

DIAKON CONNECTION

WINTER-SPRING 2005

Volunteer finds value as advocate for older adults

As a child, Sarah Begus stuffed envelopes for the League of Women Voters. It was a family tradition and the start of a life of volunteerism.

"I have volunteered many years for many, many things," says Begus. "It is really the legacy of my mother, who believed we had a social responsibility to give to the community and be part of solving problems in our local community."

Begus continues that legacy as a volunteer for Diakon's **Volunteer Home Care**—known locally as Interfaith Good Neighbors—which helps serve the needs of older adults in north and northeast Baltimore. Program volunteers provide non-medical assistance such as visiting, shopping, transportation to medical appointments, and light housework.

Volunteer Home Care has been serving people for more than 15 years in northeastern Pennsylvania and was introduced in Baltimore to meet the needs of the older persons in a sometimes-challenging urban environment.

Barbara Ruland, program manager, recruited Begus from St. Mark Lutheran Church, Baltimore, which serves as a program partner.



Sarah Begus visits with Berdine Moody, who has received service through Interfaith Good Neighbors.

"She's been working with me since October 2003, helping care-receivers with grocery shopping and trips to the doctor," Ruland says. "She has been a great volunteer. People find her very friendly and flexible with them."

A former college professor who taught political philosophy and women's studies at American University in Washington, D.C., Begus says the program attracted her because it is faith-based.

"My idea of Christianity is one of peace and service. It is very important to live out our faith and the teachings of the Gospel," she says. "Certainly taking care of old folks, people who need help, is a core message of Christianity and a core focus of my own spirituality."

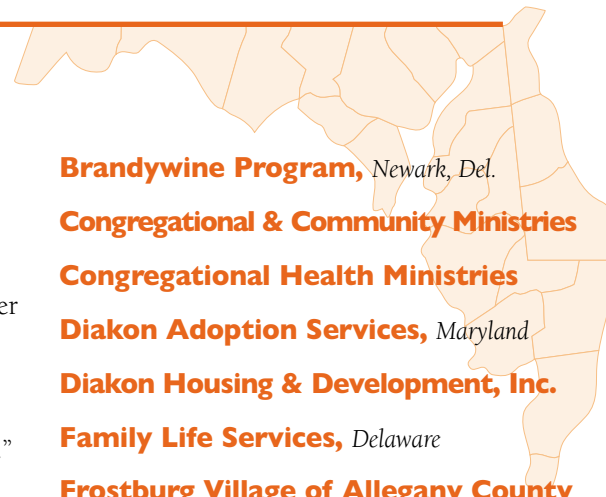
One assignment found Begus doing more than transporting an elderly woman who was having trouble with her hearing aid.

"I was being more than her driver. I had to be her advocate," she says of her efforts to help the woman resolve her problem. "Sadly our society all too often disrespects elderly people. People like myself can do more than just drive them around; we can advocate for them."

Experiences such as this one are the real payoff, Begus notes.

"Once you start volunteering, you realize you get back as much, if not more, than you give. You are helping people with things that they really need. Your actions translate into direct results," she says. "It is a very worthwhile feeling."

For more information on how you can become an Interfaith Good Neighbors volunteer, readers may contact Barbara Ruland at (410) 631-0723.



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Volunteer Home Care

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Adoptive mother's perseverance, dedication pay off for child in need

Four-year-old Branden was a student at the day care center at which B.J. Edmunds taught when the boy's mother and grandmother passed away within months of each other. A friend of the family, Edmunds immediately stepped forward to help.

"I was a friend with his mother and a single parent as well. I had been trying to help her with discipline, setting limits, and having consistency," she remembers. In fact, she had been identified as a resource for the family in time of need. The area's children's services "called me to pick up Branden after his mother died. He was with me until they located his birth father, which was about a week."

For the next two years, Edmunds would try desperately to follow Branden's care and keep in touch with him. She talked with his father, stressing Branden's special needs to him. But as time went on, her contact with the family grew more and more infrequent.

"I knew there would be problems. I saw them coming from Day One," says Edmunds, who later heard from a residential center in which Branden had been placed because of behavioral concerns. "It was two years after his mother died, and I began to visit him. I could see him, share telephone calls, and have conferences with the therapists."

In March 2004, then-eight-year-old Branden came home to live with Edmunds and her son Chuckie, 12. By this time, Branden's father had relinquished parental rights.

"I knew I was going to adopt him when his Mom died.

I had mentioned that to the father and step-mom, but they said 'no, we'll work it out,'" says 31-year-old Edmunds. "I told them, 'Yes, I'm a single mother. I'm a working parent. But Branden knows me well.' I knew what his needs were—he needed consistency and structure."

The following months would not be easy for Edmunds and her sons. Branden's needs were beyond those offered in public school. "It was small-group instruction, but they could only do so much. The school called me several times to pick him up. I could not work. I only had so many hours of sick leave to use," she says.

Edmunds enrolled Branden in a private school for children with emotional and social needs, which has made a huge difference in their lives. "He's not as much about taking it to the limit," she says.

In fact, she has had time to discuss his heritage with him.

"He is aware that he is Jewish. We've talked about Hanukkah, and I plan to enroll him in Hebrew school once we are on a regular routine," she says. "We have many Jewish families [in the day care] who are very supportive and give me books and suggestions."

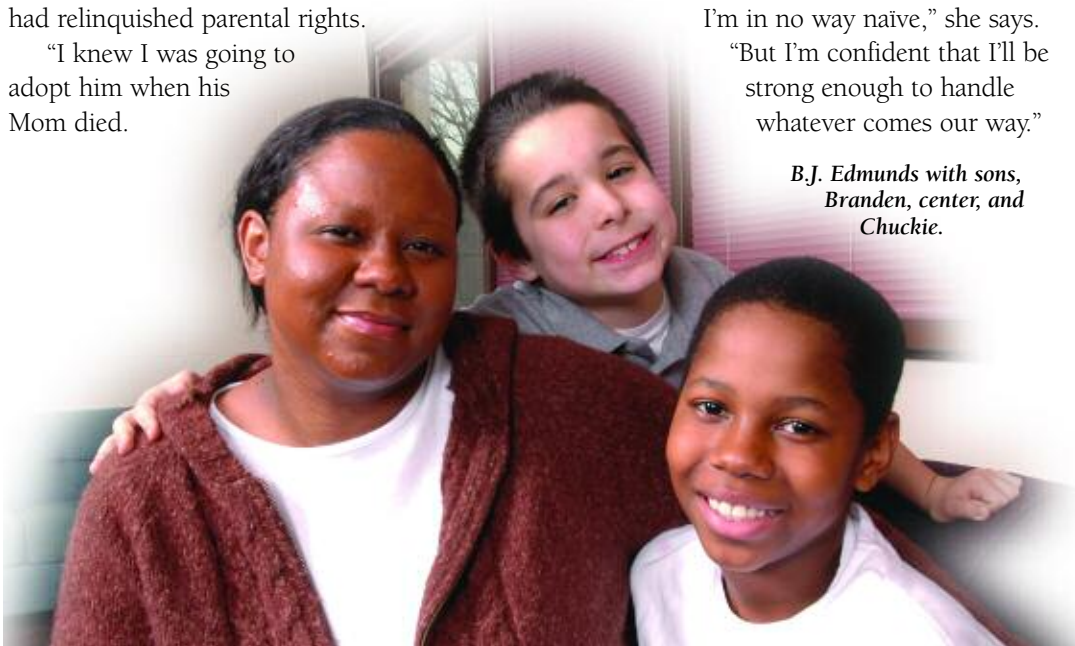
Despite their achievements, Edmunds knows the years ahead won't be easy.

"My biggest concern is for him to have some attachment with us, with people, and society. I'm not looking at it as being easy.

I'm in no way naïve," she says.

"But I'm confident that I'll be strong enough to handle whatever comes our way."

B.J. Edmunds with sons, Branden, center, and Chuckie.



Mission: In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries will demonstrate God's command to love the neighbor through acts of service.

Diakon serves some 70,000 persons annually in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware through adoption, foster care, counseling, retirement communities, volunteer home care, congregational ministries, hospice services, and more.

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Commitment to older adults runs in the family



Richard Newcomer, far left, resident of The Village at Robinwood, chats with Jacob VanMetre, 5, while resident Betty Koelle, enjoys a moment with Jacob's 2-year-old brother, Benjamin.

Of many memories involving his father, a Methodist minister, Eric VanMetre recalls visits to shut-ins and older hospitalized members of his father's congregation as very special times.

VanMetre, marketing and admissions director at Diakon's *The Village at Robinwood*, describes how he would be allowed to take off school occasionally to spend the day on visitations with his father.

"It was a day off school, but it was also time with Dad," Van Metre explains. "I had a chance to learn about these people, to learn

that they were someone's father, mother, sister, or brother. I became very comfortable talking and interacting with older people."

VanMetre's father served churches in the Baltimore and Washington, D.C., areas until his death in a car accident in early 1990. A student at Shepherd College at the time, VanMetre came back home to be with his mother. Eventually, he returned to school and earned a degree in political science. But he was hooked on the idea of working with older adults.

"When I came home after my father was killed, a family friend helped me get my first job, as a program assistant at an adult day services center," he explains. "I helped with activities and meals—and I loved it."

He was able to continue in adult day services at The Village at Robinwood's sister facility in Hagerstown, Diakon's *Ravenwood Lutheran Village*, where he spent four years. In July 2003, he moved to his current position at Robinwood. He misses the more direct interaction he had in adult day services, he says, but finds it rewarding to help older adults discover a new home at Robinwood.

Like his father, VanMetre hopes to pass along his commitment to caring for older adults to his young sons, Jacob, 5, and Benjamin, 2. The boys spend time with the residents of Robinwood, attending events and sharing their

youthful enthusiasm and point of view. Since the residents "love kids," the boys feel quite comfortable around them, VanMetre says.

In fact, VanMetre would like to see more activities at Robinwood that bring young people in contact with residents. He hopes to develop volunteer opportunities for youth groups through area churches and eventually to have an "Adopt-a-Grandparent" program. Such programs pair an older adult with a family to share life experiences, as a natural grandparent would.

"We'd have a better health-care system if young people learn to appreciate older people and what they deal with as they grow older," he says. "We need to take the time to step into their world."

WISH LIST

The Village at Robinwood can use your assistance! If you or your congregation are able to donate any of these items or provide funding for their purchase, please contact Diakon's Office of Advancement at 1-877-DIAKON-7, ext. 1219. Thank you!

- Volunteers
- Funds for theme days/resident picnics

It's just a dog's life for this welcome volunteer

Volunteers serve in immeasurable ways, but rarely has a volunteer been able to help so much by doing so little—but that's Ginger's specialty.



Ginger often can be found relaxing in the lobby at Ravenwood Lutheran Village, keeping an eye on the daily 'comings and goings.'

Just by sitting quietly and "being there," she brings happiness to those around her.

Ginger is a six-year-old golden retriever who lives at Diakon's *Ravenwood Lutheran Village*. Beginning with her arrival at the village at the age of nine weeks, she was an instant source of pleasure to her new "family."

Selected for her temperament, Ginger has the ideal personality for her the village—calm and composed, never riled.

"She's very laid-back," says Abby Housel, activities director. "She hangs out in the lobby and visits the rooms where she knows there are treats for her." Visitors, especially children, also seek out Ginger, who goes home with various staff members each evening but returns in the morning.

Ravenwood also is home to Alex, an older cat who frequents the therapy department. Two cockatiels, named Smokey and Tweety, live in a

glass-enclosed home in the lobby, and a third, Sunshine, resides in an aviary by a nurses' station. "Having pets around just makes it seem more like home," says Housel.

WISH LIST

Ravenwood Lutheran Village can use your assistance! If you or your congregation are able to donate any of these items or provide funding for their purchase, please contact Diakon's advancement office at 1-877-DIAKON-7, ext. 1219. Thank you!

- New patio furniture for porch
- Funds for electric low beds
- Polaroid camera and film
- Plants for outdoor flower beds
- Volunteers

New KidzStuff director puts children first



Mia Foster

Choosing a day-care provider is a difficult decision for any parent to make. But parents have been finding the decision an easy one at Diakon's **KidzStuff** in Baltimore, which Mia Foster has overseen as director since September.

"I have a genuine concern for the children. My philosophy is to put the children first in

every situation," explains Foster, a mother of three. "That is how I make all my management decisions. I think of what is best for the child."

Foster was perusing online employment ads when the opportunity to work in an urban community caught her eye.

"I've worked in the inner city, in the country, at various day care centers of different backgrounds," she says, adding that the needs of the inner city are what initially attracted her to the position. "Then I came and saw KidzStuff. I fell in love with the center, and we went from there."

Fern Spellman, who oversees Diakon's **Brandywine Program** and **Family Life Services** in Delaware, as well as KidzStuff Child Care, says the new director's nine years of experience in operating day care centers caught her attention during the hiring process.

"She also impressed me as a person who could take the initiative when needed, was confident in her abilities, and would work hard," she says. "All of those things were what we were looking for in a director."

Although the new director holds a degree in hotel and restaurant management, she never worked professionally in that field.

"The summer after my graduation I got a job with Head Start," says Foster, who knew long before her classes ended where her future was headed. "I started as an aide. By September they promoted me to a teacher, and before the year was out, I was the director of the center."

Ten years later, Foster has never looked back. She now holds a child development associate certificate and has completed 90 hours in early childhood education and related training. With a staff and families that support her 100 percent, she is excited about the future of the KidzStuff program.

"Things are looking great. There is nothing that I would ask for—except more children! We are definitely headed in the right direction," she says.

WISH LIST

KidzStuff Child Care can use your assistance! If you or your congregation are able to donate any of these items or provide funding for their purchase, please contact Diakon's Office of Advancement at 1-877-DIAKON-7, ext. 1219. Thank you!

- Digital camera
- Laminating machine
- Die-cutting machine
- Movement and/or quiet time CDs
- Cot sheets for the classroom

Residents helping residents



These Ravenwood Lutheran Village residents are among those who make it their mission to help other residents in a variety of ways. Shown, left to right, are (standing) Ann Morgan, Pam Everett, Paul Shank, (seated) Louise Rice, Maude Lesher, Susan Logan, (standing) John Porter, Anna Kepler, Charlotte Donley, and Elinor Shaull.

When other residents learned of Ann Morgan's quilting talents, they were quick to ask her to start a quilting group.

Morgan is one of a group of cottage residents from Diakon's **Ravenwood Lutheran Village** and **The Village at Robinwood** in Hagerstown who volunteer their time and talent to make community life more rewarding for everyone.

The residents play piano, help with bingo games, mail calendars, assist residents in getting to Sunday worship services, maintain plants and flowers, and even provide special personal services such as

painting fingernails—offering kindness and assistance so that other residents can enjoy activities and events.

"It keeps me out there," "I like to get involved," and "I'm glad I can help" are reasons the volunteers cite for their generosity. In addition to leading the quilting group for other interested residents, for example, Morgan agreed to finish a quilt begun by the mother of a 90-year-old resident in assisted living.

"She was so pleased because it is really special to her," says Morgan, a former seamstress. "I'm just happy that I can help."

The following regional memorial gifts were received from Sept. 23 to Dec. 31, 2004. Diakon programs in the Delaware-Maryland Synod thank these donors for their generous contributions.

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