

Family Connections



SUMMER 2018

Welcome to the Center for Permanency!

Partly as the result of a bequest from the estate of Helen Nicholson Palmer, the second floor of Old Main on The Lutheran Home at Topton campus has been renovated and restored and now serves as “command central” for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

The Helen N. Palmer Center for Permanency provides office space for our Eastern Pennsylvania adoption and foster care staff members, who had been housed in three different buildings on The Lutheran Home campus.

A ribbon-cutting in mid-March brought more than 150 visitors to see the new center, which features a playroom, observation area and family kitchen so that visitations can occur here for birth families and their children. There also is a large conference room that can accommodate many families for resource parent training, information nights and large-group activities.

If you haven't seen the new center, please stop by.



Staff and family members cut the ribbon to welcome visitors to the new Helen N. Palmer Center for Permanency.

National Foster Care Crisis



Have you heard there is a national foster care crisis?

Every day, children are abused, neglected or abandoned and need to be removed from their family, but there are not sufficient foster families available to provide a home for all the

children in the foster-care system across our country.

The most recent number I heard is that about 400,000 youths are in foster care in this country. In our combined offices, we place less than 30 percent of the child referrals we receive in a month. Our program goals are to increase this number to 30 percent, but think about those youths we can't help because we don't have a family to care for them. The Department of Human Services in Philadelphia just put out an emergency plea for 300 foster families. If that is the number that one city needs, think about what that number must look like across the nation.

So why do so many youths need care? No doubt you have heard about the opioid crisis or heroin epidemic.

While the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services has been trying to reduce the number of youths in foster care the past ten years, the numbers have nevertheless spiked due, in part, to the increase in parental drug usage and substance abuse, with heroin being the drug of choice.

I just read that in 2017, one in three children entering foster care for the first time was in the 0- to 2-age group, the largest age group represented in first-time entries the last five years.

Why are more families not coming forward to become foster parents?

Recruiting foster parents has become more and more challenging over the years. Fewer members of the younger generation are coming forward to become foster parents, while older foster parents are retiring or end up adopting and ultimately closing their home.

Foster parents must go through a licensing process that can be personal

and intrusive, such as providing financial, medical and family background information. In addition, fostering requires hours of training. Once a family has a child in the home, there are multiple expectations such as transporting the child to multiple birth family visits each week, taking youths to all medical and therapy appointments and attending court hearings. These expectations are in addition to the day-to-day demands of parenthood.

Additionally, today's families need to have more knowledge about child development and how trauma affects that development. Raising a child affected by trauma is different from rearing a child who has not experienced trauma. As you can see, foster care is much more than just taking a child into your home and providing shelter, food and love.

While recruitment of new families is challenging, another big question is how we, as a nation, retain them.

A recent study indicates that between 30 and 50 percent of families decide not to foster after initially experiencing it. A study by the Foster Care Institute found that foster-parent retention suffers from several different factors: Many indicated grief and loss as the main factor for stopping, while half the respondents said they did not feel supported by their agency or case manager. A small group felt they were not included in decision-making for the child placed in their home. Some families believed they did not receive the training they needed to handle the child's behaviors and trauma. These are all valid reasons for deciding not to

continue to foster.

Retention of quality resource families is a continuing challenge for all agencies.

Yet foster and adoptive parents are the most important resources we have to give our youth.

How we treat them and what support we can offer will determine whether they continue in this role. Being a member of our permanency committee, which also includes

Most referrals of new families come via word of mouth.

Families, please continue to send new families our way.

Don't forget we offer financial incentives for your efforts.

Thanks for your continued help so more youths have a family to care for them.

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Baseball Park hosts teen match event

Citizens Bank Park, home stadium of the Philadelphia Phillies, was a great setting for a Teen Match Party in March for Diakon's Older Child Matching Initiative recruiters. The recruiters brought youths from all over central and eastern Pennsylvania to meet prospective families in hopes of finding a match. The day included a tour of the stadium where the youth, recruiters, and families got to spend time on the infield and in the Phillies dugout!



Pictured, left to right, are Katie Juliana, Marian Kolcun, Helene Kosciolek and Karen Knodel.

Finalizations

Aubriella
Oct. 4, 2017
Janel and Justin
Berks County

Summer and Serenity
Oct. 6, 2017
Jeffrey and Joanna
Lehigh County

Zion
Oct. 6, 2017
Drew and Jayme
Lehigh County

Cassidy, Gavin and Fiona
Oct. 6, 2017
Jonathan and Selena
Lehigh County

Analise and Aracelis
Oct. 11, 2017
Troy and Morgan
Berks County

Christian, Isiah, Jeremiah,
Josiah, and Riana
Oct. 18, 2017
Ariel and Larissa
Berks County

Aliana
Oct. 24, 2017
David and Shannon
Northampton County

Joshua
Nov. 1, 2017
Brian and Jennifer
Berks County

Aiden, Eli and Yolanda
Nov. 1, 2017
Russell
Berks County

Cory and Juliette
Nov. 1, 2017
Joby
Berks County

Millie
Nov. 1, 2017
Joel and Marlene
Berks County

Alister
Nov. 14, 2017
Andrew and Amanda
Berks County

Ella
Nov. 14, 2017
Richard and Amanda
Berks County

Lilly
Nov. 16, 2017
Jeremy and Kimberly
Berks County

Lorelei
Nov. 16, 2017
Pauline
Berks County

Zylis and Remy
Nov. 16, 2017
Kyle and Dana
Berks County

Summer
Nov. 16, 2017
Donny and Jodie
Berks County

Cornelia, Mariella,
Nicholas and Priscilla
Nov. 21, 2017
Jeff and Cathy
Northampton County

Alexander
Nov. 28, 2017
Frank and Kristin
Northampton County

Gavin
Nov. 29, 2017
Jerome and Crystalin
Lancaster County

Ava and Derrick
Dec. 6, 2017
Sean and Doris
Berks County

Ella
Dec. 6, 2017
Tim and Marie
Berks County

McKenzie and Felicia
Dec. 6, 2017
Darren and Lisa
York County

Owen and Ian
Dec. 7, 2017
Daniel and Pamela
Berks County

Hudson
Dec. 20, 2017
Bethanie
Berks County

Scarlet
Dec. 21, 2017
Dan and Gina
Dauphin County

Angel
Dec. 22, 2017
Chris and Tanya
Cumberland County

Gavin
Jan. 9, 2018
Ryan and Gwen
Northampton

Lynn
Feb. 13, 2018
Douglas and Amanda
Northampton County

Josephina and Jaylee
Feb. 14, 2018
David and Pamela
Berks County



Jenna (in coral) was adopted on April 6, 2018, by Denise (far left), holding son, Thomas. Her daughter, Tammy, is holding Jenna and her son, Roman, stands between them, with a big grin.

Siomari and Analia
March 2, 2018
Gary and Heather
Berks County

Phoenix
March 9, 2018
Jeffrey and Janel
Berks County

Nathaniel, Elijah, Kiara
and Josiah
March 9, 2018
Adam and Amanda
Berks County

Alivya, Cyrus, Elliana,
Naomi and Shiphrah
March 9, 2018
Daniel and Darlene
Berks County

Gregory
March 9, 2018
Robert and Stacy
Berks County

Daniel, Jeremiah and
Jonathan
March 9, 2018
Theodore and Deana
Berks County

Jeremiah, Yesenia and
Julian
March 8, 2018
Daniel and Valerie
Berks County

Josiah
March 28, 2018
Joel and Marlene
Berks County

Chloe
March 28, 2018
Michael and Julia
Berks County

Jenna
April 6, 2018
Denise
York County



Angel was adopted by Chris and Tanya
on Dec. 22, 2017.



Darren and Lisa adopted *Felicia* (far left) and
McKenzie on Dec. 6, 2017.



Daniel and Valerie adopted *Jeremiah,*
Yesenia and *Julian* on March 9, 2018.

Help us to find *forever* families

Abbie, age 16

Friendly, affectionate, and outgoing, Abbie loves spending time with others. She is very talkative and has a wicked sense of humor. She does very well in her Life Skills class in school. Abbie loves being involved in activities such as baseball and bowling. In her free time, she enjoys watching television and movies, listening to music, and swimming. For more information, please contact Katie Juliana (717) 795-0479, julianak@diakon.org.



Robert, age 16

Robert is a gentle soul who is friendly and easy going, but also introverted. He enjoys playing games, completing puzzles, using sticker books, coloring pages and going on walks. Most of all, Robert loves wrestling, especially wrestling figurines. Robert is autistic and nonverbal, but can communicate by writing things down or using a tablet. He will need continuing care throughout his life. For more information, please contact Katie Juliana (717) 795-0479, julianak@diakon.org.

Samantha, age 15

With her sweet personality, Samantha wins the hearts of everyone she meets. She likes to talk and spend time with others. Samantha tends to see the good in everyone. She loves art, sports, playing games and even helping with chores! She is especially good at playing Memory. Samantha will need continuing care throughout her life. For more information, please contact Katie Juliana (717) 795-0479, julianak@diakon.org.



Help us to find *forever* families

Isaiah, age 16

Athletic and intelligent, Isaiah will keep you in check when it comes to sports and card games, where his excellent math skills shine. While he tends to be quiet and reserved, he really comes alive on the basketball court. His iconic poker face will break through to a big smile and competitive persona. He also loves to play football and basketball. Like most boys his age, Isaiah is a big eater! He would really like to sit down and have a home-cooked meal of lasagna with his future adoptive family, a meal he would gladly help to prepare. Isaiah has a long-term goal to become a Marine. He does have intermittent contact with his siblings, contact he would like to continue. For more information, please contact Helene Kosciolk (610) 682-1564, kosciolk@diakon.org



Xzavier, age 10

With his love of a challenge and competitive spirit, Xzavier enjoys board games, card games and basketball games. Often luck is on his side; he earns a win, and then breaks out into a victory dance! Xzavier also likes to get on the field and play football and soccer. He also enjoys cooking and would love to expand his experience in the kitchen with his forever family. Xzavier enjoys school and receives good grades, especially in his favorite subject, math. Recently he has become a huge dog lover and is especially fond of a special dog named Maggie, who visits him and teaches him lessons in trust and unconditional love. Xzavier does have family connections that are important to

him and would need to be continued throughout his life. For more information, please contact Helene Kosciolk (610) 682-1564, kosciolk@diakon.org

TEENS NEED FAMILIES, TOO.



FREE TRAINING COMING SOON!

COMING SOON

Diakon will host a free pilot training program designed for both current foster, adoptive and kinship parents caring for older youth and prospective families interested in parenting teens. Watch for starting dates in August 2018 or contact **Cassandra Dry** for more information at dryc@diakon.org or (610) 682-1259.

- Are you an adoptive, kinship or foster parent parenting teenagers?
- Are you considering providing foster care for teens?
- Would you like more knowledge and skills to help you meet teens' unique needs?
- Would you like to participate in a trauma-informed, research based parent training, specific to parenting teens?
- And would you like your time to count toward your yearly foster parent training hours?

 **DIAKON** ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE
DIAKON CHILD, FAMILY & COMMUNITY MINISTRIES

www.diakon.org/adoption  



A program funded through a 3-year Foster/Adoptive Parent Preparation, Training and Development Initiative cooperative agreement with the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under grant #90CO1132.

Diakon expands foster care and adoption services

In response to a request from Bucks County Children and Youth Services to recruit foster homes to serve children and youths in their home areas, Diakon is expanding foster care and adoption services to the southeast. To meet this need, we are actively recruiting homes in Bucks and Montgomery counties.

Staff members hope to identify and approve resource homes in every school district in Bucks and Montgomery counties to keep children and youths in their home school districts whenever possible. Especially needed are homes for older youths (age 10+) and sibling groups.

Diakon staff has been visiting churches across the area to provide information about requirements to become resource families and Diakon programs. In addition, one training class was held at Twining Village, a Diakon senior living community in Holland, Bucks County, in April, with another scheduled for June. A full cycle of training classes will be scheduled between August and October. Sibling training is tentatively scheduled to begin in 2019 at Twining Village.

If you know families living in Bucks and Montgomery counties interested in opening their hearts and homes to children and youths from their communities, encourage them to reach out to Diakon for more information on becoming a resource family.

You can receive incentive payments when families you refer complete training, are approved, and when their first placement lasts at least 30 days.



Diakon Adoption & Foster Care welcomes new director

Kimberly James joined the Diakon Adoption & Foster Care staff earlier this year as director of the program's capital region offices in Mechanicsburg and York. Kim holds a bachelor's degree in social work from Bloomsburg University, as well as a Master's of Social Work degree from Temple University. She began her career in adoption services and has remained in the child welfare field through various positions the past 23 years. She can be reached at either of the capital region offices or by email at jamesk@diakon.org.

HOOPLA!

Matching event gets kids on the court, while families explore adoption

A unique adoption awareness/matching event recently took place in a different kind of setting, with interested families, adoption agencies and waiting youths getting together at a basketball training facility called Backcourt Hoops in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

On Saturday, May 19, from 9 – 11 a.m., adoption workers talked with families interested in adoption, while waiting youths ages 10 and older honed their basketball skills on one of the facility's courts. Families were able to sit courtside and cheer on the ball players!

Dubbed HOOPLA, this free event was sponsored by Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, Pennsylvania's Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network (or SWAN) and the Northeast Training Collaboration.

Backcourt Hoops is located at 5 West Olive Plaza in Scranton.

For more information on this type of event, readers may contact Marian Kolcun at kolcunm@diakon.org or (570) 351-9290.



National Foster Care Crisis continued from Page 2

foster and adoptive parents, has taught me a lot about what their experiences, both good and bad, have been, so that we can begin to make sure our case-managers are supporting them and helping them receive the services and training they need.

These conversations have been invaluable to me.

So families, please let us know what we can do to better serve you.

What trainings would be most helpful? Are grief and loss and trauma trainings something you would find beneficial?

This is a continued partnership and the youths we serve are counting on us!

Kathy Roach
Executive Director
Diakon Adoption & Foster Care

Family Fun Gathering held Foster Care Awareness Month

A family Fun Gathering event, held May 11, was aimed at celebrating foster care awareness month while bringing everyone together. Twenty-two families attended representing families waiting for a placement, current foster families, and families that have adopted. In total, there were 39 adults and 50 children!

This was a potluck event including food, raffle prizes, games/crafts and foster family awards! Guest speaker Paula Gelbach, current resident at Diakon, and author of “It’s Okay, Everybody’s Different,” joined us for our special day to read to the children.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Information Sessions

Families interested in learning more about adoption and foster care are invited to attend Diakon Adoption & Foster Care's free informational sessions, held throughout the year at various locations. If none of the scheduled sessions is convenient for interested families, individual sessions may be scheduled.

Eastern Pennsylvania – Topton office

Location: Topton

Helen Palmer Center for Permanency, Old Main, The Lutheran Home at Topton, One South Home Ave.

June 14, July 12, Aug. 9, Sept. 13, Oct. 11, Nov. 8, Dec. 13

Location: Bethlehem

St. Peter's Lutheran Church, 474 Vine Street, Social Room
July 25, Sept. 26, Nov. 28

Location: Holland

Twining Village, 280 Middle Holland Road
June 25, Oct. 22, Oct. 30

Location: Pottstown

Manatawny Manor, 30 Old Schuylkill Road
June 19, July 17, Aug. 21, Sept. 18, Oct. 16, Nov. 20, Dec. 18

Sessions run from 6 to 8 p.m. For more information, please call (610) 682-1504 or check our website at www.diakon.org/adoption.

Central Pennsylvania (Mechanicsburg)

Location: Mechanicsburg

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, 960 Century Drive
June 7, July 12, Aug. 2, Sept. 6, Oct. 4, Nov. 1, Dec. 6

Sessions begin at 6 p.m. For more information and to register, please call (717) 219-2790 or email WhiteR@diakon.org or BrodeM@diakon.org.

South Central Pennsylvania (York)

Location: York

836 S. George Street
June 19, July 17, Aug. 21, Sept. 18, Oct. 16, Nov. 20, Dec. 18

Sessions begin at 6 p.m. For more information and to register, please call (717) 845-9113 or email CroneH@diakon.org or JacksonC@diakon.org.

Additional York-area Information Sessions:

- Guthrie Memorial Library, 2 Library Place, Hanover – Nov. 6

Training Classes

Families preparing for the addition of a child to their home are required to attend family group training, which takes place three consecutive Saturdays. Here are upcoming training class dates:

Eastern Pennsylvania – Topton office

Location: Topton

Children Services Building (Annie Lowry Building), The Lutheran Home at Topton campus, One South Home Avenue

July 14*, 21 and 28

Sept. 8*, 15 and 22

Nov. 3*, 10 and 17

Time: 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. each day

*This session includes our sibling preparation class for children ages 6 to 18 whose parents are attending training classes. To register, please call Sandra Schreffler at (610) 682-1504.

Central Pennsylvania – Mechanicsburg Office

Joint Mechanicsburg-York Training Sessions

Location: Varies by date of session

June 2*, 9 and 16

(St. Peter's Lutheran Church, 947 N. George Street, York)

Aug. 4*, 11 and 18

(Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, 960 Century Drive, Mechanicsburg)

Oct. 6*, 13 and 20

(St. Peter's Lutheran Church, 947 N. George Street, York)

Time: 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. each day

*This session includes our sibling preparation class for children ages 6 to 18 whose parents are attending training classes. To register, please call (717) 795-0320 or (717) 845-9113.

Twining Village

August 18, September 15, October 20