

# Families Helping Families

Summer 2014

Pennsylvania State Resource  
Family Association

News to keep you well-informed

Meet

Franklin...

AND

Jonathan...

See page 6



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# Summer 2014

## From the Desk of the President Garry Krentz

### PSRFA working on awareness of the need for Normalcy for Children in foster care

There is a “Let Kids be Kids” movement that is gaining momentum at the federal level and in many states. In fact “Let Kids be Kids” laws are being passed in some states already and many other states are getting on board along with bills being introduced at the Federal level in the house and the Senate. These laws recognizes the importance of allowing children in foster care the ability to take part in everyday activities, without the unnecessary involvement of case managers, provider agencies or the court system. All the laws have a common theme which is a “Reasonable and Prudent Parent” standard incorporated in the law allows foster parents to give foster children permission to do daily, age appropriate, activities such as joining a school athletic team, getting a driver’s license or going to do activities with friends. PSRFA is working on awareness as Pennsylvania moves towards the introduction of its own law to give normalcy to children/youth and the following is an overview of some key points.

#### Key points for resource parents:

- Promote normalcy for each child to the fullest extent possible.
- Encourage and give permission to the child, dependent on his or her age and maturity level, to engage and participate in appropriate social and extracurricular activities in order to promote social development, obtain employment, have contact with family members, have access to phone usage, have reasonable curfews, and travel with other youth or adults.
- Permit the child to take part in overnight or planned outings which support recreation and normal life experiences, as long as the licensed caregiver has determined the outing to be safe and appropriate.
- Notify the case manager of overnight stays exceeding one night, prior to the event occurring
- Be sensitive to the input of the child’s parent as to the types of activities they would like their child to participate in, and whenever possible, include them in the decision making.

Background screening is not necessary for a child to participate in normal school or community activities and outings, such as school field trips, dating, scout campouts, and activities with friends, families, school, and church groups.



## Participation in Childhood Activities

Participation in these types of activities is important to the child's well-being, not only emotionally, but in developing valuable life-coping skills.

The caregivers can now make decisions regarding activities in which foster children may participate - removing obstacles and red tape.

## Caregiver Making the Decisions

A caregiver can now make the same decisions regarding a foster child's participation in childhood activities as any other "reasonably prudent parents" would make for their own child.

Although caregivers may consult with case managers and others prior to making decisions regarding activities in which their foster children participate, it is ultimately the caregiver's and youths decision. Case managers, therapists, the GAL, other caregivers, and case managers may offer advice to support the caregiver in making decisions as a reasonable prudent parent; however, they should not make the decisions for caregivers.

When a youth is in a group home or shelter they must identify someone to be the "caregiver" responsible for making such decisions for each child in their care.

## Prior Approval Not Required

Neither the case worker nor other providers may require prior approval of the caregiver's own assessment using a reasonable and prudent parent standard.

## Pre-existing Court Orders or Other Regulatory Guidelines

A caregiver's decisions regarding normalcy activities cannot be contrary to any pre-existing court orders. For example, if there is court ordered visitation with the child's parents on Saturdays, a normalcy activity planned or approved by the caregiver would not trump or take precedence over an existing court order for Saturday visitation. In order to keep balance and support agency regulatory requirements, a caregiver's decision cannot contradict the goals of the Individual Service Plans or

Family Service Plans. When caregivers are making decisions they must also consider:

- the child's age, maturity, and developmental level to maintain
- the overall health and safety of the child
- potential risk factors and the appropriateness of the activity
- the best interest of the child based on the caregiver's knowledge of the child
- the importance of encouraging the child's emotional and developmental growth
- the importance of providing the child with the most family-like living experience possible
- the behavioral history of the child and the child's ability to safely participate in the proposed activity

In closing I want to let you know that this is a project that is gaining support and we will keep you posted as this important work moves forward to normalize the lives of foster children. I would also like to close again with the importance of our role at PSRFA, to make sure that we do everything in our power to Recruit and Retain Resource Families that are willing to help children and give them a place to call home. **So please consider being a resource to an older youth or one that needs to step down from a more restrictive setting like congregate care.** The research clearly shows that when you step a child down to a less restrictive environment in our communities and provide the services needed, there is a much greater probability of their success in life. We will do everything in our power to fulfill our mission to help you as Resource families so every child has a place to call home. There is no greater cause then the one that you signed up for when you became a Resource parent. If you have any suggestions to have better outcomes for the children, and improve the lives of resource families, we welcome them.

Sincerely

Garry Krentz



# Message from the Executive Director

## *Kathleen Carey Ramper*



Wow! Just sitting here writing this I can't believe another summer is about to end. I hope all of you had a wonderful time with your families and are now prepared for a new school year.

In celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association and because May is Foster Care month we had a great event! On May 24, 2014, "Hearts & Homes, An Afternoon with Jimmy Wayne" was held at the Forum in Harrisburg.



Performing was country music singer, song writer and author, Jimmy Wayne. Opening for Jimmy were youth performers from Allegheny County, "We Rock". The We Rock workshop is a residency program that teaches foster youth to open up creatively through music and that's just what they did.

We were able to create a greater awareness about the child welfare system, the children and who they are, what it means to be a foster parent and the need for community involvement. As one of our premier sponsors said, "Leaving a better world for our children, starts with the work we do today!"

Coming up October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, & 25<sup>th</sup> is our Annual Conference, **Celebrating 40 Years of Families Helping Families!** Once again we will be at the Holiday Inn, Grantville. By now you should have received a scholarship application to attend the conference. If not, please contact our office. Also, please remember our awards banquet on Friday and nominate your favorite agency, family, FPA and community partner. I am sure all of you know someone who deserves the opportunity to be recognized.

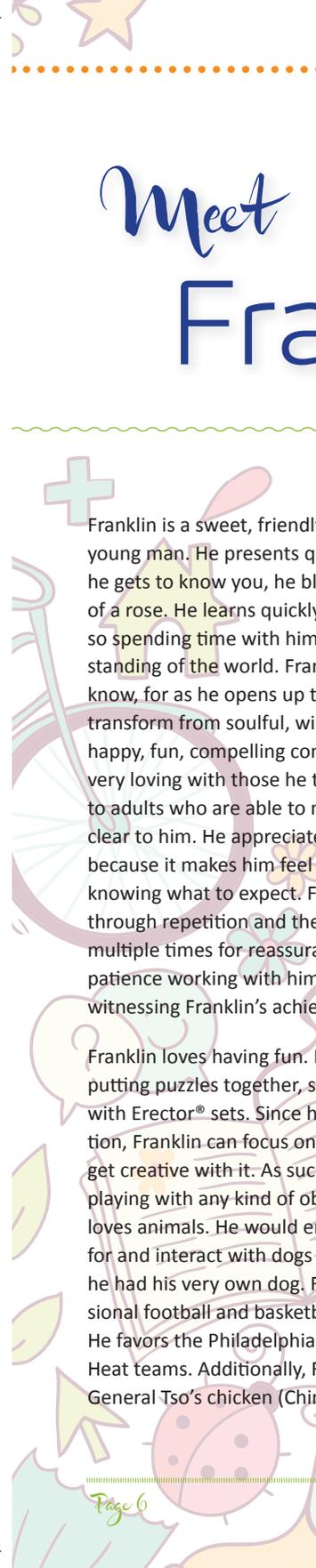
Looking forward to seeing all of you in October. As always, thank you for all you do for the children and families.

**Kathy Ramper**





# Meet Franklin...



Franklin is a sweet, friendly and kind-hearted young man. He presents quietly at first, but as he gets to know you, he blossoms like the petals of a rose. He learns quickly from role models; so spending time with him enhances his understanding of the world. Franklin is fun to get to know, for as he opens up to you, you observe him transform from soulful, wide-eyed innocence, to happy, fun, compelling confidence. Franklin can be very loving with those he trusts and he relates best to adults who are able to make their expectations clear to him. He appreciates structure and routine because it makes him feel safe and comfortable knowing what to expect. Franklin learns best through repetition and therefore asks questions multiple times for reassurance. One requires some patience working with him, but the end result is witnessing Franklin's achievement of success.

Franklin loves having fun. He enjoys playing games, putting puzzles together, swimming, and building with Erector® sets. Since he has a good imagination, Franklin can focus on one specific toy and get creative with it. As such, he can find pleasure playing with any kind of object. Franklin further loves animals. He would enjoy learning how to care for and interact with dogs and/or cats, especially if he had his very own dog. Franklin follows professional football and basketball sports teams too. He favors the Philadelphia Eagles and the Miami Heat teams. Additionally, Franklin's favorite food is General Tso's chicken (Chinese). When taken to a

Chinese food buffet, Franklin will politely indulge, placing an emphasis on that type of spicy chicken.

Franklin recently completed 9th grade and is in life skills classes. He typically enjoys school in addition to spending time with his classmates. He does well academically too. Franklin isn't difficult to satisfy; he makes the best of whatever situation he's in, and attempts to benefit from it.

Franklin hopes his forever family spends lots of time playing with him. He would do well in a home where he is the youngest or the only child. Franklin appreciates structure and repetition; he responds well to adults who are both clear and kind to him. The best family for Franklin would give him much attention, as well as give him an appropriate routine for his needs. Franklin is eager to find his forever family; the special family who will keep him safe and make him feel loved.

Franklin has been able to maintain a positive and enriching relationship with his birth father, enjoying his phone calls and visits with him. Franklin's forever family should be open to maintaining and encouraging the connection. The contact helps keep Franklin grounded.

All families will be considered for Franklin. He is not yet legally free for adoption. For more information on Franklin, please contact Melanie Rehrig at Diakon Adoption and Foster Care at (610) 682-1527 or [rehrigm@diakon.org](mailto:rehrigm@diakon.org).



# Meet Jonathan...

“Hi, my name is Jonathan and I am twenty years old. I am a man of many interests, with my strongest interests being in the fields of astronomy, travel, geography, and geology. I’m very friendly and when I see someone I know or they say hi first, I will say hi back, ask how they’re doing, and tell them how I’m doing. I’m enjoyable to be around and interesting to talk to. My favorite subject in school is history. I want to become a travel agent when I get older, helping people book their trips and making sure they get the best possible trip. My view of a real family is one that cares about me, is kind, and is interested. I like to write, read travel books, play on the computer, and play Pokémon games on my Nintendo DS.”



Jonathan is truly an amazing older youth who wants, needs, and deserves a family. He is considerate, thoughtful, and caring. Jonathan enjoys spending his time reading and researching places all over the world. He also enjoys writing travel brochures in his free time. Jonathan thrives on knowledge and is passionate about learning. He volunteers at the library, a travel agency, and a historical society.

Jonathan is respectful and would like a family that will always be there to guide him and give him love throughout his life. He would like his family to support him in following his dreams of being a travel agent. Jonathan is open to exploring any type of family composition as long as the family is caring, loving, and supportive. He is truly unique and a wonderful young man.

Any family would be lucky to have him as part of their own. All families will be considered for Jonathan. He is not legally free for adoption. If you feel that you could be the family for Jonathan or someone who could provide him with a sense of support please contact. Kim Matthews at Children’s Aid Society at (814) 765-2686 ext. 319 or [kimm@childaid.org](mailto:kimm@childaid.org)

**A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU**



**AN AFTERNOON WITH JIMMY WAYNE SCHOLARSHIP BENEFIT**

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# Hearts & Homes

AN AFTERNOON WITH JIMMY WAYNE SCHOLARSHIP BENEFIT





# 10 Things You Need to Know About Adopting from Foster Care



**B**efore adopting two awesome kids who came into my life through foster care, I had this idea in my mind that the whole ordeal would be kind of like what happened in *Annie*. We would just be handed a precocious, well-adjusted child that we would rescue from their dire straits through love and perseverance and possibly a few well-timed choreographic musical numbers. The truth is that it's infinitely more complicated than that, although it is equally thrilling and wonderful—minus the giant mansion and, sadly, Punjab. We could all use a little Punjab in our lives.



So, if there is someone you know (maybe you?) who is going through—or considering going through—this glorious insanity, here are some things to keep in mind.

### 1. I am my children's "real" mother. My husband is their "real" father.

People, I know what you mean when you ask who their "real" mother is. I get it. In the minds of a non-adoptive parent, especially a woman who has birthed babies out of her own loins, motherhood means that your ovaries made an egg, which fertilized and grew within your own womb, and then pushed out of your nether regions. But please understand that biology isn't the trump card in motherhood. I didn't give birth to my kids, although not a day goes by that I didn't wish I could have had that experience. Instead, I met my children when they were toddlers. I worked at my relationship with them—not through biology, but through sheer determination. I *became* their "real" mother, and even though it didn't happen at birth, it happened. I am real, we are real, this is real. Really.

### 2. Their lives and their circumstances are private.

A lot of adoptive kids have stories that aren't easy to tell. I may choose to share some of the details, in broad strokes, but this is their story to tell—if and when they choose to. Most of our close friends and family know the quick and dirty about what our kids' lives were like before coming to live with us. We're not ashamed of them and we don't pretend they grew up in a golden castle with a snow leopard as a pet and had nothing but loving, magical experiences. On the contrary, we accept and recognize their past. We just don't want to explain it to everyone we meet.

### 3. Sometimes, we need to do things a little differently.

There is no such thing as one size fits all parenting; we all know that. What works for one kid or one family might not work for others. But, sometimes, kids who have come from really shitty experiences may need things that kids who don't come from really shitty experiences may not. It's that simple.

Yeah, you don't let your kids graze for snacks between meals. That's awesome, and I'm glad it worked for you. But my kids? Food wasn't always a constant in their lives, and so providing it is a form of trust. Letting them know it's always there is important. You put your kid to bed at a certain time and then don't let them leave their rooms? Okay. But my daughter needs to know that someone is there, because she was left alone so much as a baby. She needs me to lie with her and rub her hair until she falls asleep, even if it takes an hour. And, so, that's what I do. You would make a point to punish your son when he hits his sister? I know that my son saw plenty of violence, that in his first home hurting another person was normal. So instead of sending him to a time out, I talk to him about how we treat people we love with kindness, not pain. When our kids first came to live with us they sometimes wanted chicken for breakfast. And they got it, because that's how important comfort is when you're young and confused. Chicken first, healthy breakfast later.

At the end of the day, we all want our kids to feel happy and healthy and safe. Adoptive parents sometimes take a different path to get there.



#### 4. Kids adopted from foster care aren't messed up kids.

An idea exists about kids in foster care—that they're completely and totally damaged. They'll steal from you. They'll hurt you. They'll reject your love and ruin your life because they're just rotten to the core. Someone messed them up, and now they'll be that way. Forever.

Let's get real for a moment here: A lot of foster children have come from extremely difficult circumstances. Abuse of all kinds, neglect, exposure to drugs both in utero and during their daily lives, squalid conditions—it happened. And those sort of things have a profound effect on kids, even if they were very young when it occurred. Their minds may or may not have memories of what happened, but their bodies always do. Sometimes these circumstances lead to difficulties in their lives—difficulties in forming relationships, difficulties with trust, and, yes, as a result there are sometimes difficulties with behavior.

That being said, **there is no such thing as messed up kids; there are just kids that come from messed up places.** And that's where we come in—their adoptive families, friends, communities, schools, churches, neighborhoods. We come in and we love them and we care for them and we do everything we can to make this part of their lives as amazing as we can. We show them their worth, help them learn to trust, and provide the stability that serves as a foundation for healing.

Love works, but not by itself. These kids with messed up circumstances needs support, guidance, stability. Sometimes therapy. The road there isn't always paved with gold and lined with daisies, but the road exists. They just need someone to follow them down it.

#### 5. Nothing is different. Everything is different. Nothing is different.

Adoptive families are families, and for the most part we operate in the same way biological families do. Sure, some things are different by design, but we just want treated the way we feel—like normal, everyday, crazy, complicated, normal groups of people who love each other. I don't know of any families that have adopted who introduce their children as “my ADOPTED son....” or “my former foster child, now adopted.” Please don't ever introduce us as such.

#### 6. You can't replace relationships.

Not ever. This has been one of the hardest things for me to accept. Subconsciously, I viewed myself as a *replacement* Mom to my kids. Oh, that lady who *used* to be your Mom? She didn't do a good job, so I'm here now, and I love you, and it's all good! But it's not that simple. I can't ever replace the woman who gave birth to my children, and I don't want to. No matter what happened, no matter how things were, she is the woman they bonded to when they first entered the world. She is the woman who gave them life. I am not her substitute, I am not her replacement. I am the mother who continued to give them life, who nurtured them next, who will see them into their future. And that is enough.

#### 7. Adoption is born of loss.

*“A child born to another woman calls me Mom. The depth of the tragedy and magnitude of the privilege are not lost on me.”* – Jody Landers

This single quote sums up adoption so perfectly. As wonderful and beautiful and amazing as adoption is, it starts with a loss, especially in foster care. A mother and father lost their children. Grandparents lost their grandchildren. Siblings





get separated. My children lost countless family members, most of whom they will never see again.

Early on, I would play the Blame Game in my mind, and I let it rob me of my empathy. It was their birth mother's fault that she lost her kids, why should I feel sorry? If any of those family members wanted the kids, they would have stepped up to the plate and taken custody, why should I feel sorry?

The truth is that it's always more complicated than that, and assigning blame might feel good in the moment, but ultimately it will just crush all the good we've worked so hard to build up. As a mother, I feel like I want to claw the eyes out of anyone who has ever hurt my kids. As a human being, I know that forgiveness is about letting go, recognizing the loss, and working to heal it.

## 8. This is work.

Imagine if the moment that you met a new person—literally, the first moment you laid eyes on them—you were expected to live with them, trust them, rely on them for your every need, respect them, bond with them emotionally, and follow their rules. This is what children in care go through when they're placed in a new foster home.

As adults, we don't build relationships that way, not even friendships. We start small. "Hey, let's get a coffee!" And then we get to know each other before we care, trust, and love. Kids in care don't get that luxury. They are thrust head first into new places, with new people, new rules. Sometimes they're in a new town. They sleep in unfamiliar beds in unfamiliar houses and eat unfamiliar breakfasts at unfamiliar places.

I get chills when I think about how terrifying that must have been for my kids, the first night they spent at our home. It takes work to build trust, especially with kids who feel scared, alone, and confused. You are strangers, in a strange world. They have no reason to depend on you, and every

reason not to. As new foster parents, our kids were just as foreign to us as we were to them. We didn't know them. We spend so much time worrying about their health and safety, shuttling them to doctors appointments and therapy and speech evaluations. We introduced ourselves by our first names.

And so we worked. We worked on building a relationship. We got to know the kids; what they liked and didn't like, what they needed, who they were. We continue to work, to iron out the kinks that hold them back emotionally, to prove to them that they are safe and loved. We will always work.

## 9. You are important in our children's lives.

Yes, you. You, and everyone around you are essential in the upbringing of kids who have come from care. Every single person they meet will have an impact on them, positively or negatively. See, when kids are just learning to trust and love and be comfortable again, every single person they encounter can have a profound effect. Thanks for being so awesome.

## 10. You can do this too. Promise.

I can't tell you how many people have told my husband and I that they admire what we do, but could never do it. And to each and every person who has said that, my response has been the same: sure you could. Being a foster parent or an adoptive foster parent is, at its core, very simple. Anyone who has ever parented has already done what you need to do. Can you make a kid feel safe? Provide for them? Care for them? Advocate for them?

There are over half a million kids in foster care across this country this year, and not enough families to take them in. Chances are that you have what it takes, you just don't know it yet. Choose to make a child's life extraordinary. Be a foster parent.



*Todd E. Lloyd, MSW  
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The number of suspected child abuse reports in the commonwealth reached a record high in 2013, though abuse substantiations declined slightly, according to the Annual Child Abuse Report released in June by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare.

*The report found:*

- There were 26,944 reports of suspected abuse in 2013, up from 26,664 reports in 2012.
- 3,425 reports of abuse – or 12.7 percent – were substantiated in 2013, compared to 3,565 substantiated cases (13.4 percent) in 2012.
- 302 substantiated cases, or 9 percent, involved children who had been abused before. This was up from 283 (8 percent) re-abuse cases in 2012.
- 38 children died from abuse in 2013, up from 33 in 2012.

The latest report marked the second year in a row that Pennsylvania set a record for suspected reports of child abuse – a trend that quite likely has been driven in part by the increased public awareness about child abuse in the wake of the Sandusky scandal and other high-profile abuse cases. Yet substantiation rates have declined, just as they did last year.

One reason Pennsylvania tends to have among the lowest child abuse substantiation rates in the nation is because our legal threshold for defining abuse has been set higher than in other states, essentially making it more difficult to meet the legal definition of abuse.

A new law that will take effect later this year lowers the threshold for what constitutes child abuse, particularly relating to physical abuse. Other measures signed into law in May eliminate a separate definition of ‘student abuse’ that effectively set a higher threshold for defining abuse by school employees. Together, these laws will improve our collective efforts to make Pennsylvania’s children safer.

Anyone who suspects child abuse or neglect can anonymously report their concerns to ChildLine, the state’s toll-free hotline, at 1-800-932-0313 (TDD 1-866-872-1677).



## THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE RESOURCE FAMILY ASSOCIATION

### *Invites YOU to become a member!*

Membership into a non-profit organization is a rewarding opportunity to show your community you care and that you are willing to support an association's mission and vision statements. The Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association would like to invite you to join our non-profit association. We offer a number of services and programs to our friends, our families, and our professionals that comprise our membership.

### What Do We Offer Our New Members?

#### Information:

- PSRFA's quarterly magazine *Families Helping Families*, includes timely information on legislation, educational opportunities, member activities, an in-depth look at foster parent associations, answers to questions from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and columns written by our foster parents and agency personnel.

#### Development:

- Our Annual Conference is held each October and brings more than 200+ individuals together to network, teach, and learn. It offers many educational workshops designed to serve and meet the needs of our foster, kinship, adoptive families, and professionals.
- Our Annual Awards program recognizes outstanding foster families, agencies and individuals who have contributed so much to the program in Pennsylvania.

The PSRFA invites you to join us as a member and to grow with us as we continue to expand our services and programs. We want to share with you the benefits and incentives we offer to our members.

For more information, please contact our  
office at 1.800.951.5151



## The Pennsylvania WIC Program is Celebrating our 40th Anniversary in 2014!

The Pennsylvania Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is celebrating 40 years of delivering value and services to families in the Commonwealth.

Pennsylvania WIC serves about 250,000 eligible pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women; infants; and children under age 5 every month.

**WIC helps families to make healthy eating and lifestyle choices**

**WIC foods ensure good health, growth and development**

**WIC promotes breastfeeding, which provides many health benefits for mom and baby**

WIC services are provided in over 270 locations in Pennsylvania. If you have not already enrolled your foster child in the WIC Program, please call 1-800-WIC-WINS (942-9467) to be connected to the WIC office closest to your home. WIC is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



*A poem composed by Brandy, age 15,  
for her foster parent*

Sometimes I know the words to say  
Give thanks for all you've done  
But then they fly up and away  
As quickly as they come.

How could I possibly thank you enough?  
The one who makes me feel whole  
The one to whom I should owe my life  
The forming of a brand new soul.

The one who's there at nights  
The one who helps me when I'm crying  
The one who's continuously an expert  
At picking up when I was lying.

The one who sees me off to school  
And spent the days alone  
Yet magically produced a smile  
As soon as I came home.

The one who always makes sacrifices  
To always put us first  
Who lets me test my broken wings  
In spite of how its hurts.

What way is there to thank you?  
For your heart, your sweat, your tears  
For the ten thousand things you've done  
For oh-so many years.

For changing with me as I changed  
For accepting all my flaws  
For not loving cause you had to  
But loving just because.

Thank you for the gifts you give  
For everything you do  
But thank you most of all  
For making my dreams come true!!

## Families Helping Families

A support services publication of the Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association

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### Mission Statement

"The Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association advocates for all those who care about children and their families. We work supportively with foster, adoptive, and kinship families, and with local foster parent associations and agencies who care for the children we serve."

### Vision Statement

"To involve all parts of the community to improve the quality of family life in Pennsylvania and to influence child welfare policy and practice, both nationally and internationally."

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