

Family Connections



SUMMER 2015

Lights, camera, fashion! Waiting youths are stars of the show



Terrel shows off his personal style.

To celebrate National Adoption Month last November, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care held its 3rd Annual Fashion Show and Matching Event on the campus of The Lutheran Home at Topton. Sixteen youths participated in the fashion show, with 15 agencies and 28 families attending.

The participants, all between the ages of 11 and 17, are served by SWAN Child-Specific Recruitment program or Older Child Matching Initiative. Before the fashion show, they were treated to hair styling and makeup from students at METRO Beauty Academy, Allentown. Interacting with the cosmetology students, some not much older than themselves, and being on the receiving end of a little pampering, was a treat for them. The kids had their photos taken courtesy of Brandee Krycia of Art by Brandee, who also captured images of them on the runway, making them feel even more like stars.

A catered lunch was provided by Dori Martin Catering in Fleetwood. DJ Outlaw of Majik DJ Entertainment in Reading provided music for the day's festivities, much of which was personally requested by the youths. The music helped to create a fun and relaxing environment, and served as a soundtrack after the fashion show as the kids showed off their moves on the dance floor.



Participating youth show off their fashion star power!



Shannon is all smiles after her hair and makeup session.

The SWAN Older Child Matching Initiative serves children over the age of 10 who have a primary goal of adoption and are legally free, unless the court that determines dependency will not terminate parental rights until an adoptive resource has been identified. Siblings groups are also eligible, as long as one child is 10 years old.

The children must be registered with the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange or be eligible for registration.

To learn more, please contact Melanie Rehrig, OCMI supervisor, at rehrigm@diakon.org or by telephone at (610) 682-1527.



Making Worlds Whole ... by Making Whole Families

Lauren Konzaman
Vice President
Diakon Adoption & Foster Care



You may have seen a few of the Diakon Adoption and Foster Care billboards if you happen to live in or travel through the Harrisburg and Reading communities.

We recently invested some of our limited resources to target the recruitment of additional foster and adoptive families by using outdoor advertising. There is such a significant need right now for families that we are doing everything we can to create awareness and recruit additional families willing to provide short- or long-term care to children experiencing out-of-home placement.

When we receive 20 calls in one week for children in need of a foster home and we are unable to provide the names of any licensed families interested in these youths, we are not fulfilling our mission or being consistent with our goal of “making worlds whole” for children and youths in need.

While these children may not stay long-term, they are still in need of care and a home. We strive to serve more children and families as an organization, but we also want to be able to say “yes, we have a family” to every single one of those calls we receive.

The calls we receive are not telemarketers, sales calls or someone trying to convince us to have an estimate completed on a construction project—the calls we receive are real live children being removed from their current home environment.

The children and youths are in unfortunate situations and in need of a family able to manage whatever needs they may bring with them. Based on what we are sometimes told, the information may sound scary—whether it is the child’s age, the size of the sibling group, the diagnosis, a list of past behaviors, or family history.

The children we are called about may come as victims of abuse, be homeless, have special medical needs or have been severely neglected. They may act out, take medications, act impulsively and take out of their frustration or fears on those with whom they feel most comfortable.

Most have experienced significant trauma, have been diagnosed with mental health and behavioral health issues

and have family with substance-abuse issues. These children come from a variety of living situations, may be older, and could possibly come with two, three, or four siblings. They may tell you they hate you, they may be disrespectful and appear ungrateful; at the least, they will need a lot additional support, supervision and a high level of parenting.

We want to find a family for every child brought to our attention. We want to be able to say we have a home for that 16-year-old with anger issues, the sibling group of five who were living on the streets, the 14- and 15-year-olds with Autism, the 12-year-old who wears leg braces and his 16-year-old sister with developmental delays, the 10-year-old who won’t stop banging his head, or the 17-year-old who constantly runs away because he doesn’t feel safe.

We are on a mission to help every child in need of a family. The children may need a home only for a week or a month, but also for a year or, perhaps, a lifetime—whatever that commitment, they need you.

They need a home.

They need anyone and everyone willing to open their homes and care for the children in your community. Those children will be adults in the future and we need to make sure they have at least one positive connection during childhood that can be used for a lifetime.



Outdoor team-building event sparks connections

A new event designed to connect waiting youths with waiting families took a different approach to help everyone get acquainted—by getting them all outside. There they used team-building activities to open lines of communication and have fun.

Sponsored by the Harrisburg Wendy's Wonderful Kids program within Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, the outdoor matching event took place on a crisp fall day last year at the Diakon Wilderness Center near Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania. The Wendy's Wonderful Kids program is committed to the Dave Thomas Foundation's motto of "unadoptable is unacceptable."

The Diakon Wilderness Center was selected as a matching event venue for its unique resources, including creative team building exercises and specially trained staff to oversee them. The wilderness center serves court-referred at-risk youths through community-based treatment, vocational training, counseling, and mentoring services using outdoor-based programming.

For more information on Wendy's Wonderful Kids, please visit: www.davethomasfoundation.org/what-we-do/wendys-wonderful-kids/

For the matching event, team-building activities helped to produce a stress-free setting for older youths and families so that they could interact in a structured, but open environment. One of the first activities required each participant to use a differently sized piece of pipe—and only the pipe—to pass tennis balls down a line of people. Such tasks require a lot of communication, teamwork and problem solving, all qualities youths and families need to build a successful relationship.

And just as in a family, when the activity was frustrating, the group needed to come together and make a different plan.

Several other team-building activities were completed during the morning and groups were organized to ensure each youth had the opportunity to work with each family. After a healthy lunch prepared by the wilderness center staff came the most-anticipated part of the day—the ropes course. You could feel the adrenaline and excitement in the air!

The high ropes obstacle chosen was able to support many people at the same time, which allowed the group to participate together. With several different sections and two different paths, the course was challenging, but allowed the group to support other members as they completed it. Though many of the participants were nervous, all who attempted it completed the course and several returned to try it again!

In describing the experience, one of the young people said, "I enjoyed the ropes course. When people are scared, they open up." Families seemed to have a similarly positive experience. Dan and Gina Willard-Concepcion said: "The youths were awesome. I think today was the most fun we have had all year."

As a result of the day's events, a match has occurred between a youth and family, suggesting that when youth and families have the opportunity to interact organically, potentially life-long connections are made.

For more information about Diakon's Wilderness Center, please visit: www.diakon.org/youth-services/

To contact a Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiter in PA, visit: www.davethomasfoundation.org/what-we-do/wendys-wonderful-kids/program-sites/?state=Pennsylvania

Help us to find *forever* families

Brianna, 16

Brianna has had a rough start in life, but wants to make the most of the abilities she has. She enjoys playing games with others, being a part of a group, and making crafts. She also enjoys things such as getting her nails done and shopping. Brianna receives special education services at her school and weekly therapy to help her deal with issues from her past. She has a younger brother with whom she would like to remain in contact. Brianna is legally free for adoption. For more information, please contact Helene Kosciolek; (610) 682-1564; kosciolekh@diakon.org



Anthony, 18

A handsome and talented young man, Anthony speaks three languages including English, Spanish, and Sign Language. He enjoys singing, playing the guitar, and hanging out with friends. He is well-spoken, highly motivated, and would like to pursue a master's degree. Anthony has a great sense of humor and is very personable. He is hardworking and dedicated to doing well in school and balancing a part-time job. Anthony is open to all types of families and is very excited to be a part of a family he can call his own. For more information, please contact Helene Kosciolek; (610) 682-1564; kosciolekh@diakon.org



Brittany, 17

Full of laughter, smiles, and hugs, Brittany is quite high-spirited and walks a fine line between being a “tomboy” and a “girly” girl. One part of her loves the outdoors, country music, bike riding, and swimming; another part enjoys getting her hair styled, shopping, and buying things in the color of pink. However, both sides of Brittany adore animals, especially horses. She would love to ride horses and work with them, if possible. Brittany additionally has a big heart. She appreciates being needed, and desires to be helpful. She expresses concern for others and graciously provides support in varying ways. And she likes being included in whatever others around her are doing. Brittany completed 11th grade emotional-support classes this year. She does okay in school and doesn't mind getting help and support from peers or adults. Brittany would like a two-parent family, preferably located in a rural area, and feels that being the only child in the family would be best. For more information, please contact Marian Kolcun, (570) 351-9290; kolcunm@diakon.org.



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Help us to find *forever* families



Frank, 12

Frank is a friendly boy eagerly awaiting his forever family. He enjoys going to the beach, riding his bike, and playing video games. Franks likes to be active and especially enjoys playing basketball. He likes school and receives good grades, but needs support and redirection occasionally. Frank would like to a part of a big family with a dog or cat. He would like to be able to run around and play in a big yard as well. Frank has an older sister with whom he would like to remain in contact. For more information, please contact Helene Kosciolek; (610) 682-1564; kosciolekh@diakon.org

Isaias, 12

Smart, confident, energetic, caring and humorous are all words that describe Isaias. He has come a long way in dealing with his challenges. He smiles often, gets good grades in school and studies everything with the eye of a scientist. Isaias completed 5th grade this year, having recently been placed into all regular-education classes. Some of Isaias' favorite diversions include sports, games of all types, riding bikes, and Pokemon. He enjoys playing outdoors, especially sledding in the winter and swimming in the summer. Not too long ago he was the swiftest sledder down a massive mountain; rumor has it he approached speeds of 100 miles per hour! Isaias is eager to be adopted and desires to be the only or the youngest child in the home. Isaias responds well to attention; it promotes his thriving further in his life. For more information, please contact Marian Kolcun, (570) 351-9290; kolcunm@diakon.org.



Michael, 18

A handsome, well-spoken young man, Michael is easy to talk to and loves to laugh. His favorite pastimes are singing, dancing, and using the computer. He enjoys helping others and has spent time volunteering. Michael has big plans for his future, because he ultimately wants to be involved in the fashion industry or with theatre. Michael does well in school; his favorite subject is history. He completed 12th grade life skills classes this year and would like to remain in school and build skills that are oriented to the entertainment and fashion industries. Michael dreams of a forever family that ideally includes parents, older brothers, and a dog. For more information, please contact Marian Kolcun; (570) 351-9290; kolcunm@diakon.org.



Finalizations

Skylar
September 2, 2014
Penny and Lisa
Northampton County

Alice
September 4, 2014
Michael and Lisa
Berks County

Judson
September 4, 2014
Virgil and Leanne
Berks County

Adra, Cady, and Ryan
September 4, 2014
Philip and Tracy
Berks County

Sean and Kallum
September 4, 2014
Angela
Berks County

Malachi and Sonai
September 16, 2014
Maurice and Hollie
Northampton County

Jamari
September 26, 2014
Michael and Rita
Berks County

Olivia and Grace
September 30, 2014
Ashly
Northampton County

Anaveah
October 2, 2014
Laura
Berks County

Isaiah
October 2, 2014
Donna and Omar
Berks County

Isabella
October 7, 2014
William and Wendy
Boyertown, Pa.

Michele and Brianna
October 16, 2014
Kenneth and Wanda
Berks County

Wyatt
October 28, 2014
Samuel and RoseAnn
Northampton County

Zariah, Serena, and Elijah
November 7, 2014
Eileen
Lehigh County

Mackenna
November 20, 2014
Jerome and Crystalin
Berks County

Jeramy
December 8, 2014
Theresa and Lesya
Delaware County

Niyire
December 23, 2014
Crystal
Northampton County

Raph'ael
December 30, 2014
James and Shirl
Northampton County

Adalynn Grace
December 30, 2014
Richard and Melissa
Northampton County

Daniel
January 8, 2015
Kathy
Berks County

Cylas
January 22, 2015
Erin and Paul
Berks County

Noelle
January 22, 2015
Mary and Heather
Berks County

Genesis
January 22, 2015
Rosalie and Galen
Berks County

Olivia
January 22, 2015
Damien and Alissa
Berks County

Milady and John
January 22, 2015
Heather and Matthew
Berks County

Izayah
January 27, 2015
Luz and Christopher
Northampton County

Joseph and Jayson
January 28, 2015
Bradley and Tammy
Berks County

Tristan
February 17, 2015
Hector and Kathleen
Northampton County

Bailey and Jett
February 25, 2015
Mark and Paula
Luzerne County

Mia
March 4, 2015
Laurie
Montgomery County

Jase
March 11, 2015
Ross and Wendy
Berks County

Damien
March 18, 2015
Debra
Northampton County

Lilyana
April 8, 2015
Amilyn and Valerie
Berks County

Micah
April 8, 2015
Kyle and Rachael
Berks County

Kirrah
April 9, 2015
Jen and Maryann
Lehigh County

Brielle
April 14, 2015
Randy and Tara
Northampton County

Victoria
May 5, 2015
Jeff and Angie
York County

Timothy and Elaina
May 5, 2015
Germar and Jennifer
York County

William, Aurther and
Bethenne
May 28, 2015
David and Rebekah
Lebanon County



Jen and Maryann adopted *Kirrah* in Lehigh County on April 9, 2015. Her sister, Janiya, and Judge Reibman also are pictured.



Tase was adopted by Ross and Wendy on March 11, 2015, in Berks County.



Amilyn and Valerie adopted *Lilyana* on April 8, 2015, in Berks County.



Jett and *Bailey* were adopted by Paula and Mark in Luzerne County on February 25, 2015. Judge Jennifer Rogers also is pictured.



Saul and Jarisa adopted *Austin* on April 28, 2015 in Northampton County. Also pictured are Saul and Jarisa's sons, Gabriel and Jacob.

Out and about at the Autism Speaks Walk

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care participated in the resource fair at the Autism Speaks Walk at Dorney Park in April. Helene Kosciolk, child-specific recruitment specialist, left, and Melanie Rehrig, M.S., supervisor of permanency services, greeted and spoke with dozens of attendees. The mission of Autism Speaks is family services, awareness, science and advocacy.



Baseball-game visit a home run

A group of 18 foster parents and children got an up-close look at the Iron Pigs team mascot and a great view of the baseball game, thanks to the kindness of King, Spry, Herman, Freund and Faul, LCC, Attorneys & Counselors at Law. The firm provided its Iron Pigs suite for the group to attend a game in April. The Iron Pigs, a minor league team of the Philadelphia Phillies, play in Allentown at Coca-Cola Park.



#MeetTheKids
Watch the film.
Hear their stories.
Change a life.
800.585.SWAN • adoptpakids.org

pennsylvania
STATEWIDE ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY NETWORK

#MeetTheKids offers potential foster and adoptive parents the opportunity to peek into the hearts and minds of youths waiting for homes. The #MeetTheKids campaign features 12 real youths from Pennsylvania who are waiting for adoption—waiting for someone to show them what a real family is.

These young people were given iPods and a little direction and were asked to help film one another and share why they want a family and what having a family would mean to them. Please visit The Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network's (SWAN) Facebook Page to view this special film: www.facebook.com/adoptpa

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Community Events

Join us at these fun and worthwhile community events where you can learn more about Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and support our programs.

June 18, 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.

Jubilee Day, Mechanicsburg, Pa.

June 27

Look for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care recruitment staff at the Lehigh Valley Zoo. Stop by our table and say hello!

July 22

Look for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care recruitment staff at the Iron Pigs baseball game Coca Cola Park, Allentown. Stop by our table and say hello!

July 25, Noon

York Child Abuse Awareness Event, a family day of fun with all types of free activities for children and their families, Hellam Fire Hall, 163 E. Market St. York, PA 17404, Hellam, Pa.

July 25

PrideFest, Harrisburg

August 7, 4:30 – 10 p.m.

Cultural Fest, Market Street, Harrisburg

August 24

Look for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care recruitment staff at the Iron Pigs baseball game, Coca Cola Park, Allentown. Stop by our table and say hello!

September 12, 10:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care matching event, featuring wilderness-based team building and challenge courses, Diakon Wilderness Center, 571 Mountain Road, Boiling Springs, Pa. 17007. RSVP to Katie Juliana, (717) 795-0479 or email: JulianaK@diakon.org.

September 19, Noon – 4 p.m.

Family Fun Fest, Cousler Park, 1060 Church Rd. York, Pa.

Information Sessions

Families who are interested in learning more about adoption and foster care are invited to attend any of these free information sessions:

Location: Diakon—York, 836 S. George Street, York, Pa. 17403

- July 7
- August 4
- September 1

All sessions begin at 6 p.m. If you cannot make one of the sessions, feel free to call the office at (717) 219-4025 and speak with a recruiter.

Location: Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, 960 Century Drive, Mechanicsburg, Pa. 17055

- July 8
- August 5
- September 2
- October 7
- November 4
- December 2

All sessions begin at 6 p.m. For more information, please call (717) 219-2790.

Location: Children Services Building (Annie Lowry Building), The Lutheran Home Campus, One South Home Avenue, Topton, Pa.

- June 18
- July 16
- August 20
- September 17
- October 15
- November 19
- December 17

Sessions run from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. For more information, please call 1-888-223-5428.

Location: Manatawny Manor, 30 Old Schuylkill Road, Pottstown, Pa. 19465

- June 30
- July 28

Sessions run from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. For more information, please call 1-888-223-5428.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Training Classes

Families preparing for the addition of a child into their home are required to attend family group training, which takes place on three consecutive Saturdays at these locations on these dates:

Location: Diakon—York, 836 South George Street, York, Pa 17403

Time: 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Dates: September 12, 19 and 26

Location: The Lutheran Home Campus, One South Home Avenue, Topton, Pa.

Time: 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Dates: July 11, 18 and 25

September 5, 12 and 19

November 7, 14 and 21

Location: Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, 960 Century Drive, Mechanicsburg, Pa.

Time: 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Dates: August 8, 15 and 22

October 10, 17 and 24

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care's Topton office recently held its resource family picnic at a Reading Phillies game. Families and children had a great time!

