KINSHIP CARE – what exactly is that?

It seems as if these words are frequently heard in child welfare. But what does the phrase kinship care mean?

Kinship care is the full-time care, nurturing and protection of children by relatives or any adult who has a “kinship bond” with a child. Those coming forward to provide care could be grandparents, aunts and uncles, older siblings, cousins or non-blood relatives such as a coach, teacher or family friend.

Sometimes, children and youths need to be removed from their family of origin. Family-finding services help to identify other family members or those who may have a connection to the youth who may be a permanent resource for the child.

Kinship care is one of the options when seeking permanency for children and youths. In addition, it’s the least intrusive option for out-of-home care, because it enables the youth to maintain ties with his or her biological family while ensuring safety.

Research indicates that youths do much better if they are cared for by relatives and are less likely to end up in foster care as well as experience better outcomes.
Kinship caregivers, particularly grandparents, face a variety of emotional, legal and daily living challenges as they unexpectedly find themselves in the position of raising a second family.

Grandparents and other relatives in many kin placements are the primary caregivers for children whose parents cannot or will not care for them because of substance abuse, illness and death, abuse and neglect, incarceration, domestic violence or other factors. The opioid crisis, in fact, has led to more grandparents and other kin stepping in to care for children to avoid foster care placements.

All of these factors have contributed to the increase in the number of kinship care families. In Pennsylvania, there are nearly 202,000 children living in a kinship care family. Pennsylvania’s is ranked seventh among the states in terms of children living in grandparent-headed households, with more than 164,000 children in this category.

Kinship families in Pennsylvania complete a home study called the Kinship/Emergency Caregiver (ECG) process. A case manager works with the kinship family to access their ability to care for youths and to ensure they have met the regulatory requirements to become a foster home.

Some of those requirements include undergoing a home safety check; filling out an application; completing an autobiography; providing financial information; having a medical examination; identifying references; and completing ChildLine clearances and criminal background check.

Families meet with a case manager who will assist them with completing the requirements within 60 days. Families also must complete a minimum of six hours of training per parent annually. As long as they meet requirements, kinship providers are paid just as foster parents are for the care of a child or children.

As need grows, so do services

As the number of kinship placements increases, more services are needed to assist kin families as they raise these children and youths.

Diakon offers emergency caregiver services at all of our offices. At our Northeastern Pennsylvania office, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care has offered kinship training classes for many years for kin providers in the Lehigh Valley.

The training provides caregivers with education and learning specific to being a kin provider. In addition, families have formed their own connections and support group to share specific issues they have in common and the ups and downs of raising relatives.

Recently, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care’s Central Pennsylvania offices received a grant to begin offering kinship support groups.

Moreover, Pennsylvania recently received $479,307 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families to develop a kinship navigator system.

Now operational, the program is called KINCONNECTOR and will help families identify local, state and federal resources for their families.

The KINCONNECTOR helpline is staffed by “kinship navigators,” who are compassionate and knowledgeable social service professionals prepared to help families locate, understand and access resources that may be able to help them.

The navigators also connect grandparents and other relatives to health, financial and legal services, support groups, training and parental advice. They also can help locate physical or behavioral health services and assist with school enrollment. In addition, they will help families apply for federal, state or local benefits such as Social Security, public assistance or CHIP. A website will be launched later this year.

In the meantime, the number for KINCONNECTOR is 1-866-KIN-2111 or (1-866-546-2111). Help is available Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

You may also want to review: dhs.pa.gov.

Kathy Roach
Executive Director
Diakon Adoption & Foster Care

Kin Connector

1-866-KIN-2111 or (1-866-546-2111)

Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.
and Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Family gives gift of books for children

Kay and Phil Beckman and their children stopped by the Diakon Adoption & Foster Care offices in Topton recently with a special gift: 40 Usborne books for children, along with homemade bows.

New home for support group

Effective September 2019, the Diakon Post-Permanency Support Group will be transitioning to the Diakon Adoption & Foster Care office at 1 S. Home Ave., Topton. By making this move, Diakon is hoping to be able to serve more adoptive families, because the office is located near the Lehigh Valley area as well.

If you have adopted or are close to achieving permanency and find that you could use some extra support, then this group is for you!

Child care and refreshments are provided free. Please contact Jennifer Roe, roej@diakon.org, or Sara Rarick, raricks@diakon.org, for more information on upcoming meetings.

Diakon family recognized by SWAN

Debbie Hiller wasn’t “waiting” to become an adoptive parent when she learned of a sibling group needing placement.

One of the children was a student in the school in which Hiller worked. In July of 2017, Isabella, Jordan and Noah were placed with Hiller and their adoption finalized in February 2019. She was able to keep the important sibling bond intact when she agreed to accept the youths as a sibling group.

Pennsylvania’s Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network—or SWAN—presented Hiller with its Permanency Family Recognition award early this summer.

Unfortunately, she was not able to attend the banquet because of the illness of one of the children, further underscoring her dedication as a mother.

Michelle Koontz, permanency services supervisor with Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, accepted the award for Hiller.

Michelle Koontz is pictured at the microphone in the lower left of the photo below, with a snapshot of the Hiller family on the screen.
Finalizations

Arthur
Jan. 9, 2019
A.J. and Dusty
Schuylkill County

Haven
Jan. 11, 2019
Annette
Berks County

Nya
Jan. 11, 2019
Peter and Kendall
Berks County

Jordan, Noah and Isabella
Feb. 11, 2019
Debbie
Montgomery County

Haley, John and Luke,
Feb. 11, 2019
Brian and Audrey
Berks County

Jaylianne and Jazlyn,
Feb. 26, 2019
Jason and Lana
Berks County

Logan
March 5, 2019
Britani and Adam
Northampton County

Navaeh
March 12, 2019
Sherry
Northampton County

Elliana
March 12, 2019
Pamela and David
Berks County

Isabella
March 29, 2019
Jennifer and Frances
Northampton County

Mason and Mya
April 9, 2019
Jeffrey and Jennifer
Northampton County

Rylan
April 16, 2019
Leslie and Steven
Northampton County

Bentley and Bailey
April 16, 2019
Robert
Berks County

Nehemiah and Alexander
April 16, 2019
Daniel and Tami
Berks County

Geo
April 18, 2019
Clark and Caitlyn
Berks County

Benson
April 18, 2019
Laverne and Nancy
Berks County

Callie
April 18, 2019
Chad and Monica
Berks County

Amir
April 22, 2019
LaDon and Shrril
Lackawanna County

Mateo
May 10, 2019
Miguel and Stephanie
Berks County

Shea
May 7, 2019
Patrick and Jennifer
Northampton County

Jaden
May 9, 2019
Beth
Lehigh County

Rowan
May 10, 2019
Jeffrey and Janel
Berks County

Clayton
May 10, 2019
Michael and Jessica
Berks County

Mateo
May 10, 2019
Stephanie and Miguel
Berks County

Mavis and Ben
May 15, 2019
Larry and Krista
Schuylkill County

Zoi
June 4, 2019
Jesenia and Josue
Northampton County

Emmitt
June 25, 2019
Jeffrey and Jennifer
Northampton County

Christopher and Jacob
June 25, 2019
Brad
Northampton County

Leo
June 26, 2019
Milagros
Berks County

Koda, Evangeline and
Jennavesia
June 26, 2019
Daniel and Trista
Berks County

Anna
July 9, 2019
Brandi and Daniel
Northampton County

Georgia
July 19, 2019
Megan and Matthew
Berks County

Kyra and Braxton
July 19, 2019
Lisandra and Philip
Berks County

Korey, Kylie and Brandon
July 19, 2019
Brian and Heather
Lehigh County

Christopher and Jacob
were adopted by Brad on June 25, 2019.
Logan was adopted by Britani and Adam on March 5, 2019.


Chad and Monica adopted Callie on April 18, 2019.

Robert adopted Bentley and Bailey on April 16, 2019.
Geo, held by dad, Clark, was adopted on April 18, 2019. Also pictured are mom, Caitlyn, with Morena and Evan in the front.

Nehemiah and Alexander were adopted by Dan and Tami on April 16, 2019. The whole family is pictured on that special day (left to right): Nehemiah, held by Dan; Dan, Jr.; Jackson; Maximus; and Alexander, being held by Tami.

Miguel and Stephanie adopted Mateo, held by dad, on May 10, 2019.
Summer movie night wins skirmish with summer storm!

A summer storm proved to be just a temporary obstacle when Diakon invited families to a mid-August showing of “Incredibles 2” at the SteelStacks in Bethlehem.

Along with two other agencies, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and Diakon’s Office of Advancement extended the invitation to open families and provided box dinners for all.

A pre-movie storm discouraged some folks but eventually the skies settled and the show went on!
Help us to find forever families

Kaseem, age 14
BAM! ZAP! POW! Kaseem is a huge fan of superheroes! Among his favorites are the Flash, Captain America and the Hulk. Kaseem is a superhero himself, as he has many amazing qualities and talents such as being athletic, smart, nice and a good friend. He also has an artistic side and loves to be challenged by his peers to draw whatever they name. Recent subjects include llamas, Pokémon and tacos. Kaseem enjoys playing challenging games such as UNO, checkers and chess as well as putting together model toys. Learning is another superpower for Kaseem, who enjoys school; his teachers describe him as quiet, hardworking and cooperative. Having support in the classroom helps him succeed and reach his daily goals. Kaseem would like a family who shares his interests and would allow him to keep in contact with his siblings, as this is important to him. He would do well in a home with older brothers and sisters and pets. Kaseem is legally free for adoption. Please contact Helene Kosciolek at kosciolekh@diakon.org for more

Lenny, age 14
One thing you should know about Lenny is that he loves to laugh! He tells everyone his nickname should be “Laffy Lenny,” because he not only loves to laugh but also to make others laugh. Lenny is very personable and it does not take long to get to know him. He likes to relax in a comfy chair and chat about his favorite things while also learning more about those with whom he is talking. On the list of Lenny’s favorite things are mint Oreos, chocolate pretzels and bubblegum. He has a carefree spirit and will sing and dance at the drop of a hat! Lenny would love a family who gathers in the kitchen and prepares meals together, including one of his favorite foods, sweet potatoes. Lenny also is helpful and says that in the kitchen, he’d rather do the dishes than set the table. While he is very helpful, a family who will continue to teach Lenny life skills will help him achieve success as he grows older. A family with understanding of special needs would also be beneficial to Lenny’s long-term goals. Lenny is legally free for adoption. Please contact Helene Kosciolek at kosciolekh@diakon.org for more information.

Families Needed
There are just not enough foster families to help care for the children who are referred to us for care. We are looking for families to help us spread the word about becoming a foster or adoptive parent.
Can we tell your story to others?
Please let us know and Diakon’s Office of Corporate Communications will contact you to write your story.
If you can help, please contact Kathy Roach at roachk@diakon.org.
‘Family Fun Fest’ draws more than 200 to learn about the need for foster families

Resource families for youths in foster care are urgently needed, both across Pennsylvania and the nation. To draw attention to the situation and provide information for interested families, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care recently sponsored a Family Fun Fest.

Held on the grounds of The Lutheran Home at Topton, the event attracted more than 220 people. The day included games and crafts, food trucks, music, prizes, entertainment and a variety of vendors.

“The opioid epidemic and other factors continue to result in increasing numbers of children and youths in the foster-care system,” Roach says. “That increase has added to a nationwide shortage of resource families and a need for continuing support of families caring for youths involved in foster care,” says Kathy Roach, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care executive director.

In fact, Pennsylvania has approximately 15,000 children and youths in foster care.

Festival attendees find plenty of fun and games for all ages.

One young festival-goer shows off special skills.

A perfect day for a buggy ride!
Incentives for Family Referral

One of the toughest parts of our job occurs when we cannot respond to the immediate need to place a child—because no family is available for that situation.

We need more great families like yours to meet the pressing needs of children and youths.

In fact, you can help us to do just that. And help yourself in the process.

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care is now providing a stipend to Diakon resource families for each family you help to recruit who completes various stages of the approval and placement processes.

Here is the incentive-payment schedule:

- **Identified family completes training:** $50
- **Family approved/licensed:** $100
- **Family accepts placement:** $100
- **Family accepts placement of a teen (age 13 or older) or sibling group:** $150

For you to be eligible for the full amount of $250 - $300, the licensed home must accept a placement through one of our programs and the child must remain in the home for at least 30 days.

So that you receive credit, please ask the family calling or emailing us to identify you as their referral source.

As a Diakon family, you are one of our most-critical resources. You have made a huge difference in the lives of waiting children and youths.

Now, you can make an even greater difference by helping us to find even more families like yours!
Brownie Troop creates, donates birthday boxes

Twenty children in kinship families are receiving a special birthday surprise, thanks to Brownie Troop #64075 in the East Penn School District in Lehigh County.

The troop created 20 “birthday in a box” boxes that included cake mix and icing with decorations, candles, balloons, streamers, decorative paper plates and napkins and a gift card for the youth celebrating a birthday.

The troop applied for and received a grant to purchase the contents and the girls decorated the boxes in a birthday theme.
**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
The Helen N. Palmer Center for Permanency, Old Main, The Lutheran Home at Topton campus, One South Home Ave.
Location: Bethlehem
St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, 474 Vine Street, Social Room
Oct. 30
Location: Holland
Twining Village, 280 Middle Holland Road
Sept. 23, Nov. 25
Location: Pottstown
Manatawny Manor, 30 Old Schuykill Road
Oct. 15, Nov. 19, Dec. 17

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

**Central Pennsylvania (Mechanicsburg)**
Location: Mechanicsburg
Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, 960 Century Drive
Oct. 2, Nov. 6, Dec. 4

Sessions begin at 6 p.m. For more information and to register, please call (717) 795-0320 or email WhiteR@diakon.org or BrodeM@diakon.org

Location: York
836 S. George Street
Sept. 16, Oct. 15, Nov. 19, Dec. 16

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

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

**Eastern Pennsylvania – Topton office**
The Helen N. Palmer Center for Permanency, Old Main, The Lutheran Home at Topton campus, One South Home Ave.
Sept. 7*, 14 & 21
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 Casandra Dry (DryC@diakon.org) at (610) 682-1259.

**Central Pennsylvania**
Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, 960 Century Drive
Oct. 5, 19 & 26
Time: 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. each day
To register, please call (717) 795-0320.

Location: York
836 S. George Street
Sept. 7, 14 & 28
Time: 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. each day
To register, please call (717) 845-9113.