

The Alliance

WINTER 2018

INSIDE

- 2 Coping with Overdose Death
- 3 Across the Commonwealth
- 4 Update on Changes to FBI and Criminal Clearances
- 5 A Double Win for Safe Kids

Mission

Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance educates, informs and leads communities to action to protect children from abuse and neglect.

pa-fsa.org

The Saving Grace of Mandated Reporting

The man wasn't a regular congregant of Pastor Les Montgomery's church, the Restored Apostolic Ministries of Altoona, but the story he told that Sunday evening in 2015 horrified the pastor and led him to file a child abuse report that ultimately saved three children from further devastating abuse.

Pastor Les said the man, now identified by police as Michael S. Hampton, 34, of Altoona, recounted to him how he had repeatedly sexually abused his then-4-year-old and 6-year-old sons, and molested his then-2-year-old daughter. Heightening the horror, the man told Pastor Les he wanted to rape the little girl.

"I told him he needed professional help and I also told him that as a mandated reporter, I was going to turn him in because the kids needed to be protected and he needed help," Pastor Les recounted. "He said, 'If you turn me in, I'm going to stab you.' I told him I had to turn him in for the protection of his kids and if he had to stab me, he had to stab me."

Fortunately, Hampton did not attack the pastor and Montgomery did call ChildLine and reported Hampton's admission of sexually abusing his three children. Through both his work as a clergyman and as a part-time employee of Head Start, Montgomery was considered a mandated reporter under Pennsylvania's Child Protective Services Law and was required to file a report about the case to ChildLine, the state's 24/7 reporting



The Montgomery family.

hotline. There is an exception carved into the law for pastoral-penitent communications, Catholic Church confessions, and attorney-client communications, but Pastor Les did not consider this case to be an exception to the reporting requirement.

"You have to protect the kids. As a pastor, I knew it could hurt my reputation as far as keeping confidentiality but I believe the kids' safety is more important and that's what I learned through Mandated Reporter Training," Montgomery said.

Pastor Montgomery subsequently learned that Blair County Children, Youth and Family Services investigated the case and while no criminal charges were filed at that time, Hampton was prevented from further abusing his children. It was only recently when

Coping with the Overdose Death of a Loved One

In September, PFSA welcomed families who are coping with the death of a loved one due to drug overdose or other substance use causes. We partnered with the Highmark Caring Place in Lemoyne to provide a forum for these families to talk about their experiences and how they are trying to move forward with life after this traumatic event. Of course, there were tears – but there

was also an abundance of hope in the room.

During the planning of the forum, and afterward, we have heard from families whose lives have been forever changed by the devastating effects of Substance Use Disorder. Patty Greene, mother of two sons in rural Elk County, shared a bit of her story with us.



Patty and her sons Nick and Danny (right) at Patty's wedding.

It is hard to summarize something that has had such an impact on your life into words.

My son Danny was my oldest. He started using drugs when he was 14. Danny was shy and very sensitive. He told me that he felt free when he was high and he was able to express himself without caring what others thought.

He was an addict at the age of 15; after his 16th birthday, we started our way to rehab. I was going to take my son there and they would return him to me all fixed and everything would be right again. I went to the family program and learned about enabling relapse. I connected with other families there dealing with the same emotions I was. But I really did think that everything was going to be fine and that Danny learned his lesson.

That was many, many years ago and many rehabs since.

For 22 years his addiction was front and center in my life. I loved him so much and I never gave up hope. The sleepless nights, the pacing until he would come home, the anger because he would empty my checking account or steal stuff from the house and sell it, the fear every time the phone would ring at night. Once he became a father, I thought, this is the answer! I was so excited, I thought he would understand the love a parent has and how much addiction hurts families. No, it doesn't work that way.

When Danny lost his battle with addiction, he had been clean and sober for nine months. We were all so hopeful and so proud of him at the time he relapsed and died. Period. My heart shattered into a million pieces, the air was sucked out of my life, the joy, the happiness was gone. At times I would wonder what is the sense of any of it? Why do I bother to get up? I wondered if there were warning signs that I missed? For a year I was lost, waking up in the morning and going through the motions. And then one

day I went to a church service, and had a life-changing experience. During prayer all the pain flowed out of me and I cried so hard I couldn't breathe. It was 13 months after my son passed.

His girlfriend found a letter he wrote a year before he died. He said, "I cannot imagine the world without me in it, but if addiction kills me, don't grieve for me but use me to help others." That has become my mission.

There is a light at the end of the dark tunnel of grief and despair, even though at times we don't believe it. There are many who do recover and make a difference in other people's lives. Grief is hard, you feel like you will never be able to laugh, smile or feel joy again and when you do, you feel guilty. Know that it is just a moment in time and it will pass as you heal. Many people build walls around their heart so they never feel again. That is not what life is about. And the addict: we don't understand your struggles, we don't understand your choices and we don't understand why this happened. We love you so much and what we want most is to have you back with us. ●

The Saving Grace of Mandated Reporting

Continued from page 1.

Hampton's older son, now 8, came forward with his allegations of abuse that police could file felony rape of a child and other charges against him. Hampton is accused of sodomizing the boy and forcing him to perform oral sex.

Pastor Les believes in the power of prayer and in the saving grace of mandated reporter training. In the summer of 2016, he brought PFSA's highly-acclaimed free, in-person Mandated Reporter "Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse" Training to his church staff and volunteers.

"Through my work at Head Start and as a foster parent of now five kids, I have gone through a lot of training. But I thought this (PFSA's) mandated reporter training was meaningful and very good," he said. "For example, I thought second-hand information was not reportable. Like the he-said, she-said, we-said kind of stuff wasn't reportable. But I learned through the training, no, report it all! Give as much information as possible about the person and the situation so when you report it, they can track it down."

To schedule a Mandated Reporter Training, please call PFSA at 800-448-4906 or visit www.pa-fsa.org. ●

Across the Commonwealth

Cambria County

Beginnings, Inc. in Johnstown sponsored the Harvest of Hope Music and Arts Festival in October. The day-long event drew music lovers and crafts enthusiasts to celebrate people in recovery. Organizer Trey Smay, a CASA advocate supervisor with Beginnings, Inc., said, "In this area, especially, a lot of people are struggling with addiction, so we're here to celebrate people getting clean and helping others." In addition to some great music and community-building, the event raised funds for Beginnings, Inc.'s Family Foundations Academy and **Trinity Farms Center for Healing**, two programs that provide education and support for parents, for recovering people and for people returning home after incarceration.

Dauphin County

Jennifer Vokoun, a Family Educator with **Tri-County Community Action Commission** in Harrisburg, facilitated the first graduating class for the **ACT Raising Safe Kids Program** in central PA. ACT Raising Safe Kids is an evidence-based parenting program developed by the American Psychological Association.



Jen Vokoun (center left) with the ACT graduates.

The class started out with five participants and four graduated. Jen noticed that each week the participants interacted more and developed trust with staff and other participants. The group soon realized that their parenting concerns were easier to talk about when everyone shared their experiences. On graduation day, they exchanged contact information so they can keep in touch with each other. Great work Jen and ACT parents!

Philadelphia

PFSA partnered with **Educating Communities for Parenting** and **People 4 People** to hold a full-day training on "Children of Incarcerated Parents." Over 100 people who work with incarcerated parents and their children attended the event, which included training by Ann

Adalist-Estrin, Director of the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated. A panel of staff from programs in Philadelphia highlighted innovative approaches to helping children.



Bryanna and Diana Vuolo, founder of SWAN

One highlight of the day was learning about SWAN, Scaling Walls a Note at a Time, a Lancaster-based program that helps children whose parents are incarcerated to thrive and break the cycle of incarceration through music and mentoring. Bryanna Still, a 16-year-old SWAN participant, told her story and sang several songs for the group. Similar events will be held in other parts of PA in 2018. ●

PFSA recently received a surprise gift from inmates at a state prison in Forest County. A check for more than \$800, along with the letter below, arrived in mid-November:

We are writing to you on behalf of the Family Reintegration Committee here at **SCI Forest in Marienville, PA**. We are a group composed of both staff and inmates with the goal of raising awareness and promoting change in many areas of family dynamics. We do this through re-entry services, seminars, workshops and fundraisers within our institution.

Most recently, we held a 5K walk/run fundraiser where inmates were able to donate money and participate in the day's events to take a stand against domestic violence. Our committee would like to present the proceeds from the walk/run to your organization to benefit the services you provide to families and children.

We would also like to express our sincere gratitude for the assistance you provide to those in need. The Family Reintegration Committee will continue to stay dedicated to strengthening families inside and outside of this prison.

Sixteen men signed the letter. A big **thank you and much appreciation** goes out to the men at SCI Forest, who have proven that everyone can do something to prevent child abuse. PFSA staff will be visiting them in the coming months to talk about how their gift to PFSA will be used, and offer resources for reuniting with children when released. ●



Update on Changes to Criminal and FBI Required Clearances

Two changes occurred this fall regarding Criminal and FBI clearances.

- The fee for the Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check was increased to \$22 on December 1, 2017. Requests for this clearance with the purpose of volunteering remains free.
- The Commonwealth transitioned from using the vendor Cogent for FBI Criminal Background Checks to IDEMIA. The Identogo site locations, where you can be fingerprinted, can be found at www.indentogo.com/locations or by calling 844-321-2101. ●

Who Needs Clearances?

The following individuals must obtain clearances:

- An employee of child care services.
- A self-employed provider of child care services in a family child care home.
- An individual 14 years of age or older who is applying for or holding a paid position as an employee with a program, activity or service as a person responsible for the child's welfare or having direct contact with children.
- If the program, activity or service is an internship, externship, work-study, co-op or similar program, only an adult applying for or holding a paid position with an employer that participates in the internship, externship, work-study, co-op or similar program with a school and whom the employer and the school identify as the child's supervisor and the person responsible for the child's welfare while the child participates in the program with the employer must obtain the clearances.
- Any individual seeking to provide childcare services under contract with a child care facility or program.
- An individual 18 years of age or older who resides for at least 30 days in a calendar year in the following homes which are subject to SUPERVISION OR licensure by the department under Articles IX and X of the act of June 13, 1967 (P.L.31, No.21), known as the Public Welfare Code:
 - o A family living home.
 - o A community home for individuals with an intellectual disability.
 - o A host home for children.
 - o This does not include an individual with an intellectual disability or chronic psychiatric disability receiving services in a home.
- An individual who applies to the department for a certificate of compliance or a registration certificate to provide child day care in a residence shall include criminal history record and child abuse record information required under section 6344(b) for every individual 18 years of age or older who resides in the home for at least 30 days in a calendar year.
- A foster parent.
- A prospective adoptive parent.
- An individual 18 years of age or older who resides in the home of a foster parent for at least 30 days in a calendar year or who resides in the home of a prospective adoptive parent for at least 30 days in a calendar year.
- School Employees (Pursuant to the provision of Act 153 of 2014)
- Adult Volunteers with a child care service, a school or a program, activity or service responsible for the child's welfare or having direct volunteer contact with children.

Which clearances do they need?

- Report of criminal history from the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP);
- Child Abuse History Clearance from the Department of Human Services (Child Abuse); and
- Fingerprint-based federal criminal history submitted through the Pennsylvania State Police or its authorized agent (FBI)

For more information on clearances and mandated reporting of suspected child abuse, visit our website www.pa-fsa.org. ●



Save the Date! PA Blue Ribbon Champion for Safe Kids Ceremony

Join us on Wednesday, April 4 join us in the Capitol Main Rotunda to announce this year's Blue Ribbon Champions for Safe Kids award winners. This event is the official kick-off of Child Abuse Prevention Month in Pennsylvania, when we'll announce the four award winners who are true "champs for safe kids." These folks have gone above and beyond for kids' safety. You'll see firsthand 4,597 blue flags on and around the capitol paying tribute to the children who were abused and neglected last year. Join us as we memorialize the 46 children who died because of child abuse and neglect. Join us to pledge your commitment to protecting PA's children!

Follow our event planning on FB and Twitter, but save the date-today! ●

A Double Win for Safe Kids!

Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance and our public relations firm, Nell McCormack Abom Communications, earned two 2017 Keystone Awards from the Public Relations Society of America, Central Pa. Chapter, for the PA Blue Ribbon Champion for Kids campaign. The Keystone Awards recognize excellence in the practice of media and public relations. PFSA and Abom Communications received honors in the Special Events and Observances category for the 2017 PA Blue Ribbon Champion for Kids Awards Ceremony and Rally for Children and in the Media Relations/Media Placement category for the overall campaign.

"We have created not just a memorable and moving annual event," said Angela Liddle, PFSA President and CEO. "We have really created a movement to protect Pennsylvania's children by awakening the 'Champion for Children' who lies within each of us. I thank our incredibly generous sponsors, our tireless board and staff members, and dedicated volunteers who helped us imagine and stage this wonderful event."

The PA Blue Ribbon Champion for Kids Awards Ceremony and Rally for Children celebrated professional and volunteer heroes of children and raised awareness of child abuse prevention in Pennsylvania. PFSA turned the Capital City blue by lighting the State Capitol and the Market Street Bridge blue, and lining State Street and the outside of the Capitol with more than four thousand blue ribbon flags – each representing a child harmed by abuse in Pa. The ceremony also included a somber tribute



PFSA Executive Administrative Assistant Jill Whitmyer with Nell Abom (center) and Angela Liddle

to the children killed by abuse and music by youth performers including the Philadelphia Girls Choir.

"It is an honor to promote the efforts of PFSA to protect the children of Pennsylvania from abuse and neglect," said Abom. "I am proud that the judges recognized the comprehensive approach we took in launching the first-ever PA Blue Ribbon Champions for Kids campaign. We would not have been successful had it not been for the creativity and hard work of the entire PFSA team, our sponsors, our volunteers, and our friends in the media who truly embraced the message that every Pennsylvanian must #ProtectPAKids." ●

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“You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.”

— Khalil Gibran

