. With teletherapy, the clients can have a session during their lunch, or a student is able to have a session at school. We continue to see very complex cases from traumatic experiences with the clients we serve. Therapist Rebecca Bowland, LCSW, received her license. Sara Odicio joined the department as an unlicensed therapist and is expected to be licensed within the next year. Tracy Bosis also received certification in Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR). The department anticipates adding another unlicensed therapist soon.

During the past year, Counseling provided and engaged in:

- 7,675 total counseling appointments
- 89 new clients served
- 134 successful discharges of clients

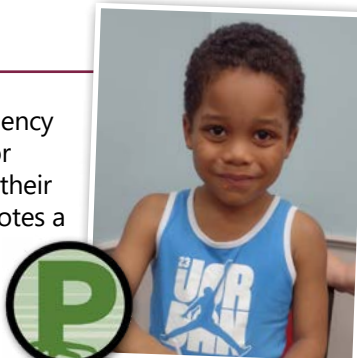


Permanency. COBYS is contracted by the Lancaster County Children and Youth Social Service Agency to act as the county caseworker, working with parents and families on their court approved plans for reunification. We help parents access court-required services to work towards children returning to their custody. 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:

- 143 children from 105 families served
- 16 children from 13 families were reunified
- 20 children from 15 families were transferred to adoption
- Eight children from six families were released to a legal guardian through subsidized permanent legal custodianship
- Three children from two families were released to fit and willing relatives

The Permanency team saw a big increase this year in children released from care through permanent legal custodianship/fit and willing relative. It is believed this is due to the increase in kinship families with whom Permanency is working. When a child is released through legal custodianship, parental rights are not terminated. Often times, we find that relatives who gain custody of children do not want parental rights terminated, therefore the child is not adopted. Additionally, we are working with a larger population of adolescents and teenagers who do not wish to be adopted. Youth get to make that decision at the age of 12 and if they chose not to be adopted, we look to obtain permanency through legal custodianship, if reunification cannot occur.



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:

- 23,244 days of care to 151 children
- 92 children were placed with COBYS foster families
- 28 sibling groups and nine medically needy children were served
- 82 children were discharged from care, 22 of these to parents or other relatives
- 12 foster children in our care were adopted, while 11 were discharged to other places
- 101 foster families served, including 16 new foster families who were approved and 27 who concluded service
- Six pre-service training classes were held, educating 25 families interested in being foster/adoptive parents

A focus in support of foster families this year included training 55 families in Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI), a parenting approach focused on caring for children with trauma and attachment challenges. Foster families also benefit from a Resource Parent Trainer who provides individualized training tailored to the special needs of specific foster children in a home. Finally, we continue to see a high need for foster families for teens, who were 46% of referrals in the year, as well as families willing to take sibling groups.



Family Life Education. This year, FLE continued to offer a broad range of programs. While we are best known for our parenting courses, all our programs share the common goal of providing parents, other adults, teens and children with information and skills to foster cooperation, courage, responsibility, self-esteem and respect.

In partnership with the Blues Program developer, we piloted Project ME, the new Blues Program curriculum for middle school students in two schools and one church. We were able to serve 26 youth in grades 7-9 through these programs. COBYS continues to be the exclusive national trainer of trainers for The Blues Program, which focuses on teens grades 8-12 and teaches emotional resilience as well as reduces low mood and anxious thoughts.

Three of our staff, Barb Paynter, Lisa Stoltzfus, and Jaime Leuthy, attended the Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) practitioner training in Utah this spring bringing our total number of practitioners to five, allowing us to broaden our TBRI offerings to all Lancaster County and several surrounding county's foster families.

FLE statistics for the past year:

- 816 classroom hours (13% increase from last year)
- 754 adults, representing over 650 children (60% increase in adults served from last year)
- 49 courses held including: Blues Program, Kinship Program, Incredible Years Autism, Parenting Wisely, Seeking Safety and TBRI program



Financial Support. Significant generosity in financial giving from donors to COBYS Family Services was evident this past year. In addition to gifts from individuals, churches and businesses, we received special donations which allowed for upgrades to technology and the purchase of a newish car. These gifts mean our staff can more efficiently access information from wherever they are delivering care and can safely travel to meet the needs of children and adolescents.

We continue to focus on quality, multi-channel communication with our donors, providing a variety of opportunities to connect to our ministries, from general giving to the COBYS Care Fund and even the Kids' Closet. We hope our donors, who join us in the call to serve children and families, appreciate a balance of success stories of kids and families, along with the real and very challenging realities of our work. While the needs we are addressing will never go away, we believe our care is making a real difference in the lives of those we serve.

We are always happy to connect with you to provide a deeper understanding of our ministries, the very real and life-impacting issues we are addressing each day, and the ways we can meet these needs together. Please contact Anne Stokes, Director of Development & Communications at anne@cobys.org or 717-656-6580 x101.



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

	7/1/2018 - 6/30/2019	7/1/2019 - 6/30/2020	7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021	7/1/2021 - 6/30/2022	7/1/2022 - 6/30/2023
Bequests	\$26,949.71	\$580,090.69	\$39,337.75	\$189,056.70	\$ 54,256.16
Campaign	\$25,125.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
General	\$696,170.44	\$624,739.22	\$725,209.74	\$739,363.21	\$ 786,204.15
In Kind	\$33,222.65	\$29,066.53	\$16,348.07	\$9,893.75	\$ 21,956.38
Total	\$781,467.80	\$1,233,896.44	\$780,895.56	\$939,313.66	\$ 862,416.69



COBYS Family Services
1417 Oregon Road
Leola, PA 17540

Address Service Requested



Become our fan on
Facebook and Instagram

Non-Profit
U.S. Post Office
PAID
Permit No. 52
Lancaster, PA

A Look Inside

<i>The Zoeller Bunch.....</i>	<i>1, 3</i>
<i>Message from Mark</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Upcoming Events.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Bike & Hike 2023 Recap.....</i>	<i>4-5</i>
<i>Annual Report.....</i>	<i>6-7</i>
<i>Lancaster's ExtraGive</i>	<i>8</i>

Support COBYS Nov. 17, during the community-wide day of giving




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.

How to "ExtraGive"

Set Your Reminder – For the Day. Although there isn't a Midnight Madness this year (no bleary-eyed rush to give at midnight) there are plenty of opportunities all day.

Every Gift Matters – Even more. Again 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!

Make Your Gift Count Double. At select times during the day, your gift will be match dollar for dollar by some generous sponsors. Your gift will count more from 7-10 am thanks to matching funds from Fillmore Container. See our ExtraGive page for more. 

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

Prizes include: Hourly prizes starting at 7 am, the Magic Minute, Social Media post prizes

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