

The
Many Hands
of
DIAKON



MANY HANDS. ONE HEART.
DIAKON
LUTHERAN SOCIAL MINISTRIES

Some of the *Many Hands* of Diakon

Many things differentiate Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries, including our nearly 150-year history and our comprehensive range of services that aid people from birth through their final moments.

Perhaps what distinguishes us most, however, is the commitment of our staff members.

Each day, several thousand staff colleagues minister to people in a variety of ways, from providing rehabilitative therapy to an older adult to offering supportive care to a person facing a terminal illness ... from seeking a permanent family for a child who has waited too long to experience the type of love most of us take for granted to guiding a young man through the wilderness to gain the self-confidence and discipline needed for success in life.

These dedicated staff members are the *Many Hands* that bring the “One Heart” of our mission of hope, healing, and hospitality to more than 70,000 people annually.

I hope you enjoy the brief glimpse this booklet provides into the lives and motivations of a sampling of our staff members — caring individuals who daily help to make the world a better place.



Mark T. Pile, MSHA, MSW
President/CEO

Mark T. Pile

*“I can see the
change we’ve
helped to
make”*



Angela Sirak

*Recruitment and Family Development Specialist
Diakon Adoption & Foster Care*

Angela Sirak helps to create families. As a recruitment and family development specialist with Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, she seeks families hoping to welcome children into their homes.

“It’s an amazing job,” she says. “Every day is different, but in the end we are forming families.” With undergraduate and master’s degrees in social work, Angela feels she has always been destined for a career of service. In fact, her life could be changed forever by her experiences with Diakon—she would love to adopt a child herself someday.

“I have always wanted to do something where I could make a difference and see the change I’ve helped to make,” Angela says. “To bring children and families together...well, I just love what I do.”



*“My work here
has helped me
to grow”*

Brenda Hensinger

*Transportation Supervisor
The Lutheran Home at Topton*

Brenda Hensinger can't leave her work behind. Even when she is not on the campus of The Lutheran Home at Topton, where she is transportation supervisor, she can't resist the urge to reach out to older individuals wherever she goes.

“It's the kind of job that sticks with you,” she says. “Like when I see seniors who need a hand, I just want to help them. Working here has changed me - has helped me to grow.”

In fact, Brenda calls the Topton campus her second home. She brings her sons to Topton as often as possible, so they can learn from and appreciate the community's residents. She sees herself as an advocate for those who call the senior living community home.

“I care deeply about them and do everything in my power for them,” Brenda says. “Really I can't imagine working any place else.”

“It just fits me”



Doreen Zielinski

*Wellness Coordinator
Luther Crest*

Coming into the new position of wellness coordinator at Luther Crest, Doreen Zielinski was impressed by Diakon’s commitment to help older individuals stay fit and healthy. She was able to make the job meaningful for both residents and herself.

“I have been able to be very creative,” she says. “Like Diakon, I have a personal health and wellness mission. Working with residents and the staff here is rewarding and enriching for me.”

With offerings such as strength training, yoga, tai chi, walking groups, and water exercises – to name a few – there is something for everyone, Doreen believes. She can see the difference being active makes for many residents and staff.

“To come to work every day and know that you are there to make someone’s life better is the greatest job,” Doreen says. “It just fits me and who I am.”



*“It’s the
fact that
everybody
cares”*

Laura Markle

Administrative Assistant

Diakon Hospice Saint John

Laura Markle didn’t set out to work in a service organization. She found a job with Diakon at the end of high school and remains part of the organization 30 years later. She has worked in finance and human resources and, for the last 12 years, as an administrative assistant with Diakon Hospice Saint John. She finds her work to be much more than a job.

“It’s like a family here,” she says. “Everybody cares about everyone else.” When Laura lost her father, she gained a greater appreciation for what hospice care means and for the unending compassion of those who provide care. She was touched by how much support she received from her co-workers.

“I like what I do; I’m happy here,” Laura says. “Who wouldn’t want to work with such wonderful people?”

*“We’re making
a difference
for those who
need it”*



Carol Powers

*Annual Fund Director, Development
Diakon Ministry Support*

Carol Powers has a simple explanation for why she does the job she does. “What can be more rewarding than helping people—making a difference for someone who needs it?” she asks. “There is satisfaction in knowing you are serving a higher purpose.”

Carol helps to raise funds needed to support Diakon’s programs. Her work, she says, has brought her in touch with “many wonderful people” who believe in Diakon’s mission. That experience, she adds, has been uplifting.

“I’ve told my children that when it comes to your life’s work, you should find your personal joy, something that makes you truly happy,” Carol says. “For me, it is service and serving others.”



“My work makes me a more caring person”

Ellen Cook

*Resident Care Manager
Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village*

When serious illness sidelined Ellen Cook, she found herself looking at her nursing career differently.

“It was quite an education to be on the other side of the bed rail,” she says.
“I was intrigued by the care I got.”

Then, by chance, she came to know of Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village when a friend’s mother was transferred there. She picked up an employment application.

“I was impressed by the care and the caring people,” Ellen says. “Working here now, I see it everywhere.”

Hired first in a flex position and now serving as a full-time resident care manager, Ellen says the more she learned about Diakon, the more she realized everything the organization does for individuals and families. Her work at Buffalo Valley has changed her, she believes.

“It’s made me a more caring person, a more well-rounded nurse,” she says. “I feel I am giving more of myself. I do believe everything happens for a reason.”

*“I want to
make a
contribution”*



Cass Hiscox

*Receptionist
Twining Village*

Cass Hiscox retired from working for the federal government and in private industry, but still wanted to be around people and make a contribution. That's exactly what she does in her position as a receptionist at Twining Village. She found the perfect opportunity, she explains, practically within walking distance of her home.

“I love being at the reception desk,” Cass says. “I greet people, meeting the public and many families. Plus, I have the chance to talk with a lot of the residents one-on-one and hear their stories.”

At 67, Cass realizes she is close in age to some residents, but those who have reached their 80s and 90s really inspire her.

“It's encouraging to see what productive lives they live,” she says. “I get a lot out of being around the residents here. They uplift my day.”



*“I make a
difference”*

Paulette Baker

Residential Assistant

Diakon Senior Living – Hagerstown

Paulette Baker was feeling discouraged and a bit overwhelmed. Working toward her degree in nursing, she faced a particularly challenging course. On top of that, she was planning her wedding. But encouraging words from residents of Diakon Senior Living – Hagerstown, where she is a residential assistant, lifted her spirits.

“They said to me, ‘Now don’t you give up. You can do it.’ I can’t tell you how much that meant to me,” Paulette says.

Her colleagues also inspire Paulette. Her work, she explains, makes her feel good.

“Everyone looks out for one another,” she says. “Sure, some days are tough, but I choose to be positive. It’s an honor for me to work here. I believe I make a difference.”

*“I get a lot
from the
people I serve”*



Norman Woodford

*Volunteer Driver
Meals on Wheels*

After retiring from the Pennsylvania auditor general's office, Norman Woodford was looking for a volunteer opportunity, “just something to fill my time.” He found that and much more with Diakon Community Services for Seniors and the Meals on Wheels program it operates in Schuylkill County.

“There's a lot more need than I realized,” Norman says. “The people we serve never complain; they are very appreciative.”

Norman likes the idea of keeping busy and helping others at the same time, and will continue to do so as long as possible. He also has volunteered with the APPRISE program, helping seniors through the maze of decisions involved in health insurance and long-term care options. But he favors Meals on Wheels.

“I enjoy it because of the people we serve,” Norman says. “I think they get a lot from me, but I also get a lot from them.”



“Each day is another day to make a difference”

Harry Doughty

Warehouse Foreman

Diakon Kathryn’s Kloset

Harry Doughty starts each day with a simple prayer: Thank you, Lord, for another day to make a difference. Then he heads to Diakon Kathryn’s Kloset, Baltimore, where he is a forklift driver and all-around helping hand. Harry sees his work as a special calling; otherwise, the retiree would, in his words, “probably just be waiting around for the grass to grow and the snow to fall.”

“I do think this is the walk the Lord wanted me to take now,” he says.

A man of strong faith, Harry believes that we all are expected to take care of those less fortunate in any way we can. That’s what impressed him immediately about the mission of Diakon Kathryn’s Kloset.

“I love what I am doing here,” Harry says. “It is a ministry where I am able to share a word of advice or encouragement with others and they with me.”

“I’m drawn to help others”



Sandra Moyer

*Memory-Support Services Manager
Manatawny Manor*

As manager of memory-supportive services at Manatawny Manor, Sandra Moyer works with residents and families facing the many issues and emotions associated with Alzheimer’s disease and similar illnesses.

She offers them words of encouragement and advice that she herself follows: “Be kind, be supportive. Realize that this is a person with a history,” Sandra says. “Be patient. Learn to live in the moment.”

Sandra also has worked with children with special needs and finds herself drawn to helping those who often need a little extra attention. She believes Diakon’s mission matches her personal philosophy and admires the dedication she sees among her colleagues.

“We have a very caring staff,” Sandra says. “I like the way Diakon is there for people and families throughout their entire lives.”



“I have a personal connection to my work”

Vickie Nieves

*Residential Assistant
Pocono Lutheran Village*

Vickie Nieves draws on family history to help explain her personal connection to Diakon.

“My mother was an orphan at the Tressler Orphans Home in Loysville,” she says. “When I was looking for work, I said to myself, I am going back to the organization that took care of my family.” (The orphanage is one of two children’s homes in Diakon’s nearly 150-year history.)

Today, Vickie honors her family ties while working as a residential assistant at Pocono Lutheran Village. It is work she finds rewarding, giving her the opportunity to show respect for a generation of people she admires. Her mother is proud of what she does, too, she says.

“I have a heart for these people,” Vickie says. “I always feel good if I can make their day happier, even in the smallest way. I think everyone wants to feel like someone cares about them – that’s what I do.”

“Each changed youth is our reward”



Michael Canton

*Case Manager
Diakon Youth Services Bridge Program*

As a case manager for Diakon Youth Services' Bridge Program, Michael Canton sees at-risk youths day-in and day-out. These young men have been adjudicated as delinquent and Michael helps to guide them toward a more productive and meaningful life as an alternative to time in a detention facility.

“We are sort of like a mentor for them,” he says. “We try to establish a rapport and be there to just listen sometimes. Some of these kids have had to deal with terrible things.”

The job can be challenging for sure and Michael emphasizes how he and other program staff members work together and support one another.

“We have a good team in place,” he says. “We are there for each other. It can be hard, because you don't see success right away. But if you can change just one, see one of your kids go to college, that's very rewarding.”



*“I believe in
the mission”*

Beth Hanley

*LPN Preceptor
Frey Village*

Talk to Beth Hanley and it quickly becomes clear how much she enjoys her work as a licensed practical nurse at Frey Village. She also has worked at other Diakon senior living communities and currently is an LPN preceptor for new staff.

“I am like a mentor, the go-to person if they have questions after orientation,” Beth explains. “I also am a role model, setting an example.”

Beth was close to completing her degree in social work when she shifted to nursing, inspired by her mother – a nurse. She likes the idea of working for an organization that can offer opportunities for her to grow.

“I’m very proud of working for Diakon,” Beth says. “I believe in the organization and its mission, the idea that we are all gifts of God and have worth.”

*“We just want to
be of service”*



Oliver Hazan and Dixie Koser

*Marketing and Admissions Team
Cumberland Crossings*

Prospective residents of Cumberland Crossings gain an instant pair of friends in Oliver Hazan and Dixie Koser when they first contact the senior living community. The marketing and admissions team for Cumberland Crossings, both believe they found the perfect place to work – one where they know they are of service.

For Dixie, helping older adults “find their next home” brings her full circle. She previously worked in an elementary school and a college.

“I have completed the circle,” she says. “I feel very connected to our residents and their families. It is a rewarding role for me.”

Dixie describes Oliver as the more detail-oriented of the two, one of the reasons they work so well together.

“I am a fixer, a problem-solver,” says Oliver. “I think I am good at explaining the details to families and together we figure the best answers.”

Service is his calling, he adds. “It’s in my personality to serve. We bend over backwards to give the best service.”



*“This is the
job for me”*

Darlene Meeks

*Child Care Teacher Preceptor
Diakon KidzStuff*

Being around children all her life only made Darlene Meeks want to spend more time with them. One of 13 in her family, she helped to care for her brothers and sisters. And, as she grew older, she often babysat nieces and nephews.

Now, as a teacher and preceptor at Diakon KidzStuff Child Care, Darlene feels right at home with her chosen profession.

“Working with children gives you a good feeling,” she says. “They give you a smile and a hug without your even having to ask for it.”

Darlene thinks it is important to create an environment of “gentle guidance” in which children are encouraged to make their own choices. She believes in emphasizing self-esteem, giving children a strong framework to achieve goals.

“I feel this is a unique opportunity for me to serve,” she says. “I always say this is not a job for everyone, but it’s the job for me.”

*“I am
passionate
about what
I do”*



Michelle McElwee
Clinical Director
Diakon Family Life Services

Michelle McElwee understands the difficulties faced by the families she and her staff counsel. Struggling to cope with children diagnosed with serious emotional challenges, the families are on the brink of crumbling – and likely would without Diakon Family Life Services’ family-based mental health services, for which Michelle is clinical director.

“I’m a parent myself,” Michelle says. “I know how challenging it can be. At its core, this program is about family preservation and that makes it unique.”

Various life experiences led Michelle to social work, her field for the last 17 years. She praises Diakon’s family-based focus, which offers skills to handle current issues and guidance to meet goals.

Michelle also directs the Diakon-sponsored Girls on the Run – Lycoming County, which promotes self-esteem and healthy choices for girls; she also helps to train school personnel to deal with barriers to learning among students.

“Growing up, I was taught to take care of others and be of service. It’s part of my personality,” Michelle says. “I am passionate about what I do.”



*“It’s my
responsibility
to help others”*

David Kane

*Maintenance Supervisor
Diakon Wilderness Center*

David Kane tells a story about his father assisting an elderly woman in the town in which he grew up, an early influence on him. As maintenance supervisor at the Diakon Wilderness Center, David still draws on what he learned as a boy.

“I saw that’s what we are challenged with as human beings,” David says. “It’s my responsibility to help others.”

The Diakon Wilderness Center’s mission of helping at-risk youths fits with David’s personal philosophy of lending a hand. He believes you can’t just look at what records indicate about the young men, because such documents don’t really show who they are or have the potential to be.

“I have children of my own,” he says. “I want for these young men the same things I want for my own kids. They need to know there are people who love and respect them. That’s how I feel – that’s the way I was raised.”

“I’ve always wanted to do a job that makes a difference”



Heidi Weyant

*Certified Nursing Assistant
Ohesson*

With a degree in accounting and a background in manufacturing, Heidi Weyant was not convinced she could work as a certified nursing assistant. During her interview at Ohesson and subsequent conversations with Brenda Grimm, Ohesson’s director of nursing, Heidi remained uncertain.

But the economy had robbed her of the job she held for years—and Brenda Grimm saw potential in Heidi.

“I never saw myself working in health care,” Heidi says. “I told Brenda I didn’t think I could do it. She encouraged me to take the classes and try.”

Heidi terms her first few months “terrible.” But as she learned her new job, she also learned a lot about herself. Now, two years later, she believes she is changed for the better.

“I have met wonderful people,” she says. “My days have many upbeat moments. I have found a side of myself I didn’t know, as I am learning to accept my emotions. In my heart, I’ve always wanted to do a job that makes a difference,” Heidi adds. “Maybe this is where I was meant to be.”



*“I believe
that God
calls us”*

Rob Kivlan

Supervisor

Diakon Flight Program

Rob Kivlan believes that we each have a mission laid in our hands by the Lord. His personal mission now is as supervisor of the Flight Program, a Diakon Wilderness Center service that helps formerly at-risk youths move toward greater personal achievement and positive relationships.

“I believe, very simply, that God calls us,” Rob says. “I am blessed to be able to help lead these young men forward.”

One important Flight lesson is to help participants see how they can make a difference in the world.

For example, Flight graduates and other center staff members have accompanied Rob to Haiti to assist orphanages there.

“Every moment there helps put into perspective what really matters – hope, faith, and love,” he says.

Rob praises Diakon for seeing the potential of Flight participants, for believing in their dreams. “We don’t invest in what is there,” he says. “We invest in what could be there. We know they have hopes and we give them the tools. It is so rewarding to see them succeed. To know you have a small thumbprint in that is absolutely awesome.”

Senior Lifestyle & Health Services

Home & Community-Based Services

Diakon Adult Day Services
Diakon Community Services for Seniors
Diakon Help at Home
Diakon Hospice Saint John & Diakon Home Health
Diakon Volunteer Home Care

Senior Living & Housing Communities

Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village
Cumberland Crossings
Diakon Lutheran Senior Living – Hagerstown
Frey Village
Frostburg Heights
Luther Crest
The Lutheran Home at Topton
Lutherwood
Manatawny Manor
Ohesson
Pocono Lutheran Village
Twining Village

Services for Children, Youths, Families & Communities

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care
Diakon Family Life Services
Diakon Inroads Employee Assistance Program
Diakon Kathryn's Closet
Diakon KidzStuff Child Care
Diakon Pregnancy Services
Diakon Youth Services

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