

MEETING

SPRING 2005



Challenges

Community Service: Positive link to home and the future

For youths enrolled in TresslerCare's Wilderness School programs, community service has always been an integral part of the experiential challenge, with 50 hours of service required for successful graduation from the Wilderness School program and 30 hours from the 90-Day Challenge+Plus program.

In 2004, youths in Wilderness Center programs performed more than 6,000 hours of community service. Until earlier this year, that service often took place within Cumberland County or on the Boiling Springs campus.

Beginning in March, however, that aspect of the program took a big step forward when staff began coordinating service projects in "home" counties so that youths in the residential and 90-day programs could reach out to their hometowns.

"We want to get the kids back in their hometowns so they get a sense of community," explains

Abby Belford, Wilderness School case manager. "It also gives them the chance to link up with positive members in their community who they may possibly use as a resource in the future."

Belford and her coworkers have found various groups to work with by researching county services and networking with professionals who could recommend specific organizations in need.

"We want to get the kids back in their hometowns so they get a sense of community,"

"A lot of the groups we started out with are nationwide, like Habitat for Humanity. We could potentially work with them in every county, if we wanted to," says Belford, adding that staff members like to work with programs that either interest the youths or are helpful to them. "We're also focusing on the skills the kids already have or have learned at TresslerCare."

Kendall Lehman, vocational skills instructor, has taken several youths to Lancaster County to work with Habitat for Humanity.

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DIAKON
LUTHERAN SOCIAL MINISTRIES

Wilderness Challenge Course

Educational credit hour curriculum unveiled

With the start of the April 4 Wilderness Challenge Course, youths involved in the program have the opportunity to keep their schooling on track and earn educational credits while learning in a non-traditional classroom setting.

"We had heard from the judges, probation officers, caseworkers, and families that they were concerned that our clients were missing school and not earning eligible credit hours while in our program," explains Jason Brode, program director. "We didn't want that to be a barrier to their coming here, so we linked our curriculum to Pennsylvania academic standards to provide participants with education instructional hours in the activities they are involved with on the course."

Working with Capital Area Intermediate Unit Curriculum Specialist Karen Ruddle, Brode and his team ensured that the course services and activities were in line with Pennsylvania academic standards.

ON THE ROAD to permanency

To more effectively serve children in need by having a greater variety of resource families available, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries has created a new, combined service called Diakon Adoption & Foster Care Services.

The goal of the program, which brings together TresslerCare foster care services and Diakon Adoption Services, is to provide a more effective route for children and youths on the

"We matched the standards to course activities and came up with 348 instructional hours that school districts have the opportunity to translate into credit hours," he says. "What we're hoping is that when dealing with local school districts, they will be willing to accept these hours, give the youth the credit, and keep them on track in school."

The majority, or 284, of the instructional hours fall under health, safety, and physical education. The remainder includes 54 instructional hours for reading, writing, speaking, and listening, 10 for environment and ecology, and 10 for mathematics.

While the new curriculum required staff to refine methods of instruction, only minimal activity changes were needed.

"We didn't have to reinvent the wheel," Brode added. "Although our program offers a non-traditional way of teaching and learning, we knew a lot of things we already were doing would find a place in the curriculum."

"road to permanency" by offering streamlined services and a wider range of family resources.

Lauren Roth Conzaman, formerly Diakon's director of foster care for the Lehigh Valley region, is serving as executive director of the program, which became operational June 1.

The change does not affect the continuum of youth services Diakon has historically offered. TresslerCare, headed by Craig Smith, will continue

The instructional hours are available on courses offered both during the school year and during the summer months. All youths who graduate from the program will receive a certificate signed by a representative of the Capital Area Intermediate Unit. A copy of that certificate, along with the Pennsylvania academic standards, will be sent to each youth's home school.

To make referrals to the Wilderness Challenge program or for more information, call Jason Brode at (717) 258-3168, ext. 124, or e-mail him at brodej@diakon.org.

DATES SET FOR Wilderness Challenge PROGRAM

July - December 2005

July 18 - August 17

August 1 - August 31

September 12 - October 12

September 26 - October 26

November 7 - December 7

November 21 - December 21

to provide Wilderness Center programs, home-based services, and sexual offender/behavior services and will work collegially with the new unit to provide a broad spectrum of treatment services and levels of care.

Referrals to Diakon Adoption and Foster Care Services can be made by calling one of our three regional offices: Topton, (610) 682-1504; Mechanicsburg, (717) 795-0320; and York, (717) 845-9113.

Foster parents' *love* leads to permanent home

“We had a lot of love to give children who needed a home and stability,” says Mrs. Galligan. “We had discussed what would be the best way to go. I thought foster care could offer us someone to love and take care of.”



The Galligans brought love to children in need.

Gene and Jo Galligan had wanted to share their lives with a child for a long time. When other efforts failed, they turned to Diakon’s foster care services office in Topton, Pa. With Diakon’s help, they not only found what they were looking for, but also were able to make the decision to adopt.

“We had a lot of love to give children who needed a home and stability,” says Mrs. Galligan. “We had discussed what would be the best way to go. I thought foster care could offer us someone to love and take care of.”

After attending an informational meeting, it wasn’t long before the Galligans jumped in with both feet to complete the training, home study, and paperwork that would give them their shot at parenthood.

“Our decision to take that course has been a part of what we consider our fulfillment of the will of God in our lives,” says Mr. Galligan. “That was the beginning of our good experience through this whole process with the staff from Diakon.”

In February 2001, the Galligans returned home after filing the last of their paperwork to find a message on their answering machine that there was a four-year-old child in need of a foster home. Although surprised by the sudden request, it didn’t take them long to respond to the call.

“Gene and I are very spiritual. We prayed about it and found out what God wanted for us,” explains Mrs. Galligan. “We figured we had gone this far and this [call] meant something. We wanted to see this little person.”

When Misty visited the Galligans for the first time, it was an opportunity for her to get to know them.

“Of course, she just walked through the door and that was enough for us,” says Mrs. Galligan. “We didn’t even say, ‘let’s think about it.’”

Although Misty’s move-in date was delayed by a snowstorm, it wasn’t long before she returned to the Galligans for good.

“Their family was wonderful from the start,” says their caseworker, Heather Reigle, who believes Mr. Galligan’s talents as a professional musician and puppeteer are an added benefit. “They believe in using your imagination and creativity to entertain. Instead of watching television, Mr. Galligan would play the piano and start singing.”

In addition to the fun times, the Galligans have also had their share of challenges. One of them was the fact that Misty was separated from her two-year-old brother, Tristan, when she moved in with them.

“Every week for one hour there was a sibling visit. It was heartbreaking to see them say goodbye,” remembers Mr. Galligan. “Misty was strongly influential in convincing the world that she wanted her little brother to be with her.”

Thanks to her persistence and the Galligans’ love for both children, Tristan joined his sister nearly two years later in October 2002. From

that moment forward, the Galligans were drawing closer to making both children a permanent part of their family.

“We had good guidance and preparation [throughout the process],” says Mr. Galligan of why they have had such a positive experience. “And we had and still have a tremendous amount of support from family and friends.”

That support was never more obvious than when the Galligans finalized the adoption of Misty, 8, and Tristan, 5, in March of this year. Family traveled from Washington, Utah, and New Jersey. Their pastor, the local postmaster,

and two of Misty’s classmates also were on hand. Twenty-six people in all were present.

“We thought this would just be a formality because we had been a family for so long. Instead, there was something very significant and uplifting about going to court that day,” say the Galligans. “It was wonderful, and the feeling hasn’t subsided.”

To make referrals to Diakon Adoption & Foster Care Services at Topton, contact Cathy Balliet at (610) 682-1504 or via e-mail at ballietc@diakon.org.

TRESSLERCARE *Regional News*

TRESSLERCARE – CAPITAL REGION

- **Lia Furlas** joined the TresslerCare Aftercare and Prevention Program (TAPP) as a contract therapist. Furlas has a master’s in counseling degree, with a specialization in grief counseling.
- **Jene Mertz**, NCC, joined the MIFFLINfamilies program as a family therapist. Mertz has extensive experience in pastoral counseling. She lives in Milroy, which is in Mifflin County.
- **Kelly Smith**, case manager, Diakon/TresslerCare’s Foster Care program, Mechanicsburg, gave birth to Kaleigh Ann on April 8.

in Brookside donated 25 backpacks stuffed with candy and toys, and **Agere**, of Bethlehem, donated 75 filled Easter baskets. The children also participated in the annual Easter egg hunt held on the campus of The Lutheran Home at Topton.

- Diakon’s foster care services at **Topton** successfully passed its DPW regional licensing inspection on March 31 with no citations.

TRESSLERCARE – WILDERNESS CENTER

TRESSLERCARE – LEHIGH VALLEY REGION

- All of the children in Diakon’s foster care services program at Topton had a happy Easter thanks to the kindness of two groups. **Concordia Lutheran Church**

- **Linda Mitchell**, RN/LPN, recently joined the Wilderness School as the part-time school nurse. Mitchell previously served the Shaffner Detention Center as medical director. In addition to her school nurse duties, she also is responsible for staff training in CPR, first aid, STDs, OSHA regulations, and medication requirements. Mitchell is a graduate of St. Mary’s School of Nursing in Philadelphia and holds an associate’s degree in human services from HACC.

Community Service:

Positive link to home and the future

Continued from Cover

"These are kids who already have experience with woodworking and carpentry, and they have a staff person to guide them," says Belford. "Many cities and boroughs are in need of landscaping services and turn to us because of our horticulture program. Because we have a lot of kids who are really talented in this area, we are lending our help in that way as well."

The variety of projects in which the youths have been involved also has been a bonus for the program. Belford recently confirmed a project with the

Lancaster Farmland Trust that will have the youths helping out during an annual "cow ride," which benefits the preservation of Lancaster County farmland. The youths will help set up and man refreshment stands along the 51-mile route.

"Our weekends are filling up pretty fast with service projects, especially as the weather gets warmer," she says, adding that projects are lined up in Chester, York, and Perry counties with more requests coming in weekly. "People are really glad to have our help. It has been a very, very positive experience."

To make referrals to the Wilderness School residential program or for more information, please contact Dee Davis at (717) 258-3168, ext. 111, or via e-mail at davisde@diakon.org.

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WAP extends

service opportunities

The Weekend Alternative Program is also part of the larger effort to locate and provide community service opportunities in the home counties of the youth served by the Wilderness Center's programs.

Corey Carothers, program director, has reached out to Delaware and Chester counties in recent months as well. The YMCA in Chester County invited the youths to help out with a quarterly celebration for children that featured various events throughout the facility. In addition to one youth

performing as a "mascot," the others helped manage and organize the event.

"The youths can easily miss the whole point [to community service] if it is not performed in their local communities," he says. "There are positive things going on that these youth can get involved in and see the benefit."

The youth who served as mascot made a point of mentioning the experience in his graduation speech, says Carothers.

"He said it was a new experience for him to be in that role and to get all the attention he got from the kids," he remembers. "He was tickled with the experience. He said he felt like the Easter Bunny."

"There are positive things going on that these youth can get involved in and see the benefit."

Wilderness School enhances *therapy-intensive atmosphere*

With all of the youths enrolled in Wilderness School programs involved in some way with drugs and alcohol or needing mental health counseling, the opening of a Diakon Family Life Services satellite office on the campus last fall came as a welcome addition.

“With four therapists now on campus, we have definitely increased the amount of services available to the youths,” says Martin Young, FLS clinical director, explaining that prior to the opening of the satellite office

the youth had to travel off campus for treatment. “We now can do groups on a regular basis and deal with things that actually happen on campus. It creates a much more therapy-intensive atmosphere for the kids.”

The decision to open the office and staff it with one drug and alcohol therapist and three mental health therapists has quickly proven to be the right one, according to Young.

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“One of the things we really are happy about is that the therapists get a better understanding of the environment in which the kids are living,”

environment in which the kids are living,” he says. “It also gives them an opportunity to talk with some of the other staff at the Wilderness School who are with these kids every day.”