

DETAILED CHILD PROFILES SPUR GROWTH IN HONG KONG ADOPTIONS

Though just a baby, Henry Lok Adler took a long journey to find his forever family. Today, he enjoys life in a stable, loving home thanks to a unique partnership between Diakon Adoption Services and International Social Services Hong Kong that eases the process for prospective parents adopting children from the Asian nation. Such partnerships are not common. Diakon Adoption Services was selected as a “placing agency” with International Social Services Hong Kong because of its quality, mission-driven service to children and the detailed child profiles it provides. “They don’t work with that many agencies to place children,” says Ramona Hoyle, director of Diakon Adoption Services in Maryland. “Our partnership is strong.” Diakon has placed approximately 10 children from Hong Kong in the United States through the program so far. The program is unique in that it provides detailed information about the children available for adoption.



“It is unusual to get much background or developmental information when dealing with an international adoption. In China, for example, it is against the law to make an adoption plan because the children are considered abandoned,” explains Hoyle. “With International Social Services Hong Kong, the adoptive parents receive detailed social and medical information, making it possible for them to make a much more informed decision.”

With dedicated recruitment staff now on board, Hoyle says interest in the program is taking off.

Danielle Chappell and Karl Adler had already decided to adopt internationally through a larger placement agency when they began their adoption training with Diakon more than a year ago. When they learned about Diakon Adoption Services’ relationship with the Hong Kong program, they changed their plan.

“What we really liked about the Hong Kong program was how much information we would get about the child and that the child was in a foster home rather than a more institutional setting,” says Chappell. “We also liked that we would get individual attention—we would meet the social worker and foster parents and we’d have a better sense of the child’s community in his own country.”

About one month after completing their training and home study, the couple received a photo and brief description of the little boy they would eventually adopt. “We expressed an interest and received something called a child study report,” remembers Chappell. “It was 10 to 12 pages long and described his daily routine—how many naps, how many bottles—funny little things he was doing with his foster mother. It was really detailed information.”

Nine months after the process began, Chappell and Adler traveled to Hong Kong to meet their new 16-month-old son as well as his foster parents. “We had a day visit with him. It was very child-focused so he was comfortable.” Throughout the week, they lengthened their visits until Henry Lok Adler spent his first night with his parents in their hotel and eventually traveled to his new home in Owings, Md. “We’d been thinking about having a child for a long time,” says Chappell. “It is the end of a long wait and we’re thrilled!”

The Adlers’ experience is common to the program, says Hoyle. Parents “are very enthusiastic and feel it is a positive experience—including the families who’ve adopted older children,” she says. “All the families have been glowing in their reports.”

Diakon Place: Helping to Change a Neighborhood

In early October, Diakon staff and board leaders and local community and governmental officials dedicated Diakon Place, a major investment in an economically challenged East Baltimore neighborhood. Formerly an auto center and supermarket, the abandoned building, now completely refurbished, houses offices for Diakon Housing & Community Development and Diakon Family Life Services – Maryland and Diakon KidzStuff's state-of-the-art child-care center.

DELAWARE-MARYLAND



UPPER SUSQUEHANNA



Roll in the New, Donate the Old

When Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries began to replace all of its nursing care beds with new electric ones, staff members had no idea their decision would help people halfway around the world. When the two Diakon senior living communities in the Upper Susquehanna Synod—Ohesson Manor at Lewistown and Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village in Lewisburg—rolled in the new beds, the older electric and manual ones were rolled out and donated to several causes.

Ohesson donated nearly 100 manual beds to the Upper Susquehanna Synod, which in turn sent them to Liberia.

“The hand of the Lord is in all of this,” says Dr. Robert Bradford, global missions facilitator for the synod. “This project came at a particularly good time.” Just as a group of synod volunteers returned from Liberia, where they helped to rebuild Curran Lutheran Hospital, Zorzor, damaged during the Liberian civil war, they received word of Diakon’s

gift. “The volunteer work crew put a new roof on the hospital, replaced walls, laid new tile on the floor, and completed general renovations,” says Bradford. “It was ready to receive patients again—it just needed beds.” Rebels had stolen the beds and, without the means to replace them, the hospital could provide only outpatient care. But with Diakon’s contribution and the synod’s effort to help rebuild the war-torn country, the hospital will once again function as a hospital should. Responsible for shipping the beds to Liberia, the synod also has worked to raise funds to purchase new mattresses.

“We are so pleased that our beds will be used to care for others, continuing Diakon’s mission to serve those in need,” says Cork Leiter, Ohesson Manor executive director.

Buffalo Valley’s donation of beds benefited those involved in a different reconstruction effort.

Once a month, since Hurricane Katrina’s devastation of the Gulf Coast, volunteers from Christ Wesleyan Church, Milton, have been helping to rebuild area homes. During a recent trip, the crew transported five donated electric beds to offer to older adults or those with special physical needs. “We will be making life a whole lot easier for people,” says Russell Davis, facilities director at the church. The remaining 13 electric beds, out of an 18-bed donation, may be used for the homebound and terminally ill among its 1,200-member congregation. The beds could also serve area individuals from all faiths as Christ Wesleyan Church participates in a community effort, the Hands Up Foundation.

“This is just another example of how Diakon is resourceful in serving as many people as possible,” says John Allison, Buffalo Valley executive director.

LOWER SUSQUEHANNA

Violin's Tradition Leads to Special Gift



Every year Kim Elicker would buy a Christmas gift—usually a toy or a piece of clothing—for a child served by Diakon's foster care program. As she perused this last year's gift list, something caught her eye.

It was a request for a violin.

A musician, Elicker was intrigued. Just how serious was the child about playing? Investigating, she came to learn

that a teenage girl, who had played the violin for six years, had made the request because her instrument had been sold when she entered foster care.

Touched by the youth's situation, Elicker immediately approached her fellow musicians in the Hershey Symphony. One woman quickly raised her hand, offering to donate a violin that belonged to her.

"For her to say, 'here,' was a huge, huge thing," says Elicker, noting that the instrument was more than 100 years old with an intriguing story behind it. "From the beginning, this violin was always given, never sold, except for its original purchase. The girl would be the fifth owner."

The donor was no longer playing the violin and believed it was time to pass it on. "She wanted to keep the tradition of the violin alive and give it to someone who would appreciate it," says Elicker. "She even cleaned up the violin and added new strings."

The opportunity to share the holiday spirit with children and youths served by Diakon is a long-standing tradition at Zion Lutheran Church, Hummelstown. When Elicker returned to her congregation with news of the donated violin, other members stepped forward to make sure the gift included a new case, bow, shoulder pad, chin rest and other accessories, as well as Hershey Symphony tickets.

"It was very much a community gift," Elicker insists. "Because I play the viola, I understood we would need the accessories if we wanted to make it a complete gift. With the donation of the violin, we were able to do that."

The magnitude of the gift was not lost on the girl. When Kelly Smith of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care presented her with the gift, the youth "cried for several minutes and kept repeating that it was the best gift she had ever received. Ironically," says Smith, "her high school orchestra concert was that same night and she was able to take the violin and play it at the concert."

Zion's members "have gone out of their way for years to ensure that kids get their specific requests," adds Smith. "In this situation, they were able to make a miracle happen for a very special young lady."

NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Bereavement Camps Offer Safe Haven

For youngsters like Jessica Adamczyk, 11, Camp Evergreen, a Diakon Children's Bereavement Program, provides a safe haven to explore and discuss the emotions experienced after a loved one dies.

"I came here to express my feelings and talk with the other kids and the counselors. My dad died in a car accident when I was just two years old and my friend, who was 8, just died in a four-wheeler accident," says Adamczyk.

In the rural setting of Camp Kresge, White Haven, Adamczyk and approximately a dozen other campers, ages eight to 14, participated in a weekend camp this summer. Geared towards helping youngsters cope with loss through therapeutic activities and peer, counselor, and volunteer interaction, the camp helps children regain normalcy in life.

"When participants meet other kids who have experienced loss, they know they are not alone," says Christina Fedorko, children's bereavement specialist and camp organizer.

"They quickly bond and support each other throughout the weekend."

Camp Evergreen offers a myriad of activities such as fishing, swimming, boating, sand art, creating memory boxes, journaling feelings, campfire time, planting flowers and a symbolic evergreen tree. Through informal and formal activities, children discuss their experiences with death with one another and the trained volunteers and counselors.

Diakon recently began an expansion of the program to enable more children to be served.

SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Twining Village Purchased

Earlier in 2006, Diakon announced the purchase of Twining Village, a Continuing Care Retirement Community in Holland, Bucks County, Pa.





IN MEMORIAM

The following memorial gifts were received between October 22, 2005 and June 26, 2006. Diakon programs thank these donors within the Delaware-Maryland Synod for their generous contributions.

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LENDING THEIR TALENTS TO PROVIDE RELIEF

In the days following Hurricane Katrina, people from around the country responded in whatever ways they could to help those who needed so much. Frostburg Heights, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Housing Community, was no exception.

A group of Frostburg Heights residents decided they could be most helpful by doing something they do really well—make comforters.



The group of women—a dozen strong—regularly draws on their talents to supply comforters to Lutheran World Relief, which distributes the handcrafted items around the world. The group from Frostburg Heights, located in Frostburg, Md., made a special effort for those affected by Hurricane Katrina, creating 44 comforters in just two months.

Above: Hand-knotting a donated comforter are, left to right, Jean Smith, Ruby Rayner, Charlotte Folk, and Beula Townsend. Also helping with the project were residents Kitty Brown, Lona Arnold, Hilda Abe, Virginia Miller, Jeanne LaRue, Betty Davis, Martha Cotton, and Martha Lehr.

DIAKON KIDZSTUFF WORK IS EXTENSION OF PRIVATE LIFE FOR NEW DIRECTOR



Robin Contee, who directs the Diakon KidzStuff child care center at its new location in Diakon Place in East Baltimore, has been working with children for years.

As a family liaison in Wicomico County elementary schools, a family coordinator for the Wicomico County Department of Corrections and, most recently, as assistant director of a day care center, Contee has established a career centered on children. Her love of children also spills into her private life.

“As a youth pastor at my church, I’ve been leading programs for people of all ages and abilities for more than 10 years,” says the Salisbury University graduate and Eastern Shore native. Contee has initiated many youth activities including a youth ministers’ alliance and a conference known as “Jammin’ for

Jesus.” “My heart is for children and teens,” she says, adding that her personal mission to serve the community complements Diakon’s.

“I love that even if [Diakon KidzStuff] parents cannot afford day care, Diakon helps them,” she says. “It is a win-win situation here.”