

Family Connections



FALL 2018

The adoption journey: One mother's story

We first knew about Fatima in the autumn of 2015. I think we found her picture on the SWAN website and asked our caseworker for more information.

We had been in the search process for almost a year and a half and hadn't had any luck. Quite honestly, we were becoming very discouraged.

We were always hearing that we lived too far away for family visits or caseworker visits or, sadly, many times we just didn't hear back at all. We eventually received Fatima's profile along with an email from one of her many caseworkers stating that there was "more to her" situation than the profile was able to convey, and that this was a case that required special consideration.

To be frank, Fatima's profile was pretty scary. She had been through much, and it showed. Nonetheless, we decided to go through with the interview and see where that took us. We figured that saying yes to the interview didn't mean we were saying yes to the placement and it would give us an opportunity to discover more, for better or worse.

In anticipation of this interview (and further along the way) many people told us not to go through with it, including our caseworkers in Somerset, former foster parents, and other adoptive parents.

But there was something about this child that made us keep saying yes.

Near the end of 2015, we were told that another family had been chosen, and we were crushed. But we still had to move on in our journey. Several months later, however, our



Fatima smiles with her parents, Cathy and Bryan, on the day her adoption was finalized.

caseworker gave us a call and asked if we were still interested in Fatima. Although shocked, we said we were still interested.

We underwent more interviews. In the meantime, however, there was a matching event that she was going to attend. We were permitted to attend, but not identify ourselves as going through the process to become her family.

The day I first met my daughter was her 10th birthday. She has no memory of playing several games of Uno with me, but I'll never forget it. It took until May for things to be official and we could start visits and she moved in to our home July 18.

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Meeting the needs of older youths



Last year, Diakon was approached by Spaulding for Children—in partnership with the North American Council on Adoptable Children, the Child Trauma Academy, University of Washington and the Center for

Adoption Support and Education—to participate in a three-year training grant from the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

The pilot is called CORE, which stands for Critical On-Going Resource Family Education.

The goal of the pilot is to develop a state-of-the-art training program to equip resource parents with the necessary skills to meet the needs of older youths who have moderate to serious emotional and behavioral health challenges.

The outcome is to better prepare resource families to welcome older youths into their families, maintain the placement stability of the youth, commit to permanency and enhance the youths’ well-being. The program is structured into three components: family self-assessment; 14 hours of classroom instruction to enhance resource families’ skills and knowledge; and right-time training videos that will support the families when they need them the most.

CORE training is being piloted in the states of Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Florida and with one tribe. The curriculum will be released nationally at the conclusion of the three-year pilot, which will end Sept. 30, 2019.

Too many older youth in Pennsylvania within the child welfare system are placed in restrictive settings and will age out of the foster care system without achieving permanency and well-being.

Research indicates us that youths do much better when placed within a family setting as opposed to residential programs. However, families hesitate to parent teens because they often do not feel they have the skills and confidence to manage their behaviors.

To ensure that Pennsylvania’s older youths grow up with a family and are engaged in their community, Diakon is committed to helping families receive the support, knowledge and skills needed to parent older youth who have

Seeking adoptive/foster parents to help us with Core training or willing to share their story at information night or training classes to new families.

See Page 8 for more information.

experienced trauma. These young people’s needs are not often met because the caregivers lack the information and support needed to respond to their needs.

The CORE training, which is trauma-informed and culturally responsive, will help families maintain permanency, reduce a disruption or unplanned move for the youth and help in the recruitment of new families to accept older youths.

Diakon staff members and several foster or adoptive families prepared to offer the first round of training classes in September and October of this year. Diakon staff has devoted many hours, beyond their daily responsibilities, to bring this much-needed training to our regions.

I want to thank our dedicated staff members for helping with this important project. Berks County Children & Youth has partnered with us, as well as the Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network, or SWAN.

We are excited to offer this training and welcome the families focused on successfully completing this pilot effort in Allentown and Mechanicsburg.

If you missed this opportunity to participate, we will be offering the trainings in 2019.

Contact Casandra Dry with questions or to sign up: dryc@diakon.org or call her at 610-682-1259.

Kathy Roach
Executive Director
Diakon Adoption & Foster Care

Supporting foster and adoptive parents with specialized training

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care continually provides support and educational opportunities for foster and adoptive parents to help enhance the skills they need to care for their children.

A recent training session presented by Signe Whitson focused on “Brain-based Strategies for Helping Kids Manage Anger and Anxiety.” The purpose of the training was to help foster and adoptive parents understand what is happening in a young person’s brain during periods of stress and anxiety, to identify specific strategies to help children be better regulated and to learn how to respond effectively to a young person who is overwhelmed by anger, anxiety and other intense emotions.

Twenty-five adults attended the training, along with 26 children, who had the chance to play together and participate in games and crafts presented by Diakon staff.



As their parents learned, these young children enjoyed crafts and games.

The adoption journey *Continued from Page 1*

In the year-and-a-half since she’s been ours we have spent a great deal of time trying to find the right kind of therapy to help her deal with the trauma she’s experienced. We have worked with her doctor to take her off medications she didn’t need. We have become friends with others in similar situations. All of this has been an uphill journey, but a journey we wouldn’t trade, as we have been making it together.

Fatima is a wonderful young lady who does well in school, is wonderful with small children and animals, loves to play basketball, dreams of being a teacher and begrudgingly plays the saxophone.

She participates in a singing group called Inclined to Sing, which is affiliated with the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra,

and through that had the chance to sing with the symphony last Christmas in Handel’s Messiah.

Fatima loves food and will eat anything except Brussel sprouts. Her favorites include sushi and seafood. As a family we love to travel; our recent travels include our annual Thanksgiving trip to Bethany Beach, Del., and a large-scale summer road trip.

Fatima needs continued support in coming to terms with her past and preparing for her future. Our challenging days are, at least, equal to our good days, but we are finding that with love and patience, she is becoming an amazing young woman who will show the world that foster care is somewhere you’ve been, not something you are.

Our thanks to Cathy for sharing her story.

Finalizations

King
April 11, 2018
Kelly
Montgomery County

Kayden
April 11, 2018
Susan
Montgomery County

Genevieve, Julia and Olivia
May 1, 2018
Jeffrey and Jennifer
Monroe County

Skylar
May 2, 2018
Amy
Berks County

Georgia
May 2, 2018
Lori
Berks County

Dylan
May 7, 2018
Jason and Chelsea
York County

Logan
May 16, 2018
Michael and Megan
Berks County

Emmanuel
May 16, 2018
Jonathan and Brandi
Lebanon County

Elliott
May 16, 2018
Steven and Millicent
Berks County

Aria
May 16, 2018
Jason and Shae
Lehigh County

Civik
May 22, 2018
Donald, Jr.
Monroe County

Nadia and Ishmael
May 30, 2018
Christopher and Tara
Berks County

Raylee
May 30, 2018
Richard and Mikan
Berks County

Estefanie
May 30, 2018
Esteban and Linnette
Berks County

Paul
June 5, 2018
Bryan and Matthew
Montgomery County

Cheyenne
June 13, 2018
Tupper and Tessa
York County

Dawson
June 18, 2018
Randy and Susan
Dauphin County

Alyssia
June 19, 2018
Carlo
Northampton County

Chase, Leah and Briann
June 19, 2018
Ian and Evelyn
Lehigh County

John
June 22, 2018
Sean and Amy
York County

Noah
June 27, 2018
James and Melissa
Montgomery County

Grace and Natalie
June 27, 2018
Doug and Rebecca
Lehigh County

Isaiah
June 27, 2018
Ryan and Katie
Berks County

Nezzie
June 27, 2018
Dana and Seth
Berks County

Brandy and Manuel
June 29, 2018
Will and Janice
York County

Ashantii and Irie
July 10, 2018
Bernard and Ruth
Northampton County

Anthony
August 6, 2018
Chris and Wendy
York County

Sarah
August 10, 2018
Jessica
York County

DJ
August 15, 2018
Chris
Cumberland County

Ainah
August 22, 2018
Miguel and Veronica
Berks County



Sophia, on her new mom's lap, was adopted by Matt and Hannah Aug. 24, 2018.



Janiyah
August 22, 2018
Heather and Mary
Berks County

Zebastian
August 23, 2018
Sean and Michelle
Lancaster County

Justin
August 22, 2018
Shawn and Virginia
Berks County

Sophia
August 24, 2018
Matt and Hannah
Franklin County

Randy and Susan adopted *Dawson*
June 18, 2018.



Ainah was adopted by Miguel
and Veronica August 22, 2018.



Dana and Seth adopted *Nezzie*
June 22, 2018.



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Go to smile.amazon.com and then select Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries



Chris adopted *DJ* on Aug. 15, 2018.

Help us to find *forever* families

Kaseem, age 13

BAM! ZAP! POW! Kaseem is a huge fan of superheroes! His favorites are the Flash, Captain America and the Hulk. Kaseem is like a superhero himself as he has many amazing qualities and talents, including being athletic, smart, nice, and a good friend. Additionally, Kaseem has an artistic side. He loves to be challenged by his peers to draw whatever they name and he has drawn fun subjects such as llamas, Pokémon, and tacos. Critical thinking also is another superpower of Kaseem's as he enjoys playing challenging games such as UNO, checkers and chess and assembling model toys. He would love a family who would dare to test his strength at these activities! Kaseem enjoys attending school, where his teachers describe him as quiet, hardworking and cooperative. Having support in the classroom helps him succeed and reach his daily goals. For his future, it is no surprise Kaseem is interested in a career in law enforcement, in which he can use all his abilities to help others daily. Kaseem would like a family who shares similar interests. Additionally, he would like a family who will allow him to keep in contact with his siblings, as this is important to him. Kaseem would do well in a home with older brothers and sisters and pets. Kaseem is legally free for adoption. Please contact Helene Kosciolk at kosciolkh@diakon.org for more information.



Bianca, age 17

Bianca is a brilliant young lady with big aspirations and a determination to succeed. With a self-proclaimed “goofy” and “talkative” personality, Bianca loves to chat with others and does so effortlessly. She is a confident teen who works hard to achieve her goals. Bianca has a variety of interests, which include cheering, swimming, field hockey, basketball and volleyball. She has an artsy side as well, participating in her school's chorus and playing the guitar. In addition to those interests, Bianca is a lover of the great outdoors. She would love a family who would take her hiking and kayaking! Bianca says she “thrives on positivity” and tries her best to stay “drama-free.” She would love a family who will support her dreams of becoming the first person in her birth-family to attend college. She recently had the opportunity to participate in a program that gave her a firsthand experience of life on a college campus, which cemented her decision to pursue a collegiate track. After the program Bianca stated, “I want to be somebody in life, so I can show that I'm able to do things I put my mind to.” She is interested in pursuing a career in nursing or carpentry and is motivated to do well in high school in order to achieve this goal. She would love the support of a family to steer her in the right direction and is open to considering all family types who are supportive and would allow her age-appropriate freedoms. Bianca wants a family who will understand that her friends and birth-family play important roles for her and will support her maintaining contact with her siblings. Bianca is legally free for adoption. Please contact Helene Kosciolk at kosciolkh@diakon.org for more information.

Unique fashion show/matching event connects waiting youths and families

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care's 7th Annual Matching Event & Fashion Show will be held in November to help celebrate National Adoption Month.

This unique event brings together older youths in need of permanent families and prospective adoptive and foster families. Here are the details:

What: 7th Annual Matching Event & Fashion Show

When: Saturday, Nov. 3, 1 – 4 p.m.

Where: Henry Auditorium at Diakon Adoption & Foster Care

The Lutheran Home at Topton

One South Home Ave., Topton 19562

Who: Waiting youths and waiting families are the models

This one-of-a-kind matching event features a fun fashion show atmosphere that makes the youths "stars" for the day. Each youth receives makeovers from Metro Beauty School, as well as a new outfit he or she models.

Waiting families are invited to "walk the runway" to show support to the youths and also showcase their own personalities, just as the youths do. Youths and families have time for socialization following the fashion show.

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care holds several matching events each year, including ones that take place in venues such as professional baseball stadiums during games. The goal with every event is for permanency matches to be made and for families to learn more about Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

The fashion show matching event also includes door prizes and refreshments, as well as display tables with adoption agency staff members.

For more information, please contact Karen Knodel via email at Knodelk@diakon.org or by telephone at (610) 682-1527.



Playing pool for a good cause

For more than 30 years, the Sunday Pool League of Coplay has held a tournament that brings together experienced pool players as well as novices for a day of friendly competition and, more importantly, to raise money for nonprofits and individuals.

This year, the event, held Aug. 11, benefited Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

An appreciative thank-you goes to Jennifer Lawhome, a Diakon foster parent, who suggested Diakon Adoption & Foster Care to the pool league as a beneficiary of this year's tournament.

TEENS NEED FAMILIES, TOO.



FREE TRAINING:

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care will be offering CORE teen trainings in three locations in 2019:

Allentown
Mechanicsburg
Reading

Contact us today
if you are interested.

Casandra Dry
dryc@diakon.org or
(610) 682-1259

- Are you an adoptive, kinship or foster parent parenting teenagers?
- Are you considering providing foster care for teens?
- Would you like more knowledge and skills to help you meet teens' unique needs?
- Would you like to participate in a trauma-informed, research based parent training, specific to parenting teens?
- And would you like your time to count toward your yearly foster parent training hours?

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www.diakon.org/adoption  



A program funded through a 3-year Foster/Adoptive Parent Preparation, Training and Development Initiative cooperative agreement with the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under grant #90CO1132.

Pregnancy services program helps women consider options

Diakon Pregnancy Services is a small but vital program offering services to women with unplanned pregnancies. Options counseling is often the first step to help women explore all plans of action. If a woman chooses to parent the child, the pregnancy services counselor will assist in connecting the family to appropriate community resources. If she chooses to make an adoption plan, the adoption process is coordinated with Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

Some women contact Diakon Pregnancy Services already knowing that they want to make an adoption plan, while others need some counseling before arriving at a decision. The choice to make a plan of adoption is often difficult and always life-altering.

Even before Felicia* called Jennifer Roe, the pregnancy services counselor, she knew that she wanted to make an adoption plan for her child. She already had a young child who was currently living with a relative. Felicia was working full-time while attending school in the evenings. She wanted to make her life better so that she could eventually raise her young daughter on her own. A newborn child did not fit into this picture, and she didn't want the baby to be in the same situation as her daughter. She knew she wouldn't get any help from the birth father, who had ended the relationship when he learned that Felicia was pregnant.

Felicia wrestled with the idea of adoption for some time. She talked with her family and finally contacted Diakon Pregnancy Services. Felicia met with Jennifer several times, in locations that

were convenient to Felicia. During those meetings, Felicia talked about her family background, her current life situation, and the role the birth father had played in her life. Jennifer counseled her on the adoption process and assured her that her baby would be in good hands.

Felicia had some definite ideas about the qualities in a family that were important to her and was very pleased to be able to select the adoptive parents. She wanted her child to be raised in a Catholic home and also felt that a mature couple would be the ideal parents. In addition, Felicia wanted to meet the adoptive couple; she was able to do that before the baby was born.

More than a year has passed since Felicia's baby was born. He is healthy and happy little boy, and his adoption has been finalized. Felicia has finished school and looks forward to a bright future, one in which she can now focus on raising her daughter and securing a new job. And she knows the future also is bright for that special little boy.

Programming through Diakon Pregnancy Services is confidential and offered at no cost. For information, email roej@diaokn.org or call (610) 682-1504/toll-free (888)582-2230.

* Name changed for privacy.



My story

by Cheyane

When I was in foster care for five years, I felt that no one loved me. But there was one family out there that would love me. And that family adopted me and that was Bec and Gwen. They fell in love with me and I fell in love with them.

I was so tired of moving from one place to another so that's how I got adopted by this family. I was adopted Aug. 3, and that's when I got to change my last name. What it felt like when I got adopted? Well, it felt good because I found my forever home and that's all that matters. I love them, that's what counts.

When we have rough days, we all three sit down and have a family meeting. We talk nicely and we aren't allowed to yell at each other. At the meeting, we agree on things and we do not fight at family meetings. When I do not like what someone says I just walk away and calm down and then I come back and we all talk some more.

Our thanks to Cheyane for sharing her story.





Kathleen "KK" 16 years old

Showing heart in a special way

*H*ear Gallery Day in the Northeastern/Lehigh Valley region was a very special day for some waiting youths looking for their forever families, thanks to the support of two local businesses in Topton, Pennsylvania.

Held at Diakon Adoption & Foster Care's office in July, Heart Gallery Day included mini-makeovers for three young ladies, provided by Metro Beauty School. Then Lauren Little Photography took beautiful Heart Gallery photos that will be used to help recruit families.



Haley 14 years old



Jenny 13 years old

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

Permanency Center, Second Floor, Old Main

The Lutheran Home at Topton

One South Home Ave., Topton, Pa.

Nov. 8, Dec. 13

Location: Bethlehem

St. Peter's Lutheran Church, 474 Vine Street, Social Room

Nov. 28

Location: Holland

Twining Village, 280 Middle Holland Road

Oct. 22

Location: Pottstown

Manatawny Manor, 30 Old Schuylkill Road

Oct. 16, Nov. 20, Dec. 18

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

Central Pennsylvania (Mechanicsburg)

Location: Mechanicsburg

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, 960 Century Drive

Nov. 1, Dec. 6

Sessions begin at 6 p.m. For more information and to register, please call (717) 219-2790 or email WhiteR@diakon.org or BrodeM@diakon.org.

South Central Pennsylvania (York)

Location: York

836 S. George Street

Oct. 16, Nov. 20, Dec. 18

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.

Additional York-area Information Sessions:

- Guthrie Memorial Library, 2 Library Place, Hanover – Nov. 6

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

Location: Topton

Permanency Center, Second Floor, Old Main

The Lutheran Home at Topton, One South Home Avenue

Nov. 3*, 10 and 17

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 (610) 682-1504.



Making Memories

Young people from the ACLA youth summer program at Christ Lutheran Church in Allentown, Pa., planned and prepared Memory Boxes for youth in the care of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. The boxes, each designed by a two-student partnership, are intended to hold personal items and keepsakes. Pictured with the completed boxes are the Rev. William (Woody) Maxon and Linda Maxon, who organized the project. "Our youth were excited to give back to other children," she says.