



FAMILY CENTERS

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Family Center Network
strengthening families, nurturing children, building communities



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Everything I Learned Came From Being Pushed Off the Diving Board

Some Thoughts for Family Center Leadership

Allison Williams, Columbia County Family Center

When I entered the work force as a Parent Educator in 1999 I left home for the first time in 23 years. During those years I ran a very successful day care with a small staff. Working with young children and their parents was easy for me. As my children grew and all were entrenched in school activities and their own lives I felt a strong need to get out of the house and work in the real world. I filled out one application and that was to become a Parent Educator in Columbia County for their Family Center. I was now working out of a school district, making connections with teachers and administrators as well as my peers within the Family Center. In 2001 I was promoted to Assistant Director under a leader who was on top of her game, much younger than me and had no designs on leaving her position. In my new position, I remained a part-time home visitor and took on some administrative duties that really were more paperwork than anything. I could handle this from here to retirement.

In 2005, the Director announced that she was having a baby and would be utilizing the obligatory maternity leave prior to her return. I could handle that. I could keep things running with phone calls to her here and there and deal with bigger issues upon her return. Then life happened and one day the director and her new baby came to visit just prior to her return date. Only her visit purpose was to tell me she was not sending her baby off to strangers during the day and she was not returning to work.

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YIKES!

I truly felt that I had been pushed off the diving board by someone tired of waiting and I now had no choice but to kick or drown. I must be a survivor because here I am more than ten years into the position and preparing myself emotionally for life on the other side, as well as preparing a new person to take this Family Center and make it an even stronger thread in the tapestry that is Columbia County.

I am no expert on the topic, nor can I tell you that I have not stumbled, but I have grown and learned and as I prepare to walk away this spring, I want to leave you with some of what I learned in hopes that it may help you avoid my stumbles and make an even bigger impact in the lives of children and families than you ever thought possible.

What I needed to learn as a supervisor of ten diverse staff:

- How to appreciate each of them as individuals even though we may have nothing in common outside of work
- How to look them in the eye and be a listener until the end even though I wanted to stop them at “hello”

And by learning to do this I found that they actually could change my opinion on things

- How to bring everyone together so that we could function as one unit even though we are spread out over a vast rural area

We have always held monthly staff meetings but they tend to be long and all business. We created quarterly meetings that are designed to cover any in-house training we want to cover and to get to know each other by having fun. We go to nice restaurants, state parks, and picnics, we play games and we compete. Venues are discussed at staff meetings so everyone has input.

- The hardest thing I learned was that I cannot be their best friend nor can I expect them to always like me or my directives. When you change your hat from their peer to their supervisor, it changes everything.

New Early Learning GPS Online Tool Helps Families Plan for Their Young Children's Success

The new Early Learning GPS, www.earlylearninggps.com, is a great interactive, online tool for all families who want to learn what they need to know and can do to help their young child learn and grow. It is a great way for families to learn on their own, with a professional one-on-one, or as part of a parenting class.

The Early Learning GPS helps families get reliable answers to questions like:

- When does my baby start “learning?”
- What do I do if my friend's child (whose the same age as mine) can do things my child can't?

After a family answers a question, they receive a simple video tip and links to reliable resources. Families can save their favorite tips and resources to their child's map as well as:

- Follow their child's milestones;
- Find fun family activities based on Pennsylvania's Early Learning Standards;
- Compare child care/ early learning programs;
- Search for local organizations that can provide additional help.

All of the information is from reliable sources like Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning. Professionals do not need experience or education in child development to use the resource. “I have found that not only can this help me spark family goals for Family Partnership Agreements but it can also help during parent meetings, where in which I can showcase the site to answer some Kindergarten Readiness questions and get the answers and resources on the spot for the parents and this could work as a start to them using the website themselves.”

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When I became a program director, funding was precarious and the state budget was not always kind to Family Centers. Proving to staff that I was capable of finding funding, writing grants and making jobs as secure as possible went a long way to stabilize and eventually strengthen our working relationship and new dynamics.

In 2016 I am preparing to walk away from Family Centers and spend time with my grandchildren, husband and children with both two and four legs. I am excited about this opportunity. However, I cannot walk away without leaving all of you with some advice gleaned from that push off the diving board:

1. **Break the rules!** Unless you want to be a ho-hum program, break the rules in favor of staff, children and families whenever it makes sense.
2. **Appreciate staff and all they bring to the program as individuals and as a team.**
3. **Listen to each person who wants your ear until they are through.** Hear them out and consider those options that you may have never considered before. Crawl outside the box to think now and then.
4. **Give every staff responsibility, a leadership role and a long leash.** Don't micromanage.
5. **Find your niche in your community and work to fill the gaps so that children and families can prosper.** You are that program that can seek out grants and programming to support child welfare and the courts. Do it! Step up to the plate and take the risks!
6. **On a regional and state level, stay organized and committed.** We are a quality program with positive outcomes and great advantages for families. In the past we failed to get that message to Harrisburg. Don't let that happen again.

I wish you all the best and I am very proud to have been a small part of Pennsylvania's Family Centers.

Practice Tip

Everyday Tips for Flu Prevention

Flu season is upon us! Here are some quick and easy things you can do to keep you healthy and flu free:

1. **Wash your hands often with soap and water.**
2. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.**
3. **Avoid close contact with sick people.**
4. **Get plenty of sleep and exercise, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat healthy food.**
5. **Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.**
6. **If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.**

Looking for more information? Check out this website:

<http://www.flu.gov/prevention-vaccination/prevention/>

Collaboration Works!

Allison Williams, Columbia County Family Center

Columbia County Family Center is very proud to introduce 18 month old Mya and her mother, Lindsay. Mya's father, Shawn, is typically at work when their Parent Educator comes to visit. Lindsay loves her visits from her Parent Educator, fully immersing herself in all of the Parents as Teachers handouts and child development activities. Lindsay shares child development information with Shawn at the end of the day. It is a picture book family.



Let's turn back the clock a year. Shawn was working hard to spend quality time with his daughter during supervised visits with Children and Youth Services. He attended these visits as well as honored his commitment to attend Drug Court every Tuesday morning, NA meetings and Drug and Alcohol Counseling. Shawn was court-ordered to attend the Family Center's Community Based Parenting Classes. He completed all ten sessions. In spite of all of these commitments, Shawn logged more than full time hours each week at work and had stable housing. Lindsay was not as lucky as far as Mya was concerned. Lindsay was in a drug rehabilitation center. It was not the first time. Visits with Mya were not happening as frequently because of distance. Her visits with her daughter were held twice each month.

Two weeks before giving birth to Mya both Shawn and Lindsay were arrested for basically running a meth lab out of their vehicle. Drugs were a huge problem. Judge Thomas A. James, Jr. kept Lindsay under house arrest with her father until delivery time in order to keep the unborn child safe.

Shawn was charged soon after the incident and served time prior to being accepted into Columbia Montour Treatment Court. Lindsay chose to commit herself to a rehabilitation center, so charges were on hold. Mya was placed in an agency foster care home coincidentally with a nurse that helped to take care of her in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. It was also around this time that the courts saw the value of inviting the Family Center to send a representative to Treatment Court each Tuesday morning. This allowed for better triaging of those who were parents into the various prevention programs offered by the Family Center (Parents as Teachers, Community-based Parenting Classes, Time Limited Family Reunification as well as Family Group Decision Making).

Shawn began to have regular supervised visits at the Family Center with Mya. The family (Shawn and Mya to start with) was accepted into the TLFR program so that intensive services can work to reunite the family. When Lindsay left rehab and moved to a half-way house she began to have three hour bi-weekly visits with Mya. Parents as Teachers became part of the visits. Lindsay actually extended her stay at the half-way house and transitioned into Independent Living in order to reinforce her sobriety and become personally strong enough to deal with the pressure of life without ongoing supports at hand. Upon release from programming Lindsay is now facing sentencing for the charges. However, Probation, the courts and Family Center are in agreement that Lindsay is doing remarkably well and all have vowed to support her through every step in the process.

Probation Officers allowed Shawn and Lindsay to live together after her release. Supervised visits began as a family unit and eventually moved to unsupervised weekend visits. The foster family was a great source of support to them. The couple was also working very hard with their Family Center TLFR team and doing everything asked of them. Shawn continued to hold a good-paying job and Lindsay was creating a home for Mya

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to come to as she worked on her own personal strength. Family Center staff also coordinated and facilitated two FGDM Conferences for both Lindsay and Shawn in order to get as many supports in place as they prepared to bring Mya home. Mya came to live with her parents in June, 2015.

Collaboration is ongoing between the Family Center, CYS and Probation as well as the Treatment Court team. Lindsay, Shawn and Mya are truly the first family that has had all of the programming the county has to offer available to them, with all agencies cooperating and supporting each other, and it is working!

Today Mya, Shawn and Lindsay live a life that is supported by not only service agencies, but extended family and friends. Mya is lucky because her parents understand the support that was provided by her foster family and that family remains in her life on a regular basis. The family has transitioned from TLFR to Parents as Teachers, and Lindsay and Mya love each and every one of their home visits. Home visits with PAT are held weekly. Mya couldn't ask for better parents right now. Shawn and Lindsay are well aware that their life needs to include supports, meetings and a vision that includes taking things one day at a time. They are more than thriving in that environment, with a strong commitment to each other, Mya and sobriety.

This family is vindication that collaboration between agencies works. Family Centers hold a large piece of the puzzle in their hands for families of young children. It is imperative that we reach out to the courts and Child Protection Services in order for Pennsylvania's Family Centers to reach our potential as an elite child abuse prevention program in Pennsylvania.

"I like the Family Center because they help you with things if you need help and they become part of your family. My kids enjoy that they do together."

-Sylvia, R



Julia and Leo

We purchased recordable books with money donated from John Morrison. We thought this would be a great way for children to stay connected with a parent if they are separated for one reason or another. One family I work with in PAT has a father who works for the government. He is often sent away to fix military equipment, sometimes for weeks at a time. The father is currently in Saudi Arabia. Before he left, I gave them one of our recordable books so dad could record himself reading it. Today mom shared a photo with me. It shows the children listening to dad read the book. She said they listen to the story every night before bed!



I find professional satisfaction in my job when.....

Peggy Sterner, 15 year CCFC Parent Educator: *"The best part of my job is working with families. I love to point out family strengths that the family was not even aware of. A very positive part is to see families move forward on their goals and to stretch their imaginations for the future."*

Michelle Welsh, 19 year CCFC Parent Educator: *"I am able to watch the faces of the children as they experience something for the first time, be involved as the parents explore activities with their children, interact with parents and the children to assist them in accomplishing goals they set for themselves, and seeing the pride in the parent's eyes as they observe their children accomplishing developmental milestones."*

Jennifer Banks, 12 year CCFC Parent Educator: *"I find professional satisfaction in my job because presenting the Parents as Teachers program to the families I serve allows them to assist their children developmentally to better prepare them for school."*

Ashley Mensch, 8 year CCFC Parent Educator: *"I have always loved helping people and being a home visitor allows me to do this first hand. It is wonderful to be able to equip families with tools, help them recognize their strengths and watch them utilize these things to overcome obstacles."*

Lori Auten, 17 year CCFC Parent Educator: *"I enjoy my job because no two days are ever the same; there is a nice mix of allowing me to put my skills to use and help families solve problems. I do work that matters. I realize that I can't save the world, but I can help improve it in some way. Families trust me and my knowledge; my creativity and goofy sense of humor are welcomed. I appreciate my coworkers in this office. They are wonderful team players who work towards the same goal of helping families reach their full potential of being amazed parents raising amazing kids."*

Chris Kupsky, 4 year CCFC Parent Educator: *"I enjoy helping people. Working with the families enrolled with Columbia County Family Center gives me an opportunity to positively impact a family for generations to come. There is no greater job satisfaction than that."*

Carrie Romig, 4 year CCFC Parent Educator: *"I am able to share in the successes/achievements made by the families I work with and feel like my time with them has helped make a difference in their lives."*

Karen Cotter, 1 year CCFC Social Worker: *"I enjoy building a rapport with clients and watching them use the parenting skills they have learned via the Family Center with their children."*

Heather Getkin, 1 month CCFC Parent Educator (former CYS Caseworker): *"I enjoy my job because families look forward to visit and are eager to see what activities I bring."*

Lacey McCourt, 1 month CCFC Parent Educator: *"I enjoy my job because every day poses a new learning opportunity, allowing me to become a better professional. My job allows me to be creative and innovative while making a difference in my community."*



Kindergarten Bus for Us Reading –Greater Nanticoke FC



Oh the Places You'll Go!

The EOTC's Parents as Teachers program recently hosted their first graduation ceremony at the Scranton Area Family Center. Five children proudly received diplomas and copies of the Dr. Seuss favorite – "Oh the Places You'll Go!" -- inscribed with a special message from their home visitor. During the ceremony, each child presented their parents with an apple to thank them for being their first (and best!) teacher! An educator from the Scranton School District was on hand to discuss school readiness and answer any parent questions about the transition process. Research shows that when parents, schools, and the community work together, children will not only be successful in school, but successful in life as well. The Parents as Teachers program helps foster and strengthen that early learning foundation, giving children the building blocks they need for future academic achievement. Dr. Seuss said it best, "You're off to great places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting, so... get on your way!" Good luck in kindergarten, to all our little graduates!



Big Splash! From Greater Nanticoke

The GNA Family Center completed its first year as a Community Innovation Zone grantee, a 3-year grant that is part of Pennsylvania's Race to the Top funding. The center is using the CIZ grant to enhance its PAT and other parent-child programs with a program called "My School, My Community." MSMC aims to improve family engagement, community involvement, and P-3 transition by providing every pre-kindergartener in the school district with a personalized My School and Community Passport, a comprehensive listing of important and enriching events and places for parents and children to enjoy together in the school district and community. This allows Family Center PAT staff to increase community impact to non-PAT families.

During 2014-15, while PAT staff continued home visits and group connections, the Family Center also sponsored athletic and cultural events in the community and hosted parent-child events at KM Smith School for MSMC participants, where year-one MSMC children currently attend kindergarten. Parent-child events included a picnic supper, supervised recreation for the children, literacy and kindergarten readiness workshops for children as well as for parents, and Parent Café discussion groups. The GNA Family Center did

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outreach events at the Nanticoke Head Start and other community preschools and daycare centers to promote and recruit for the MSMC program.

During the summer, GNA Family Center staff attended Pennsylvania's P-3 Governor's Institute with the GNA School District's superintendent to plan further collaborations. MSMC parent-child summer transition events continued, along with the center's PAT home visits and playgroups.

Current kindergarteners and parents started the school year by receiving a copy of The Bus for Us, a calendar planner, a welcome letter inviting children and one parent/caregiver to attend GNA varsity home football games for free this fall when presenting their My School and Community Passport, and hayride passes at Dundee Gardens' Pumpkinland, in Nanticoke. Kindergarteners and parents also attended a MSMC kindergarten night at KM Smith on September 24, with a picnic supper, free play, Bus for Us story time and activities, and a Parent Café. Year two has now begun for current pre-kindergarteners.



What's New at PAT?

The PA PAT state office is excited about the 2015-16 year, though we recognize the challenges we all face as the year begins. The budget impasse has had serious impacts on most family centers and other PAT providers in PA. As the state office, we were glad that the PAT National Center could set up a write in campaign for PAT affiliates to use to alert their legislators to the difficulties faced. We made arrangements with the PATNC for affiliates to delay their fees if necessary.

We are gearing up for a strong year. Just a quick unofficial re-cap about all of the PA PAT services last year: Throughout PA 6,216 families with 8,316 children participated in 108,067 personal visits and 3,223 group connections. Unfortunately, we have a waiting list of about 1,000 families. We hope to develop strategies to expand PAT in the state. And we continue to work with other evidence based home visiting models to provide services to as many families as possible.

Our two wonderful instructors, Bethany Smith and Terry Wertman, will be joined by a third instructor this year. We are excited to be welcoming a new PA PAT state office technical assistant staff person who will also serve as a PAT instructor. This will increase the number of courses we can offer and extend our technical assistance services. More to come!

Only three new organizations received MIECHV grants this year. Two of them were Family Centers providing PAT in underserved communities: Columbia County Family Center and Pottstown Family Center. Congratulations! They join Erie Family Center, McKean County Family Centers, Cameron County Family Center, Perry County Family Center and by sub-contract, Berks County Family Center.

By June of 2016 we anticipate that at least fifteen PA PAT affiliates will have the PAT Endorsement seal, so you can expect to have a partner or two going through the process with you. We will provide support for you as well.

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Parents as Teachers National Center has made a new data collection system available with the affiliation fee. Most PA PAT affiliates are signing onto Penelope and beginning to use the powerful tool. It is organized differently than Visit Tracker, and is continuing to try to respond to customer requests. Allyson Fulton and Wenda Deardorff here at the PA PAT office are providing assistance on the use of this new tool.

We were enthused by the turnout for our first statewide conference in May, 2015. Based on feedback from you in our Professional Development Survey, we intend to alternate statewide conferences with regional conferences each year. In spring, 2016 we will host Regional Conferences with PAT updates and workshops. It would be great to feature work that you do and can share.

Don't forget about the PAT Roll and Read Event Planning Toolkit...it is a good time to start planning a spring event.

Please check out our updated website: <http://www.pa-pat.org/>

Penelope: The Parents as Teachers New Data Management System

Penelope is a data management system that can be used to capture a program's services. It is available to all Parents as Teachers affiliates as it is included with a program's affiliation fee. Penelope, when used to its fullest, can provide programs a streamlined approach to maintaining records, running reports, and automatically submitting a program's Affiliate Performance Report.

Parents as Teachers families will be connected with both an Affiliate service file and at least one Group service file. Group Connections are planned and recorded within Penelope, and attendance for families is tracked within the system too.

Parent educators will schedule, plan, and record visits within each family's file. They will track goals, update referrals, and input assessment results all within Penelope.

Supervisors are able to document staff observations, record staff meetings, and enter reflective supervision sessions (all items which are required as Parents as Teachers affiliates).

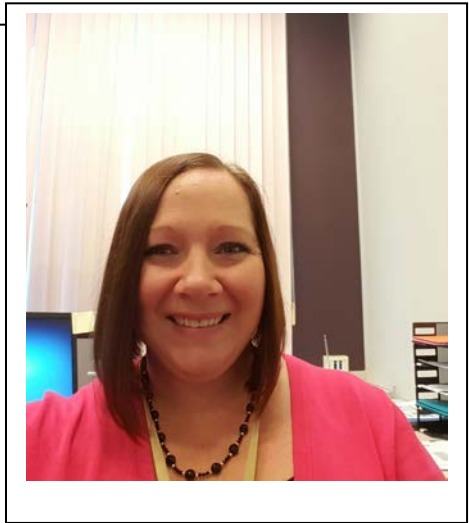
In the three months that Penelope has been live, PA PAT "Super Users", Wenda Deardorff and Allyson Fulton, have offered several sessions to support affiliate use of the new system. They have provided individual email and telephone consultation as well. Parents as Teachers National Center has responded to hundreds of program questions and listened to their concerns. Changes have been made as a result of the feedback they have received.

As a Pennsylvania affiliate, you are encouraged to contact Wenda Deardorff or Allyson Fulton at the PA Parents as Teachers state office at 717-763-1661 if you have questions related to Penelope. Wenda and Allyson are available to support your program and staff in navigating this new system.

An Interview with Desiree Weisser.....

1. Tell us a little about yourself.

I have been married for eleven years to a wonderful man and we have a 6 year old daughter who is the best part of our lives! Family is very important to me and I'm fortunate to have a close relationship with both my family and my husband's family. I enjoy cooking and baking, going on adventures with my little girl and spending time with family and friends. I am a 1996 graduate of Shippensburg University with a degree in Elementary Education.



2. Can you share what your experience has been while at and before coming to the Department of Human Services?

I have been with the Department since 2002. Within those 13 years, I have worked as: a ChildLine Caseworker; a Program Specialist in the Division of Programs where I managed many parts of the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) contract, the Child Abuse Prevention and Education Grant and the Accurint contract, just to name a few; an OCYF Regional Representative in the Central Region; and now I'm back in the Division of Programs as a Supervisor. In addition to managing the Family Centers, Promoting Responsible Fatherhood and the Time-Limited Family Reunification grants, I will also be managing OCYF's contracts/grants with: the Child Welfare Resource Center; the University of Pittsburgh's CWEB/CWEL programs; the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC); and the county Special Grants Initiative. I am also responsible for compiling our Divisions CBCAP submission as well as supervising one staff member. Prior to my time at the Department, I worked at Dauphin County Children and Youth Agency as an Intake Caseworker and was a substitute teacher for a short time before realizing that teaching wasn't the career for me.

3. What can centers expect from you as the Program Supervisor?

I will do my best to be a true advocate for these programs and bring awareness about the great work that is being done throughout the state and how that work impacts the children and families served. I will be responsive to telephone calls and emails and work hard to learn how to manage these grants in an effective and productive manner, while being open to new suggestions or ways on how to enhance these programs.

4. Are there specific things you will be expecting from the centers that they should be aware of?

While I know schedules are very busy, funding is limited and the work with the children and families is what drives the success of these programs, there is still a need to report outcomes on a regular basis. Therefore, I would expect that any request for reports or information is responded to in a timely manner. I have learned over the years that accurate and current data helps drive programs forward and gives credibility to the services offered. I will also ask that all reports that are requested be sent to the Resource Account at RA-PWOCYF_FC_PR_TLFR@pa.gov. This helps organize these reports and keeps them in one place so they are not missed. Lastly, please be patient with me while I get to know all of you and your programs!

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5. **Is there anything else you would like the family centers to know?**

I am very excited about this opportunity to work with you all and to learn how your services have impacted child abuse and neglect issues and strengthened families. I have a lot to learn and I'm ready to be an attentive student!



Tipping the Scales: The Resilience Game

The Harvard University Center on the Developing Child has recently released an interactive feature, where you learn how the choices we make can help children and the community as a whole become more resilient in the face of serious challenges. Negative events can occur at any moment, and it's your job to help families choose positive events to counteract these negatives.

Participants in the online learning game only have 20 'Resilience Bucks' to spend. Certain positives will better counteract certain negatives and have a greater positive effect on children in the community. Your goal is to tip as many children's scales as possible toward positive outcomes.

Clicking on a child's scale will give you a more detailed look at their history, scale balance, and the placement of their fulcrum. The positive experiences you choose will alter both the scale *and* the fulcrum's position—shaping the outcomes of children and the community.

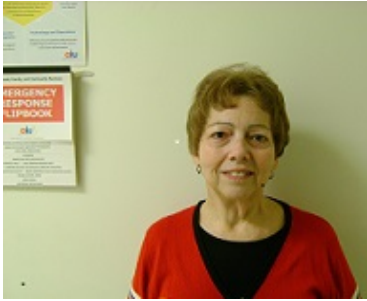
We will all face adversity in life. But will your community thrive? Or dive? It depends on the choices we make!

Check out this great online learning game!

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/resilience-game/>

MEET OUR TEAM:

Contact one of the **Family Center Network Regional Representatives** for more information about Family Centers



Mary Paull, Southwest Region

Allegheny County, PA, steelvalleyfc@aiu3.net, 1.412.461.8019

Mary has been the Director of the AIU/Steel Valley Family Center since 1999. Prior to that time she was a social worker for 17 years with an early intervention agency and brings her experience with families who have children with special needs. Mary earned a bachelor's degree in Child Development and a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. She enjoys time with her family, traveling and Steeler football games.



Allison Williams, Northeast Region

Columbia County, PA, awilliams@columbiapa.org, 1.570.387.9086

Allison has been with Columbia County Family Center since 1999 and Director since 2005. Allison focuses on prevention via a strong relationship with children and youth services and the courts. The family center brings PAT, Fatherhood, Parenting Classes, Time Limited Family Reunification, Family Group Decision Making, Baby Basics For Dads, Adolescent Workshops, Budgeting Workshops and Child-Focused Parenting (for divorcing parents) to those most at-risk for abuse/neglect.



Julie O'Connor, Southeast Region

Norristown, Montgomery County, PA, joconnor@cvca-pa.org, 1.610.279.2755

Julie O'Connor has over 30 years of experience working with children and families in the private non-profit sector. Julie is a member of the Carson Valley Children's Aid Senior leadership team and serves on multiple boards such as Norristown Interagency Council and Norristown School District Family, School and Community Partnership. Since 2006, Julie has been serving as the Norristown Family Center Director.



Sheri Valimont, Northwest Region

Mercer County, PA, svalimont@greenville.k12.pa.us, 1.724.588.2404

Sheri has been the director of the Mercer County Family Center for 15+ years, serving four school districts in Mercer County. She has an extensive background in early education and child development, with many years experience working with children and families. Sheri has established a strong focus on prevention, while building an early positive link between families and schools. In her free time she enjoys shopping, camping and spending time with her family.



"Working together with families to prevent child abuse, increase positive parenting, and promote healthy parent-child development"

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