

FAMILY CONNECTIONS



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Lessons learned, trust gained through the years Couple successfully raises young adopted son

When 4-year-old AJ saw his new mom take out a suitcase, panic flashed across his face.

“It was a couple of months after he came to us [in 1996] and we were going to visit my family,” explains Karen Ortman, AJ’s adoptive mother. “When you realize what he had been through, you understand.”

AJ was born in Lithuania. His birth mother gave him up when he was 2 years old. He lived in an orphanage until he was 3½ and then was adopted by an American couple. He remained with them a few months, but they were unable to keep him permanently. That’s when Karen and Bill Ortman welcomed AJ into their home.

The Ortman’s had just finished their home study with Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and expected to begin the gradual process of finding and getting to know a child and eventually bringing him or her into their family. But on this very snowy January day a little boy was in need.

“We expected to follow the natural process of things, but Mother Nature wasn’t cooperating,” Karen says. “There was a series of blizzards and we made our decision in two days. When I saw AJ’s picture...that was it. The day we met him, we brought him home forever.”

Karen describes some difficulties at first because AJ didn’t speak English.

But he could understand a lot of what was said to him and, if necessary, would pull Karen and Bill around by their hands to make his point.

“For about six months, he would not let us hold him,” Karen says. “He would roll up in a ball and rock himself to sleep. But then things changed. He fell and ran to me for comfort, and that’s when I knew he trusted us.”

AJ stands for Alfredus Josef. The first name is AJ’s Lithuanian birth name, Karen explains, and they gave him his middle name. He grew up doing “typical boy stuff,” she says, playing soccer, attending Boy Scouts, playing video games. When he was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, Karen and Bill made sure he had the help he needed to succeed at school.

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From left, Karen, AJ, and Bill Ortman at AJ’s high school graduation. Inset, AJ at age 4.

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Determine your purpose to put life into perspective

BY: **LAUREN CONZAMAN, MSW, LSW**
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE

Many of us have been personally affected by the financial situation being faced by our nation. Times are tough for many families; stress levels are high at home and at work, and many are trying to figure out how to make it through this difficult time.

While in a recent meeting to discuss some of the challenges we face, a very interesting question was raised that caused me to reflect on the work we do. “Why are we here?” This question had me thinking for several days. I could relate it to the workplace, family, children, school, the world, and so on.

My initial response was to relate it to our work and I said, “We are here for the children and families,” which is absolutely true. While times are tough for everyone across the United States, we are here to serve our most vulnerable. We are here to advocate for and educate those who need a mentor, parent, and teacher. We are here to fight for those unable to fight for themselves. We are here to fulfill a mission of loving the neighbor through acts of service, as described in Diakon’s mission statement.

But on my drive home that day I thought about this question on a personal level. Why am I here? What is my purpose? What do I value? My drive went by in the blink of an eye as I found myself reflecting on life and what is most important to me: my own children and family. No matter how terrible of a morning we have, how challenging the behaviors we are faced with as parents, or how overwhelmed we become, we are here for a reason. We all have purpose. While mine may be different from yours, there is a reason. You just have to figure out what yours is.

So when you are having “one of those days” or feel as though you are at your limit, just ask yourself that very question—“Why am I here?”—it should put things in perspective for you, as it did me. Don’t worry about the small, insignificant, or what can be considered “petty” issues.

Figure out why you do what you do. And while you reflect on this thought, give your children a kiss and tell them that you love them more than anything. That’s what I did.

Iron Pigs mascot joins Resource Family Picnic

“Ferrous,” mascot for the Iron Pigs minor league baseball team, made a special appearance at the annual resource family picnic, held at Lone Lane Park in Allentown in June. Here he poses



with staff members Jennifer Roe, counselor, left, and Kathy Roach, director of permanency services. The resource family picnic, which includes games and food, is held in appreciation of those involved with Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, including current foster and adoptive families.

2010 COMING EVENT

Aug. 11, 2011: Adoption and foster care night with the Senators

For information on this event, or to volunteer your time and/or resources, please contact Elisa Esh, director of recruitment and family development, at (717) 724-7979 or eshe@diakon.org.

Help us find forever families



Da-Junay, 13

Da-Junay is a pretty young lady with a great sense of humor. Although she can be reserved when she is first introduced to new people, she warms up when given a chance to interact with others. However, she would rather listen than chat.

Da-Junay performs well academically and receives A's and B's on her report cards and does best in a supportive learning environment. Her favorite subjects are spelling and math. Da-Junay says she wants to be a doctor, lawyer, or singer when she grows up.

Da-Junay also likes being involved in extra curricular activities, especially cheerleading, basketball, and jump rope. In her free time Da-Junay likes to write in her journal and do art work. Da-Junay has a wonderful imagination and uses it as a creative outlet. Most recently, she has undertaken the challenge of scripting a play titled "A Day with DaJa." In church she likes to sing in the choir and participate in Hallelujah Hands, a sign language ministry.

Da-Junay would like a family with pets that shares her love of animals. She is looking for a forever family that will be patient and love her always. All families will be considered for Da-Junay, and she

is legally free for adoption. For more information about Da-Junay, please contact her child focused recruiter, Karen Knodel, MSW, LSW at (215) 355-6500, ext. 193 or by e-mail at kknodel@bethanna.org.



Cecilia, 14

Cecilia loves to shop, eat, and watch cartoons including Sponge Bob Square Pants. She enjoys music and her favorite artist is Lil' Wayne. Cecilia is very talented and is an accomplished knitter. Her dream is to be a veterinarian for house pets, not large animals. She is very talkative when she is comfortable. She wants a family to help her feel safe and loved and would do well in either a single- or two-parent family. For more information on Cecilia, please contact Russ McCurdy, permanency specialist, at (412) 244-3083 or by e-mail at rum@the-institute.org.

If you are interested in learning more about any of these children, please contact

Elisa Esh, director of recruitment and family development at Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, (717) 724-7979 or eshe@diakon.org.



Fred, 17

Fred is a very polite young man who is a little shy but warms up quickly to friendly people. When in public, he often opens doors for others, and is always respectful to his elders. He hopes to go to college one day and work on computers. He has been working on some techniques to relieve stress in his life and has found that working out and lifting weights is a great outlet for him. He loves fast cars and is very mechanically inclined. One of his dreams is to find a father with the same interest who will help him restore an old car, such as a 1967 Ford Mustang.

Fred is very excited about being adopted and has played an active part in his family recruitment. For more information on Fred, please contact Russ McCurdy, permanency specialist, at (412) 244-3083 or by e-mail at rum@the-institute.org.

Jeremy, 14

Jeremy is a quiet and strong boy who enjoys going to amusement parks, riding dirt bikes and quads, and hunting and fishing. He likes video games such as James Bond, Call of Duty, and Need for Speed. He would

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Help us find forever families Continued from Page 3



like to have a muscle car some day and a street bike. Jeremy's favorite types of movies include horror, and comedy with Will Farrell and Adam Sandler, his favorite actors.

Jeremy would do well in an active family that enjoys the outdoors and spending time together. For more information on Jeremy, please contact Russ McCurdy, permanency specialist, at (412) 244-3083 or by e-mail at rum@the-institute.org.



Josh, 19

Josh is a friendly young man who enjoys going to the movies, playing video games, and playing pool. His favorite sports are hockey and basketball. Josh is polite and soft-spoken. He is respectful of authority figures, is motivated to succeed, and is

able to express his feelings. Josh works hard in school and earns good grades. He would like to join the military after graduation. Josh is in need of a loving and supportive forever family to call his own.

All families will be considered for Josh. He is legally free for adoption. For more information on Josh, please contact Kristen Jacobs, child specific recruitment specialist, at (717) 795-0343 or by e-mail at jacobsk@diakon.org.



Nicholas, 15

Nicholas, or Nick, is a fun and energetic young man who has a terrific sense of humor. He loves being outside and enjoys activities such as hiking, camping, and biking, as well as basketball and football. Nicholas also enjoys playing on the computer and playing video games with his friends.

Nick does well in school and has been listed on the distinguished honor roll. He is a good student, studying hard to earn good grades. He takes pride in his work and is willing to ask for help when he needs it. Nicholas enjoys the lessons he learns in school and likes having stories read to him.

Nick has a very clear idea about what he is looking for in a family. He would like younger siblings and an active family that enjoys spending time together. Nick would like a family who will accept him for who he is and not expect him to be perfect. All families will be considered for Nick. He is legally free for adoption. For more information about Nick, please contact Elizabeth White, child specific recruitment specialist at (717) 795-0479 or by e-mail at whitee@diakon.org.



Quamiere, 12

Quamiere is a quiet boy, but loves one-on-one attention. He is in sixth grade, and enjoys volunteering to read while there. His teachers and social worker tell him that he reads with emotion. He is also good at memorizing and reciting poetry and is always eager to learn new things.

When he is not at school, Quamiere likes to play or watch football and basketball. He also likes to go skating, play at the park, hang out with friends, play bingo, and do arts and crafts. He says he uses drawing as an outlet when he gets angry because it helps him to let out his angry feelings. He also likes to go to carnivals. His favorite color is blue and he wears a lot of it.

Quamiere is looking for a forever family that has other children. He says he gets along especially well with younger kids. He hopes that his family would allow him to play on some sports teams. Quamiere isn't comfortable around cats or dogs, but he does like fish, turtles, and other types of amphibians.

For more information on Quamiere, please contact Karen Knodel, MSW, LSW at (215) 355-6500, ext. 193 or by e-mail at kknodel@bethanna.org.



Tylan, 11

Tylan is a bright and friendly young boy. He enjoys school and is enthusiastic about science, which is his favorite subject. Tylan loves taking apart and rebuilding toys. He is inquisitive and curious to know more about the world around him and asks many questions when presented with a new situation or learning experience. Tylan often surprises adults with his observations, which are mature for his age.

Tylan is able to trust adults and is eager to build positive relationships with new people. He views the adults in his life as people who love and

care about him and has transferred this confidence into building new connections with others.

All families will be considered for Tylan. He is legally free for adoption. For more information on Tylan, please contact Elizabeth White, child specific recruitment specialist, at (717) 795-0479 or whitee@diakon.org.



Jacen, 12

Jacen is an outgoing young man who enjoys watching NASCAR, looking at muscle cars, and playing with Legos and Transformers. Jacen does well in school, especially when provided with extra motivation throughout the day. He wants to do something great with his life.

Jacen dreams of having a forever family with a mother, father, and pets to care for. He needs a supportive and loving family who will understand his feelings.

All families will be considered for Jacen. He is legally free for adoption. For more information on Jacen, please contact Kristen Jacobs, child specific recruitment specialist, at (717) 795-0343 or jacobsk@diakon.org.



Robby, 14

Robby is a smart and quiet young man who likes to help others. He enjoys riding his bike and playing with mini skateboards. He also likes to play Madden Football and Smack Down versus Raw 2009 on PlayStation.

Robby listens to all kinds of music including oldies, classical, R & B, rap, and hip hop. He likes to play football, basketball, and wall ball, as well as card games such as Pity Pat, War, Speed, and Go Fish.

Robby isn't sure yet what he wants to be when he grows up, but he might want to be a banker or a police officer. When asked what he would wish for if he was given three wishes, Robby says he would like a family, a dog, and not to get angry anymore.

Robby says he would like a family that has both a mom and a dad, but he would be ok if there was just a mom or a dad. He would prefer to be an only child, but it would be okay if his family has one brother or sister. He would also like to stay in the Philadelphia area. Robby would love a family that has a dog, and also one that will play cards with him, join him in video games, and maybe even take him camping.

For more information on Robby, please contact Karen Knodel, MSW, LSW at (215) 355-6500, ext. 193 or at kknodel@bethanna.org.

Staff members honored for finding children forever homes

Thanks to their singular focus on helping children find families of their own, Elisa Esh and Matt Shaffer, staff members of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, have earned recognition as a 2010 Angel in Adoption.

The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI), which orchestrates the Angels in Adoption program, honored Esh and Shaffer, along with more than 190 “angels,” at an event in Washington, D.C., recently.

Director of recruitment and family development, Esh was overwhelmed by her selection for the award and referred to the three-day celebration as “the Oscars of adoption.” Award recipients met with members of Congress, participated in a pinning ceremony, and enjoyed a cocktail party and gala.

“It is a credit to Diakon, its service and mission that two people were selected from one agency,” she says.

Esh, who has made finding homes for older children her personal focus, credits her work in developing the DiaKINnections program for her selection. The program puts an emphasis on placing children, who have been in care for a long time, with relatives.

“A large percentage of the kids I work with are in residential treatment,” she says of what motivates her efforts. “They have rooms, but it is not like living in a home with a parent. There is no one there to hug them when they are having a bad day.”

Shaffer, who has worked for Diakon less than two years as a child-specific recruitment specialist for the

“Wendy’s Wonderful Kids” program, is equally committed to the children with special needs he serves.

“Even though I lack personal experience with adoption and foster

care, I understand that it is really tough for everyone involved,” he says. “It is really important for me to stay on top of everything I’m doing, when I’m working with families and kids.”

“Although he approaches every child’s situation with the same effort and attention, he has advocated every step of the way for one child in particular. The youth lost his status as a ‘Wendy’s Wonderful Kid,’ when his social service agency decided he would remain in foster care for the foreseeable future,” says Lauren Conzaman, executive director of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. Instead of ending contact with him, Shaffer continued to guide and mentor the young man, bringing stability to a challenging situation.

The family seeking to adopt the child nominated Shaffer for the Angel in Adoption award. “They said I was the only true advocate for the child,” Shaffer remembers of the nomination. “I had the best interest of the family and the boy in mind whenever I was making decisions.”

Both Esh and Shaffer used their



Matt Shaffer



Elisa Esh

visit to Washington to accept the awards as an opportunity to reach out to members of Congress with their thoughts on how child welfare legislation could be improved.

“I thanked them for the Fostering Connections to Increase Adoption Act, which forces agencies to look closely at kin and fictive kin and attempts to decrease the number of children who actually come into foster care,” says Esh. “If we can keep them out of care and with family who know them, that is the best bet to avoid the loss of their birth families and multiple moves in foster care which cause extreme grief for the child. However, when reunification with birth families is not possible, we strive to place children permanently with adoptive ‘forever families’ that they so need and deserve. And, we have more than a century of experience in doing just that!”

The Angels in Adoption program is a CCAI public-awareness campaign and provides an opportunity for all members of Congress to honor the work of their constituents who have enriched the lives of foster children and orphans in the United States and abroad.

His clothes no longer in garbage bags, adopted youth gives other children a better option

A green garbage bag held all his possessions. The clothes in the bag were old and tattered. He wasn't homeless. He was Angel, a young boy on his way to live with yet another foster family.

As he moved from foster home to foster home, the trash bag went with him.

"When I was younger, I didn't realize how bad it was, but I realize it now. No one wants to move around with garbage bags," says Angel Gring-Vazquez of Spring Township. So he recently did something to keep other youths from experiencing what he did.

Gring-Vazquez just celebrated his 16th birthday with a party, but with a selfless twist. Instead of bringing gifts for Angel, guests were asked to contribute a backpack or duffel bag. Thanks to the support he received from his guests and countless community organizations and businesses, Gring-Vazquez will ultimately supply more than 150 bags for children and youths served by Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

Gring-Vazquez began formulating the idea for the party several years ago when he was asked to speak to local congregations about foster care.

"Angel talked about how his clothing was transferred seven times as he moved from house to house. Angel got sad and emotional," explains Ted Vazquez, Angel's parent. "When the time came, he wanted to do something to give back. It was Angel's dream to collect the bags for Diakon."

The bags will be used for children entering care through Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and for children going to summer camps or on vacation.



Angel Gring-Vazquez with some of the backpacks and duffel bags collected at his party.

"This will mean a lot to our children to have something to put their possessions in," says Kathy Roach, a director with the program's Topton office. "No more trash bags for children coming and leaving care. Because so many bags were collected, there will be one for every child."

Angel and his older brother, Tino, were adopted through Diakon Adoption & Foster Care by the Gring-Vazquez family in 2005.

Without his adoptive family, Gring-Vazquez doesn't think he would "have made it very far" in life. "The path I was going down was leading me nowhere," says Gring-Vazquez. "I had no one to look up to, no father-figure and no one to tell me what was good and bad."

Now, he says, he has a family who has set him on the right path, that has given him stability, direction and

love. "I can't ask for more love than I have," says Gring-Vazquez.

His family has made so much of an impact on him that when he grows up, he wants to adopt children. "I want to make sure that kids don't have the life I had," he says. "Adopting children and setting them on the right path is the way to go."

When Angel was 9 years old, he told his caseworker, "You have the coolest job in world. You make families." Now, he has a permanent family and is helping other children find their forever homes - with new luggage in tow.

For more information on foster care and adoption, please contact Roach at (610) 682-1504 or visit www.diakon.org/adoption.

 You can provide a child with a duffel bag and personal care items by sending a donation in the enclosed envelope.

FINALIZATIONS

Shania

March 10, 2010
Leanne & Virgil,
Myerstown, Pa.

Alexa & Kadin

March 10, 2010
Jack & Carol,
Hereford, Pa.

Daniel, Deborah, Mary-Joy, Paul, & Samuel

March 17, 2010
Adekunle & Adebimpe,
Pottstown, Pa.

Shaylin

March 22, 2010
Matthew & Kristine,
York, Pa.

Lakota, Edward, & Sarah

March 23, 2010
Robert & Regina,
Bethlehem, Pa.

Sacha

March 24, 2010
Tyrone & Terri,
Birdsboro, Pa.

Isabella, Rachel, & Vivienne

March 24, 2010
Clyde & Christina,
Freeland, Pa.

Allan

March 30, 2010
Thomas & Kelly,
New Ringgold, Pa.

Jordan

April 9, 2010
David & Melissa,
Fleetwood, Pa.

Jayziel

April 15, 2010
Margarita,
Reading, Pa.

Alexander

April 28, 2010
Thomas & Molly,
West Reading, Pa.

Quincy

April 28, 2010
Kerri,
Bangor, Pa.

Johnathin

April 28, 2010
Wayne & Steve,
Kutztown, Pa.

Steven

May 4, 2010
Steven & Linda,
Saylorsburg, Pa.

Selena & Jeramiah

May 5, 2010
Charles & Jill,
Palmerton, Pa.

Delmas

May 14, 2010
Delmas & Carolyn,
Allentown, Pa.

Brandon & Noah

May 18, 2010
Richard & Tina,
East Stroudsburg, Pa.

Daniel

May 19, 2010
David & Tracey,
Schuylkill Haven, Pa.

Samantha & Rachel

May 26, 2010
Sarah,
Reading, Pa.

Alfonso & Mercedes

May 27, 2010
William & Karen,
Northampton, Pa.

Tashawna & Kaden

June 7, 2010
Cleason & Crystal,
Plainfield, Pa.

Adriana

June 15, 2010
Marvin & Stacy,
Fleetwood, Pa.

Ta-Laijah

June 22, 2010
Tanisha & Shanoy,
York, Pa.

Moellyn

June 23, 2010
April & Reinaldo,
Hanover, Pa.

Michael

June 28, 2010
Joey & Annette,
Red Lion, Pa.

Jaisa & Nachaly

July 7, 2010
Todd & Pam,
Allentown, Pa.

Brayden

July 7, 2010
Michael & Kathleen,
Douglassville, Pa.

Hunter

July 7, 2010
Michael & Greta,
Mohnton, Pa.

Madison

July 14, 2010
Chad & Diana,
Andreas, Pa.

Nicholas

July 27, 2010
Brett & Heather,
Aspers, Pa.

Parker & Gage

July 27, 2010
Mike & Leslie,
Camp Hill, Pa.

James & Jolynn

Aug. 3, 2010
Gary & Jennifer,
Maytown, Pa.

Tammy

Aug. 3, 2010
Anthony & Denise,
York, Pa.

Rylee

Aug. 11, 2010
Dawn & Joanne,
Zieglerville, Pa.

Jaqueline

Aug. 17, 2010
Robert & Dawn,
Allentown, Pa.

Malik, Noriyanna, & Khalil

Aug. 24, 2010
Robert & Debra,
Pottstown, Pa.

Isabelle

Aug. 27, 2010
Joseph & Lisa,
Birdsboro, Pa.

Angel

Aug. 27, 2010
Robert & Stacy,
Leesport, Pa.



Sacha, who was adopted by Terri and Tyrone of Birdsboro on March 24, stands with her new family.



The family grew by leaps and bounds on March 17, when Samuel, Paul, Mary-Joy, Daniel, and Deborah were adopted by Adekunle and Adebimpe of Pottstown.



There are smiles all around as Steven Samuel joins his new family. He was adopted by Steven and Linda of Saylorsburg on May 4.



Richard and Tina of East Stroudsburg adopted Brandon and Noah on May 18.



Jayziel was adopted by Margarita of Reading on April 14.



Johnathin poses with his new family in the courthouse on April 28 after he is adopted by Wayne and Steve of Kutztown.



Alexander is adopted by Thomas and Molly of West Reading on April 28.



Mercedes and Alfonso pose with their new parents, Karen and Bill of Northampton, along with those who helped make their May 27 adoption possible.



Jack and Carol of Hereford adopted Kadin and Alexa on March 10.



Daniel and his new family pose in the courthouse after the finalization of his adoption to David and Tracey of Schuylkill Haven.



Tammy was adopted by Anthony & Denise of York on Aug. 3.



Michael and Kathleen of Douglassville adopt Brayden on July 7.



On Aug. 27, Robert and Stacy of Leesport adopt Angel.



Gary and Jennifer of Maytown proudly stand with James and Jolynn as they are adopted on Aug. 3.



Dawn and Joanne of Zieglerville adopt Rylee on Aug. 11.



The family poses with the judge on June 23 when Moellyn is adopted by Reinaldo and April of Hanover.



Joey and Annette of Red Lion adopt Michael on June 28.



Robert and Debra of Pottstown increased their family by three on Aug. 24 when they adopted Malik, Noriyanna, and Khalil.

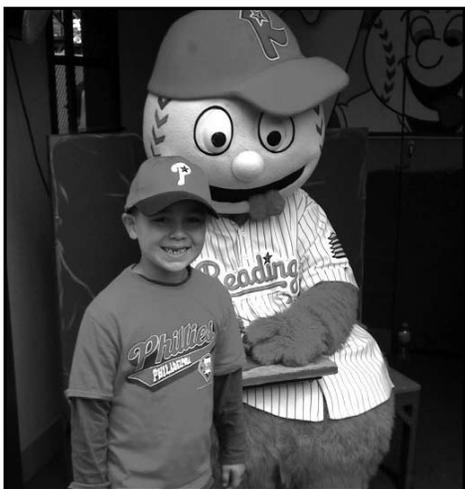
Back-to-school tips help children adjust to new routines

By now your children are likely getting into the routine of their school year as they adjust to new teachers, grade expectations, and a variety of social relationships. In addition to the importance of grades and academic progress, your child's ability to feel comfortable socially and adjust to the routine, structure, and rules can be just as important.

Below are a few things to consider in supporting your children to help them get the most out of their school experience:

- 1) Understand that school is where children learn a multitude of social skills through peer relations, interaction with authority figures, and the opposite sex, as well as where they perceive themselves to be in the "pecking order."
- 2) Realize that children who are experiencing academic success but are socially alienated are likely very unhappy, as are children who may be socially popular and academically inclined but struggle with the rigid routines, structure, and rules in the school setting.
- 3) Help your children enjoy learning by encouraging questions, accomplishments, and nurturing their natural curiosity.
- 4) Spend time each day asking and, more importantly, listening to your children about their school day. Pay special attention to teachable moments and areas where you can "catch them being good" and reinforce behaviors through praise and affirmations.
- 5) When problems are shared, encourage your children to develop ways they can resolve the problem on their own. This will teach valuable skills as well as bolster confidence. Only become directly involved if adult intervention is required.
- 6) Encourage your children to become involved in extracurricular activities through clubs, intramurals, music, and/or sports. Involvement in activities such as debate or photography club, music, and sports helps provide children with opportunities to discover and develop their interests and talents. In addition to providing a healthy social outlet, these activities help children to develop confidence and self-respect that may not occur through academics alone.
- 7) Be careful not to place undue pressure to succeed on your children, as this can cause anxiety, stress, and fear of failure.
- 8) Be cautious of bullying. Ensure that your children will share with you if they are being bullied, then empower them and follow up with the school (i.e. principal, guidance office, etc.).
- 9) Help coach your children in career directions by helping to find their passions in life, and later jobs or careers that will enable them to support themselves or their families.
- 10) Keep open communication with your children at all times.





Reading Phillies team up with adoption organizations

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care held its first annual adoption and foster care night with the Reading Phillies in May. Held in partnership with adoption organizations Project STAR and Bethanna, the awareness/matching event featured about 20 youths in need of adoption. Phillies' players played on behalf of particular youths. Additionally, more than 700 children and youths waiting for adoption in Pennsylvania were featured on the Phillies' JumboTron. A matching event took place in the refreshment concourse of the ballpark, and videos of waiting youths were highlighted. Most importantly, waiting youth had the opportunity to meet potential adoptive families.

Waiting children featured at Harrisburg Senators baseball game

The hot dog base race, with Danny, one of the children for whom Diakon is recruiting an adoptive family, in the lead, was only one of the activities available to waiting children at the third annual adoption and foster care night with the Harrisburg Senators this August. Held in partnership with adoption organizations Project STAR and Bethanna, the event featured 14 youths in need of adoption. The Senators played on behalf of particular youths that evening. The youths involved from the Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network, which Diakon administers, had the opportunity to mingle with waiting families in a safe, secure atmosphere. One lucky youth even threw out the first pitch. Nearly 5,000 Senators fans were in attendance. A matching event took place on the boardwalk that surrounds the baseball field, and youths and families in the adoption process took part in the "Carnival on the Boardwalk," which featured carnival games, face painting and spin art, free to all attendees.



Lessons learned, trust gained through the years *Continued from Page 1*

"There were challenges," she says, "but what parents don't have challenges?"

In fact, if Karen could share one lesson from her experiences with other adoptive parents or those considering adoption, it would be to have realistic expectations.

"The experience could be the opposite of what you think," she says. "People feel that the child will be so grateful, but you have to earn their trust. Just take it day by day."

She credits Diakon with having "a really good program to help parents prepare."

"One of the best things we learned was to be open and upfront as much as possible," Karen says. "Some things you can see on the outside and some things may be hidden. But really those are the same things all parents deal with."

Karen notes that she also learned from AJ about what it takes to be a parent.

"I feel as if AJ has done more for us than we could ever do for him," she says.

This summer AJ graduated from high school and is headed to a trade school to learn automotive repair. And he has learned to love the sight of a suitcase—with many family visits and vacations under his belt, he's now an old hand at traveling.

"People tell me I have a lot of opportunities ahead of me," AJ says. "Whatever comes at me, I'm ready to try it."

 You can help a child find a forever family by sending a donation in the enclosed envelope.

Diakon parents honored for multiple adoption experiences

Congratulations to Diakon Adoption & Foster Care parents Randy Bachman and Patrick Haftl for winning the 2010 award for outstanding permanency services to children and families in the Pennsylvania Child Welfare System. The award was presented at the recent Pennsylvania 2010 Permanency Conference, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network (SWAN), and the Independent Living Program.

Nominated by several adoption and foster care staff, Bachman and Haftl were chosen as "... the kind of family that we as social workers desperately want to clone ... over and over and over. They are the kind of family we need many more of; patient, supportive, unwavering, knowledgeable, realistic, unconditional, and most of all loving."



As a Diakon family, Randy and Patrick have experienced placements through the private infant program, legal-risk program, older youth adoption, as well as traditional foster care.

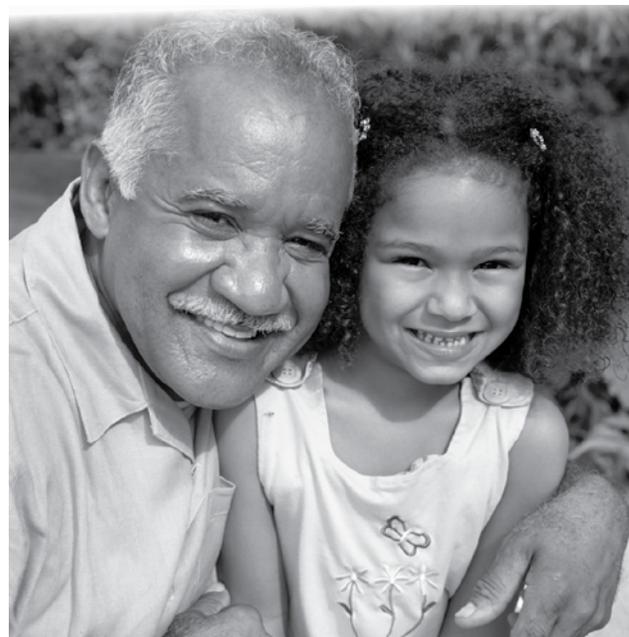
We're thankful for your generosity

Your financial support helps to bring together more families through adoption and foster care.

Through your support, you can help Diakon Adoption & Foster Care touch the lives of children and youths in need. From donating books for our resource libraries to offering financial assistance to help subsidize adoption fees, or providing items for foster children, your support is vital. Over the years, generous donations have helped our mission become a reality in so many young lives.

You, too, can make a difference! Simply use the envelope in this issue of *Family Connections* or log onto our Web site's convenient and secure donation form at www.diakon.org to make your gift.

For more information on how you can support Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, please call our Office of Advancement at 1-877-DIAKON-7, option 2, ext. 21219. Thank you!



Forever homes for older children a Diakon priority

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care will continue to find forever homes for older children with the recent renewal of a life-changing contract. The program has been chosen to continue providing the Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network Older Child Matching Initiative by the SWAN prime contract and the Department of Public Welfare Office of Children, Youth, and Families for the 2010-2011 SWAN fiscal year.

During the first two years of the grant term, Pennsylvania has obtained exciting results from a targeted effort to achieve permanency for older children and youths. Of the 111 youths served by the Older Child Matching Initiative, 83 have been matched with adoptive families. To date, 47 of the youths have been placed for adoption, 12 have had a finalized adoption, and four have

been discharged to the permanent legal custody of a relative. All of the young people served are over the age of 10 and many are teenagers and have other special needs.

The initiative is a project of SWAN administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. The project has been carried out by the grant funding awarded to three agencies working in partnership: Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, Project STAR, and Bethanna.

The grant enables each youth to be assigned a child-focused recruiter who assesses the child's strengths, needs, and challenges and arranges for adoption preparation in addition to carrying out recruitment activities. Each youth works closely with his or her recruiter to help identify kin and non-kin resources with whom they

would like to have contact and who they think might even become an adoptive resource for them.

The initiative has been so successful that the original two-year grant has been extended and a new, more extensive matching initiative project is under development.

"It is an honor to be able to provide recruitment services for older youths in need of adoptive families for five more years," says Elisa Esh, director of recruitment and family development for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

"Our outcomes for the past two years of the grant were above and beyond what we had hoped to achieve, and we are looking forward to matching children with their forever families moving forward."

For additional information, readers may contact Esh at (717) 724-7979 or eshe@diakon.org.

Help us find forever families

Continued from Page 5

Steve, 9 Destiny, 7 Kayla, 6 Donna, 4

Steve, Destiny, Kayla, and Donna are biological siblings with a strong bond to one another and a wish to be adopted together. These children would be a wonderful addition to a family that has a lot of time and energy!

Steve, the oldest, is in fourth grade and loves school. He enjoys playing outside, riding bikes, playing video games, watching TV, and anything to do with super heroes.

Destiny is in second grade. She is very outgoing and loves working on craft projects with her sisters.

Destiny has a beautiful voice and loves to sing.

Kayla is in kindergarten. She is somewhat shy and can be described as quiet and observant. She enjoys watching television, playing outdoors, and playing computer games.

The youngest, Donna, is not yet in school. She is the social butterfly of the bunch and likes to have all of the



attention. She is very personable and fun.

Families that are willing and able to adopt all four children together and provide them with a loving, supportive home are encouraged to contact Elizabeth White, child specific recruitment specialist at (717) 795-0479 or by e-mail at white@diakon.org.

Bunches of bunnies from Borders

With the help of the Borders bookstore on Whiteford Road in York, more than 400 stuffed bunnies were collected for children of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. Nearly \$1,400 worth of the toys were purchased and donated by patrons of the store. Staff at Borders also presented shoppers with brochures on adoption and foster care. Many thanks to management and staff at Borders for assisting in this event!



PLACEMENTS

Tyler

March 5, 2010
Lynn,
Northumberland, Pa.

Adam

June 11, 2010
Myke & Lisa,
Berks County, Pa.

Christopher & Anthony

Aug. 20, 2010
Dan & Melissa,
Montgomery County, Pa.

Alexander

Sept. 23, 2010
Will & Alicia,
Montgomery County, Pa.

DIAKON
Adoption & Foster Care Forum
www.DiakonFamilies.org
An online community

- Connect with other families on a more personal level.
- Learn from other parents on your schedule.
- Share stories and ideas.
- It's secure & easy to use.

Begin connecting with other families now! Go to www.diakonfamilies.org to start connecting with other A&FC participants, click the "register" button and complete a short form.

DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE
A LUTHERAN FAMILY & COMMUNITY MINISTRY

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A wish list from the staff and children at Diakon Adoption & Foster Care

A few dollars can go a long way to help the children of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. This holiday season, won't you consider giving one or more of these items to them? Or simply send us a check and tell us what you would like us to buy on your behalf.

- Gift cards for book stores
- Department store gift cards
- Fast food gift cards
- New, compact duffle bags
- Wal-mart gift cards

