

3628

waiting children have been placed by the adoption services of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries...so far!

Diakon Adoption Services Family Connections

Uniting waiting children with adoptive families since 1972.



Up, up and away

By Sloane Radcliffe-Child Preparation case manager Topton

A pink balloon soared above the trees, across the evening sky and up into the clouds. On the balloon, a thank you card was riding towards heaven where their cherished grandmother rests. The brother and sister watched the balloon climb higher, thinking and talking about the memories—joyful, sad, hurtful, bittersweet—they hold of their grandmother in their hearts. “Grandma” was the picture of good ol’ Southern manners, values, generosity, and selflessness. Many of these characteristics were passed on to them—which no one can ever take away from them. The card was written to thank their grandmother for all she had done for them before she passed away, before they entered foster care. Releasing the balloon was their way of “sending” that card to her and making peace with that part of their lives.

This activity is one of many used in a new unit of service called Child Preparation. Diakon Adoption Services provides this service for children who are in the Statewide Adoption Network. The Adoption Departments in Topton and York have begun providing this service to foster children who are ready to proceed on their journey towards permanency. That permanency may be returning to their birth family or being adopted by a new family. Which ever the case may be, children are learning how to process their past, recognize their progress and prepare for their future with Child Preparation activities. Therapeutic activities including Life Books, Genograms, and Life Maps help the children learn about and deal with their past in a non-threatening way. Child Preparation also allows the children to share their memories, life experiences and dreams with their permanent family, who is an integral part of the process. This process provides the building blocks for a solid family. What a joy it is for a child to share their past with a family who holds their future!

A Publication of
 **DIAKON**
 LUTHERAN SOCIAL MINISTRIES

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A Message from the Executive Director

Suzanne Piccolo, Executive Director



*I*t's hard for me to believe that I have been here for a year and a half already. I've had so much to learn, trying to reconcile the past to the present while working to bring the agency into the future.

The most important thing I have come to realize is that no matter what we call ourselves, our most important mission is to provide a source of healing for bereaved children. To be "bereaved" literally means to be "torn apart". No one likes to think of a child being broken hearted and grieving. However, this is the reality for children who enter the foster care and adoption systems. When we keep this image in mind, it is easier to understand the rest of the work we do and the priorities we set—it's all about providing healing for the grieving child.

- We believe that children should be with their birth families whenever possible.
- If that is not an option, the first move a child makes should, ideally, be the last.
- Brothers and sisters should be kept together if at all possible—they are all they have left.
- Adoption is a service for a child who needs a new legal family, not just a service for adults who want to be parents.
- Adults need to be the ones to take the risks because children can't cope with any more losses.
- Families should be there for each other forever—no matter what.

The wonderful diversity of programs that exists in Diakon is starting to come together, to combine forces and address these issues on several levels.

In January, we held our first parent preparation class with TresslerCare combining both those seeking to provide foster care and prospective adoptive parents. In our Foster-to-Adoption Program, our focus is on permanence for children and working with the surrounding county children and youth agencies to provide resource families for their children in need. These

families are there to do whatever is deemed to be in the child's best interest. They provide love and stability on a foster care basis and work with the agency to reunite the child with the birthparents. If it is ultimately decided that the goal needs to be changed to adoption, the same family is there for the child ready and willing to adopt. It's a difficult thing to ask parents to consider, but what a wonderful gift it is to a child. The fewer moves a child is required to make, the easier it is for him or

continued on back page

To all those who help in these efforts,
I thank you and I offer you this poem from Sharon Stoll:

A hundred years from now it will not matter

What my bank account was,

The sort of house I lived in,

Or the kind of car I drove ~



*But the world may be different
Because I was important in the life of a child.*



Topton Family Prep Group,
winter 2004



Fall 2003 Topton
Family Prep Group



Highlights from Maryland

Ramona Hoyle, Director

Currently there is a national debate within the field of child welfare about how to define success in adoptive families. Is a successful adoptive family happy? One that remains committed to a child they are not enjoying parenting? I am not sure that success is a word that can or should be used to describe any family. Families, the relationships, the commitments, are the foundation of life. Arguably, success may come most of all from just being a member of one.

Adoption as a profession is not a hard science. There are no formulas that can be used in all cases, and no simple answers when considering success. Since 1987, I have worked placing waiting children with families. I know how some of the families from the early years of my work are doing. Perhaps it is the privilege of having the opportunity to witness the evolution of their lives is what causes me to resist describing families as successful versus unsuccessful.

I challenge you to consider one such family: In 1989 I placed a young Caucasian sibling group, four-year-old *Mark and his three-year-old sister, Hannah. Mark had been brain injured in his birth family. His speech was delayed, he wasn't fully potty trained, and all the professional evaluators were unclear about his potential; generally, you could say his paperwork was scary. His sister Hannah was a smart little girl, very talkative and

beautiful, with blonde hair, blue eyes, and no documented behavioral or emotional concerns. Although her foster mother reported that Hannah occasionally had temper tantrums, they were not unexpected in a three-year-old child. I wasn't worried about finding a family for Hannah.

I consciously read homestudies looking for a family who was going to be excited about Mark. Without exaggeration, I must have had fifty homestudies from families who were looking for a three-year-old little girl with no documented problems; all of them would have been excited to consider Hannah. Working within the constraints of my own value system, I was cautious that I not place the children with a family who was accepting Mark in order to get Hannah.

The family selected was very open regarding medical and developmental issues, and indeed were excited about both young children. The children were placed into their adoptive family on April 22, 1989. What became surprising immediately was that Hannah was the one who was going to give the family the proverbial "run for their money." For years, Hannah challenged every rule. Hannah had temper tantrums hourly, then daily, then weekly, then occasionally. As she got older, Hannah wanted to know what happened to her birth mother, and why she couldn't see her anymore, and was angry and confrontational

about this issue. Hannah did not make friends easily, or treat them fairly. Hannah, and the family, was in therapy for years.

Mark began speech and occupational therapy immediately after placement. Mark had an IEP, but tried hard to do well in school. He wanted his parents to be proud of his achievements, and would not give up because a task was hard for him. This pattern continued over the years. At 16, Mark got a part-time job working at Wendy's and kept that job until he graduated from high school. Mark saved his money, bought himself a used car and paid for his own car insurance. After graduating high school in 2003, Mark took and passed the admittance test for the United States Army and enlisted.

Hannah continued to struggle. Hannah worked part time as a model for a short while, but was fired for being unreliable. Hannah was not sure what she wanted to do with her life, and dropped out of high school. Hannah is now eighteen years old and is still angry. She has left home and has not told her parents how to contact her. They hope she will reconcile with them soon. These parents love both their children, but they glow with pride when they talk about Mark.

I am describing the last fifteen years in the lives of Mark and Hannah with the hope that families who are considering children for adoption to see beyond the current set of facts to rec-

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ognize that potential is hard to document. I am also writing to say I was wrong in 1989 to look for a family who was open to a child with developmental delays and to not take the challenge of temper tantrums and parenting Hannah more seriously. Still, I believe that Hannah and Mark were placed in the family they were meant to be in; these are their parents in a way more profound than anything a caseworker could have chosen or controlled.

Is this a successful adoptive family? Who gets to decide? The parents? Mark? Hannah? Shouldn't all their points of view be considered valid? Couldn't their opinions change over time? Is it fair to look at this real family and try to qualify them with an adjective like successful? If it were decided they were unsuccessful would they be any less of a family?

**Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the family.*

Wish List

Adoption (needed for each office location unless otherwise noted)

- Proxima projector
- Digital camera (Maryland office)
- Digital camcorder
- DVD player
- Free advertising
- Birthday cards for children
- Blank cards for children
- Bookstore gift cards (to buy adoption book for child)
- Video-store gift cards
- Office desk and chair (Topton office)
- Scrap-booking supplies
- Children's books (ages five and up)
- Stickers, poster board, construction paper.
- Life books (kits)
- Training videos
- Color printer (Maryland office)

MARYLAND *Finalizations*

January 28, 2004

Lewis — Tom & Connie

February 24, 2004

Kenneth — Joseph & Mary
Carl — Joseph & Mary
Joshua — Joseph & Mary

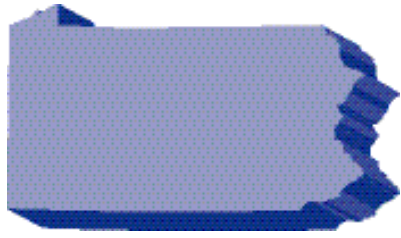
March 17, 2004

Samantha — Bob & Donna

MARYLAND *Placements*

January 2, 2004

Five year old twins, Jerome and Jamile, joined Quenton & Susan, of Hyattsville, Md. They come from Philadelphia DHS, Pa.



Highlights from Pennsylvania

Kathy Roach, Director

*T*his past September, the fourth annual Angels in Adoption Awards Celebration sponsored by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute was held in Washington D.C.

The event was a year-long campaign to highlight and raise awareness of the plight of thousands of children in this country who wait for a permanent, loving family.

Members of Congress are invited by CCAI to select an organization, individual or family from their home state who has been instrumental in helping children in need of adoption.

Pennsylvania is proud to announce that our own Jeffrey and Lydia Buck and their family were selected for the Angels in Adoption Award which was presented to them by Senator Rick Santorum. The Buck family traveled to Washington D.C. to accept this award and enjoyed a reception and awards banquet with over 700 guests and 52 members of Congress in attendance.

In 1995, the Bucks became foster and/or adoptive parents for children placed through our Topton office. They received their first foster child, Christopher, in 1997. Soon after his placement, they realized that they could not imagine their lives without him. The Bucks decided to adopt Christopher who is now seven years old. However, their love of family and their desire to help more children led

them to adopt five additional children over the next several years: Anna (age 15), Robert (age 14), Stephanie (age 10), Chelsea (age 9) and Dylan (age 7). They have also parented several additional children who returned home to their birth parents.

The Buck family was selected for this award as a tribute to the dedication and selflessness they have demonstrated in providing a happy, loving family for their children and their children's extended families. The Bucks show this love to their children by making efforts to include their children's birth families with their family. They regularly hold family outings with biological parents, siblings and grandparents to weave them into their children's lives. They also update the birth families by sending pictures and information about how the children are doing. Caseworkers have said, "the Bucks are the best example of a family that has opened their home, hearts and lives to make a difference in the life of a child".

Congratulations to the Bucks on this wonderful honor, and thanks to all who are "Angels in Adoption".



Lydia and Jeff Buck and family in Washington, D.C. with Senator Santorum.



York office wins lottery!



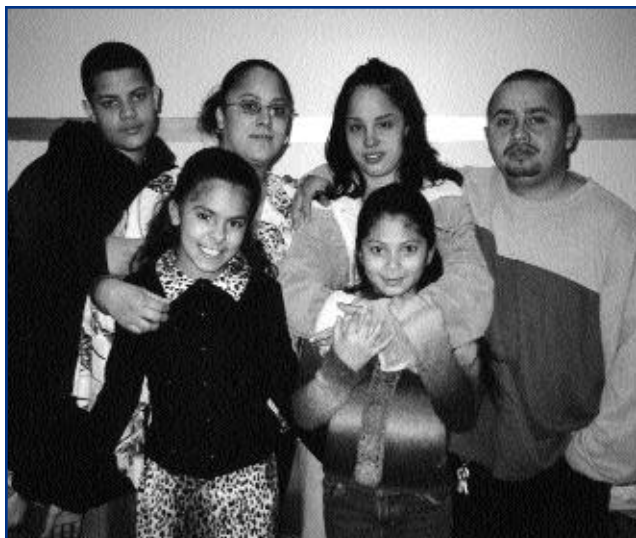
York staff Suzanne Piccolo, Karen King and Cheryl Drake receive check from Scott Hartman (holding check) and Tim Rutter.

Unfortunately, none of us was the \$110 million winner in a recent Power Ball lottery drawing; but the winner was a York County resident who bought her ticket at a local Rutter's Farm Store.

The Rutter family decided to share some of the money they received for selling the winning ticket with their employees and with several local children's charities. On March 5, Scott Hartman and Tim Rutter came to our office and presented us with a check for \$1,000.

The money was spent immediately to purchase two digital cameras that have been on our "wish list" forever. We will also have a little left over to buy some additional Life Book supplies.

Thanks to the Rutters, our waiting children will be looking their best on their recruitment flyers—which we are hoping will help them find a new "forever family."



Adopted Feb. 18, 2004, by aunt and uncle, Carmen and Victor, Evelyn (age 14) smiles for a snapshot with cousins Luis, Amanda and Vianey.

Kathy Roach, Director

One South Home Avenue, Tipton, PA 19562

836 South George Street, York, PA 17403

1-888-582-2230 (Tipton); (717) 845-9113 (York)

roachk@diakon.org



Dwight and Susan and daughter Emma from China.

PENNSYLVANIA

Finalizations

December 23, 2003

Lakeisha — Judy & Greg
Shyteirra — Judy & Greg
Brittney — Judy & Greg
Shykeirra — Judy & Greg

December 29, 2003

Dominic — Charlotte

January 7, 2004

David — Samuel & Heidi
Klarissa — Samuel & Heidi

January 21, 2004

Shawn — Martin & Helene

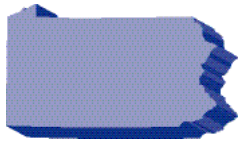
February 17, 2004

Hannah — Tracy

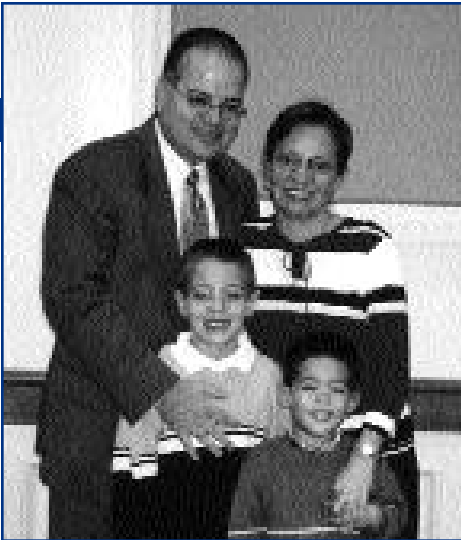
February 18, 2004

Evelyn — Victor & Carmen

Diakon Adoption Case manager, Kristen Tweed (L), poses for photo with Mark and Diane and their new family, Ryan, age eight, and Caitlin, age 7--both adopted Nov. 20, 2003.



Highlights from
Pennsylvania (continued)



Tomás & Ivette smile for the camera with sons David and Michael. Michael, age three, was adopted Nov. 12, 2003.



Christopher and Julie with son Alexander at their finalization.

CORRECTION ...

In the Winter 2004 issue of *Family Connection*, Peyton, was listed as the daughter of Wade and Cheryl of Bernville, Pa. He is their son. Sorry for our mistake.

PENNSYLVANIA

Placements

September 12, 2003

Shawn, 9, joined parents Martin & Helene of Fleetwood, Pa. He was placed by the Berks County Children & Youth, Pa.

November 1, 2003

Daniel & Roxandra, Harrisburg, Pa. welcomed Lashya, 9 and Jada, 7 into their loving home and hearts through Lehigh County CYS, Pa.

November 26, 2003

Mark, 11 months, is in his York, Pa. home with parents Michael & Teresa. He came into their lives through Journey of the Heart.

December 2, 2003

Evelyn, 15, joined her family Victor & Carmen in Reading, Pa. Evelyn comes from Berks County, Pa.

December 2, 2003

Robin & Bonnie of Fleetwood, Pa. welcomed Thomas, 1, into their home. He comes from Berks County, Pa.

December 3, 2003

Robert, 2 and Autum, 4, joined parents, Eufenio & Daisy in Reading, Pa. They come from Berks County, Pa.

December 7, 2003

Lance, 6, is at home with Tracey in Harrisburg, Pa. He comes from Allegheny County Children & Youth Services.

January 13, 2004

Robin & Bonnie welcomed Jane'e, 2, into their Fleetwood, Pa. home. She comes from Berks County, Pa.

January 13, 2004

Aida, 7, joined parents Arcadio & Jesusa of Reading, Pa. Aida comes from Berks County, Pa.

January 20, 2004

Mayra, 9, was welcomed by her mother Annette, of Reading, Pa. She comes from Berks County, Pa.

January 30, 2004

Keyona, 11, and Shanta, 13, joined her mother Toni in York, Pa. They were placed by the Berks County Children & Youth, Pa.

March 22, 2004

William & Alison, of Wernersville, Pa., welcomed Jose, 6, and Martin, 3, into their family. They were placed by the Berks County Children & Youth, Pa.

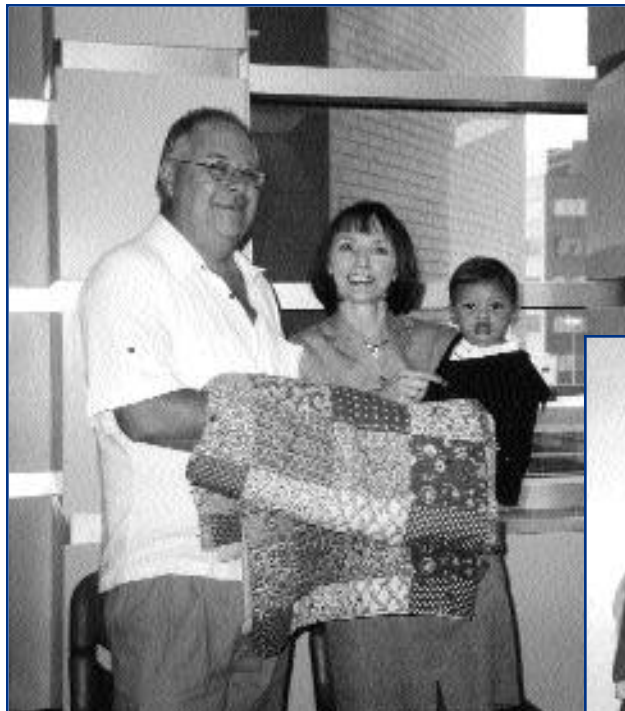
Finalizations



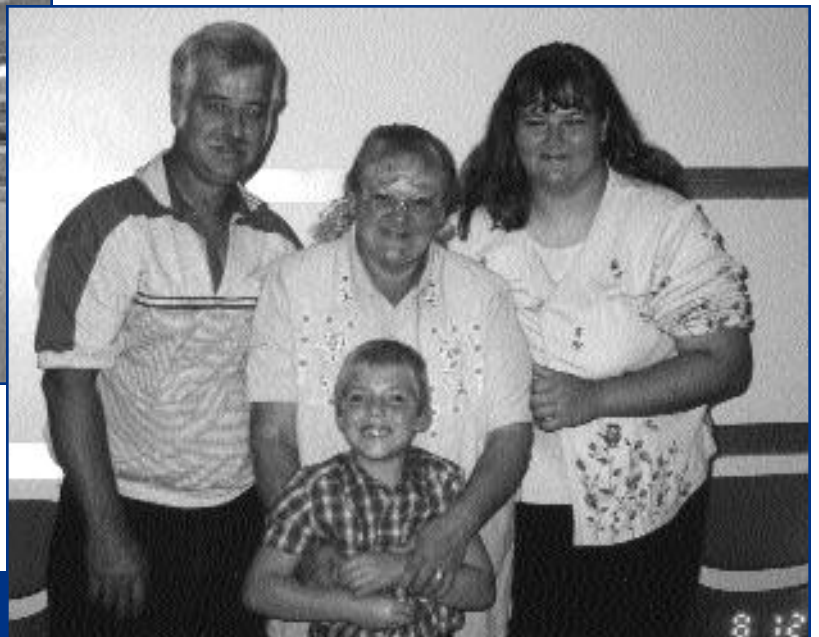
Stephen and Deborah with Michael and Haley at Haley's finalization on March 8, 2004



Tracy and Hannah at Hannah's finalization on February 17, 2004.



Lawrence and Sheree with son Donovan at their finalization.



William, Carol and Elizabeth with son Brandon at their finalization

Adoption Staff Additions & Doings

Staff Service Award

A staff service award was presented to **Katie Reyes**, our case manager from the Baltimore office, at Diakon's Leadership Conference held March 22, 2004, in Grantville, Pa.

Katie received her award in recognition of having gone "above and beyond" the call of duty by handling an extra half caseload that was left vacant when her teammate, Kate Grey, left Diakon last September.

Katie has also shown great dedication to one of her families. She attended an interview with them at a children and youth agency in northern Pa. so they would have the best possible chance of being placed with the child they wanted. The meeting was scheduled the same day the rest of the adoption staff was enjoying their Christmas luncheon and holiday outing.

We appreciate Katie's dedication to her families and to Diakon Adoption Services. Thanks, Katie!



Diakon Staff Service Award recipient Katie Reyes, Baltimore office.

New Employee

Diakon Adoption Services has a new staff member: **Tonya Bowman** is a case-manager at the Maryland office in Baltimore. She received her master's in social work degree from East Carolina University and has worked in child welfare, foster care and mental health.



Tonya Bowman, Baltimore adoption case manager.

Our Shining Star!

At our quarterly staff meeting on March 23, 2004, we had the pleasure of honoring **Karen King** for being our Shining Star. Karen was presented with a "starry crown", a star(fish) necklace, a certificate and a small monetary gift.

This deserving lady completed 29 finalizations last year—a new record. Karen accomplished this in addition to her other work of training families, performing family profiles, doing all the adult search work, and providing support and supervision to families who have received children.

Karen is always helpful and pitches in whenever something needs to be done. She's also very modest about her accomplishments. She was totally surprised when the award was presented to her. She's a major factor in the success of the adoption program in general and the York office in particular. Congratulations, Karen, may you continue to shine and inspire others for many years to come!



Karen King, case manager at the York office.

Educational Opportunities:

Just wanted to make families aware of a few wonderful resources that are available for continuing education in adoption.

The first is a web site - www.adoptionlearningpartners.org. It has several courses that parents can take free of charge. Each is about 90 to 120 minutes and they don't have to be completed in one session. Certificates are awarded for completion and can be used for those who need credits to maintain foster care certification. The topics available at present are:

- The Journey of Attachment
- Let's Talk Adoption: A Lifetime of Family Connections
- Understanding the Adoption Tax Credit
- Conspicuous Families: Race, Culture and Adoption
- With Eyes Wide Open: A Preparation Guide to International Adoption (only the first chapter is free on this one)

For families who may be considering an international adoption we are pleased to announce that Susan Myers, the national director of the Lutheran Adoption Network, will be visiting Pennsylvania in May. She will be presenting Information Nights in Tipton on May 25th and in York on May 26th. The dates of all our upcoming Information Nights and Parent Preparation courses can now be found on our web site – www.diakon.org/adoption. Please tell your friends about it.

Last, but not least, we also want to inform families that the annual SWAN Conference will be held at the Lancaster Host Resort, June 30 to July 2nd. Families are encouraged to attend. If you can't attend the conference, there will be a matching event where families can meet caseworkers and talk with them about the children they have who are waiting for families. If you would like more information, please call your case manager or go to www.Diakon-SWAN.org. to see their calendar of events.

Hope you find these helpful.

International Information Night

Please join us as Susan Myers from the Lutheran Adoption Network explains the international adoption programs offered by LAN.

Tuesday, May 25, 2004 • 7:00PM

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries
Medical Arts Building, Suite 300
798 Hausman Road
Allentown, PA 18104

To register, please call:
610-682-1504 or 888-582-2230

Wednesday, May 26, 2004 • 7:00PM

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
25 W. Springettsbury Avenue
York, PA 17403

To register, please call: 717-845-9113

UPCOMING EVENTS

The Lutheran Home at Tipton Benefactor's Dinner

Thursday, May 13, 2004
Reading Sheraton Hotel
Guest Speaker:
Bob Danzig, CEO (retired)
Hearst Newspaper Corporation
(To benefit Children's Services)

108th Anniversary of The Lutheran Home at Tipton

Anniversary Day Harvest Festival and
16th Annual Foster/Adoptive
Parent Reunion
Saturday, September 25, 2004

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Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries, created through the affiliation of Lutheran Services Northeast and Tressler Lutheran Services, also offers a range of specialized programs for children, individuals, families and senior adults.

Suzanne Piccolo
*Executive Director,
Diakon Adoption Services*

Ramona Hoyle
Director, Maryland office

Kathy Roach
Director, Pennsylvania offices

Debra A. Andree
Editor
Visit our website at www.diakon.org

A Message from the Executive Director

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her to achieve emotional stability. These are Healing Homes.

We are also working with Family Life Services and their counselors to be able to expand the provision of Child Preparation services to many more foster children in Pennsylvania. There are so many unanswered questions these children have as to who they are, what happened to them and what their future holds. This combination of resources can help children realize that they are not “damaged goods,” and they didn’t cause the breakup of their families because they were “bad” – as so many of them wrongfully assume. This service helps them put these things into proper perspective so they can begin to heal from the pain they have been carrying with them from placement to placement. These are Healing Therapies.

We have begun to work with our Advancement office not only for needed

funds to carry out our special efforts, but also for introductions to ministers in various local churches. These wonderful people can help us reach members of their congregations who might be called to help as a Healing Resource Family. These churches can be Healing Facilitators.

We are also starting to assemble Adoption Ambassador committees in each Adoption office. These volunteers, who come from many walks of life, will help us carry the message to other parts of the communities in which we work. Families need to know who we are, what we do, and why our work is so important. These people will be our Healing Home recruiters.

We are truly blessed to have such a variety of supporters sharing our mission and our vision—to work to heal the broken hearts and spirits of waiting children.

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