

# Family Connections



LATE SUMMER – FALL 2019

## KINSHIP CARE – what exactly is that?

*I*t seems as if these words are frequently heard in child welfare. But what does the phrase kinship care mean?

Kinship care is the full-time care, nurturing and protection of children by relatives or any adult who has a “kinship bond” with a child. Those coming forward to provide care could be grandparents, aunts and uncles, older siblings, cousins or non-blood relatives such as a coach, teacher or family friend.

Sometimes, children and youths need to be removed from their family of origin. Family-finding services help to identify other family members or those who may have a connection to the youth who may be a permanent resource for the child.

Kinship care is one of the options when seeking permanency for children and youths. In addition, it’s the least intrusive option for out-of-home care, because it enables the youth to maintain ties with his or her biological family while ensuring safety.

Research indicates that youths do much better if they are cared for by relatives and are less likely to end up in foster care as well as experience better outcomes.



# Why are we hearing more about kinship care?

**K**inship caregivers, particularly grandparents, face a variety of emotional, legal and daily living challenges as they unexpectedly find themselves in the position of raising a second family.

Grandparents and other relatives in many kin placements are the primary caregivers for children whose parents cannot or will not care for them because of substance abuse, illness and death, abuse and neglect, incarceration, domestic violence or other factors. The opioid crisis, in fact, has led to more grandparents and other kin stepping in to care for children to avoid foster care placements.

All of these factors have contributed to the increase in the number of kinship care families. In Pennsylvania, there are nearly 202,000 children living in a kinship care family. Pennsylvania's is ranked seventh among the states in terms of children living in grandparent-headed households, with more than 164,000 children in this category.

Kinship families in Pennsylvania complete a home study called the Kinship/Emergency Caregiver (ECG) process. A case manager works with the kinship family to assess their ability to care for youths and to ensure they have met the regulatory requirements to become a foster home.

Some of those requirements include undergoing a home safety check; filling out an application; completing an autobiography; providing financial information; having a medical examination; identifying references; and completing ChildLine clearances and criminal background check.

Families meet with a case manager who will assist them with completing the requirements within 60 days. Families also must complete a minimum of six hours of training per parent annually. As long as they meet requirements, kinship providers are paid just as foster parents are for the care of a child or children.

## As need grows, so do services

As the number of kinship placements increases, more services are needed to assist kin families as they raise these children and youths.

Diakon offers emergency caregiver services at all of our offices. At our Northeastern Pennsylvania office, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care has offered kinship training classes for many years for kin providers in the Lehigh Valley.

The training provides caregivers with education and learning specific to being a kin provider. In addition, families have formed their own connections and support group to share specific issues they have in common and the ups and downs of raising relatives.

Recently, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care's Central Pennsylvania offices received a grant to begin offering kinship support groups.

Moreover, Pennsylvania recently received \$479,307 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families to develop a kinship navigator system.

Now operational, the program is called KINCONNECTOR and will help families identify local, state and federal resources for their families.

The KINCONNECTOR helpline is staffed by "kinship navigators," who are compassionate and knowledgeable social service professionals prepared to help families locate, understand and access resources that may be able to help them.

The navigators also connect grandparents and other relatives to health, financial and legal services, support groups, training and parental advice. They also can help locate physical or behavioral health services and assist with school enrollment. In addition, they will help families apply for federal, state or local benefits such as Social Security, public assistance or CHIP. A website will be launched later this year.

In the meantime, the number for KINCONNECTOR is 1-866-KIN-2111 or (1-866-546-2111). Help is available Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

You may also want to review: [dhs.pa.gov](http://dhs.pa.gov).

Kathy Roach  
Executive Director  
Diakon Adoption & Foster Care



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from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.  
and Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

## Family gives gift of books for children

Kay and Phil Beckman and their children stopped by the Diakon Adoption & Foster Care offices in Topton recently with a special gift: 40 Usborne books for children, along with homemade bows.



Staffers Erin Oshansky and Geanna Stenger gratefully accepted the donation, sure to be welcomed by Diakon youths and families.

## New home for support group

Effective September 2019, the Diakon Post-Permanency Support Group will be transitioning to the Diakon Adoption & Foster Care office at 1 S. Home Ave., Topton. By making this move, Diakon is hoping to be able to serve more adoptive families, because the office is located near the Lehigh Valley area as well.

If you have adopted or are close to achieving permanency and find that you could use some extra support, then this group is for you!

Child care and refreshments are provided free. Please contact Jennifer Roe, [roej@diakon.org](mailto:roej@diakon.org), or Sara Rarick, [raricks@diakon.org](mailto:raricks@diakon.org), for more information on upcoming meetings.

## Diakon family recognized by SWAN

Debbie Hiller wasn't "waiting" to become an adoptive parent when she learned of a sibling group needing placement.

One of the children was a student in the school in which Hiller worked. In July of 2017, Isabella, Jordan and Noah were placed with Hiller and their adoption finalized in February 2019. She was able to keep the important sibling bond intact when she agreed to accept the youths as a sibling group.

Pennsylvania's Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network—or SWAN—presented Hiller with its Permanency Family Recognition award early this summer.

Unfortunately, she was not able to attend the banquet because of the illness of one of the children, further underscoring her dedication as a mother.

Michelle Koontz, permanency services supervisor with Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, accepted the award for Hiller.



Michelle Koontz is pictured at the microphone in the lower left of the photo below, with a snapshot of the Hiller family on the screen.

# Finalizations

Arthur  
Jan. 9, 2019  
A.J. and Dusty  
Schuylkill County

Haven  
Jan. 11, 2019  
Annette  
Berks County

Nya  
Jan. 11, 2019  
Peter and Kendall  
Berks County

Jordan, Noah and Isabella  
Feb. 11, 2019  
Debbie  
Montgomery County

Haley, John and Luke,  
Feb. 11, 2019  
Brian and Audrey  
Berks County

Jayliannie and Jazzlyn,  
Feb. 26, 2019  
Jason and Lana  
Berks County

Logan  
March 5, 2019  
Britani and Adam  
Northampton County

Navaeh  
March 12, 2019  
Sherry  
Northampton County

Elliana  
March 12, 2019  
Pamela and David  
Berks County

Isabella  
March 29, 2019  
Jennifer and Frances  
Northampton County

Mason and Mya  
April 9, 2019  
Jeffrey and Jennifer  
Northampton County

Rylan  
April 16, 2019  
Leslie and Steven  
Northampton County

Bentley and Bailey  
April 16, 2019  
Robert  
Berks County

Nehemiah and Alexander  
April 16, 2019  
Daniel and Tami  
Berks County

Geo  
April 18, 2019  
Clark and Caitlyn  
Berks County

Benson  
April 18, 2019  
Laverne and Nancy  
Berks County

Callie  
April 18, 2019  
Chad and Monica  
Berks County

Amir  
April 22, 2019  
LaDon and Shrril  
Lackawanna County

Mateo  
May 10, 2019  
Miguel and Stephanie  
Berks County

Shea  
May 7, 2019  
Patrick and Jennifer  
Northampton County

Jaden  
May 9, 2019  
Beth  
Lehigh County

Rowan  
May 10, 2019  
Jeffrey and Janel  
Berks County

Clayton  
May 10, 2019  
Michael and Jessica  
Berks County

Mateo  
May 10, 2019  
Stephanie and Miguel  
Berks County

Mavis and Ben  
May 15, 2019  
Larry and Krista  
Schuylkill County

Zoi  
June 4, 2019  
Jesenia and Josue  
Northampton County

Madison  
June 11, 2019  
Rene  
Northampton County

Emmitt  
June 25, 2019  
Jeffrey and Jennifer  
Northampton County

Christopher and Jacob  
June 25, 2019  
Brad  
Northampton County

Leo  
June 26, 2019  
Milagros  
Berks County

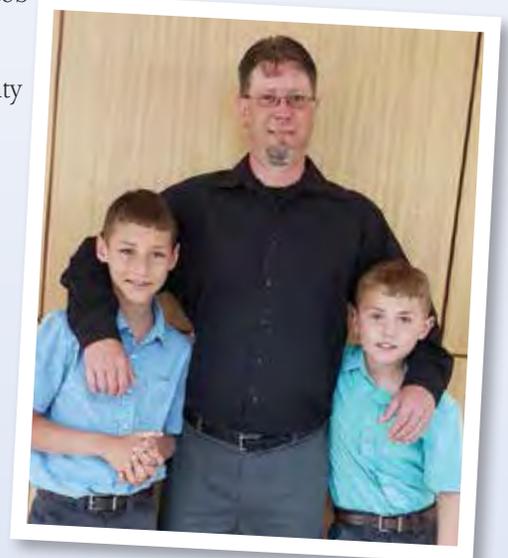
Koda, Evangeline and  
Jennavesia  
June 26, 2019  
Daniel and Trista  
Berks County

Anna  
July 9, 2019  
Brandi and Daniel  
Northampton County

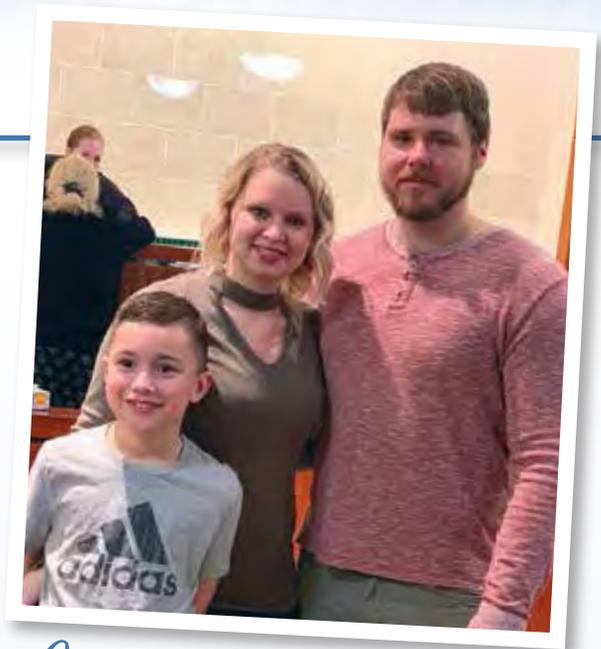
Georgia  
July 19, 2019  
Megan and Matthew  
Berks County

Kyra and Braxton  
July 19, 2019  
Lisandra and Philip  
Berks County

Korey, Kylie and Brandon  
July 19, 2019  
Brian and  
Heather  
Lehigh County



*Christopher and Jacob*  
were adopted by Brad on June 25, 2019.



*Logan* was adopted by Britani and Adam on March 5, 2019.



Megan and Matthew adopted *Geogia* on July 19, 2019.



Robert adopted *Bentley* and *Bailey* on April 16, 2019.



Chad and Monica adopted *Callie* on April 18, 2019.

# Finalizations Continued



*Geo*, held by dad, Clark, was adopted on April 18, 2019. Also pictured are mom, Caitlyn, with Morena and Evan in the front.



Miguel and Stephanie adopted *Mateo*, held by dad, on May 10, 2019.



*Nehemiah* and *Alexander* were adopted by Dan and Tami on April 16, 2019. The whole family is pictured on that special day (left to right): Nehemiah, held by Dan; Dan, Jr.; Jackson; Maximus; and Alexander, being held by Tami.

# Summer movie night wins skirmish with summer storm!

*A* summer storm proved to be just a temporary obstacle when Diakon invited families to a mid-August showing of “Incredibles 2” at the SteelStacks in Bethlehem.

Along with two other agencies, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and Diakon’s Office of Advancement extended the invitation to open families and provided box dinners for all.

A pre-movie storm discouraged some folks but eventually the skies settled and the show went on!



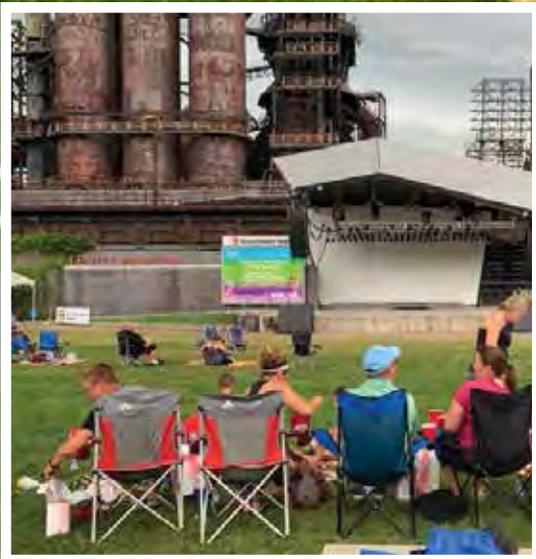
*Dark clouds threatened, but the rainbow peeking through was a promising sign!*



*Foster care staff greet guests and share information.*



*Movie fans arrive!*



*Invited guests settle in for the movie to begin.*

# Help us to find *forever* families

## *Kaseem, age 14*

BAM! ZAP! POW! Kaseem is a huge fan of superheroes! Among his favorites are the Flash, Captain America and the Hulk. Kaseem is a superhero himself, as he has many amazing qualities and talents such as being athletic, smart, nice and a good friend. He also has an artistic side and loves to be challenged by his peers to draw whatever they name. Recent subjects include llamas, Pokémon and tacos. Kaseem enjoys playing challenging games such as UNO, checkers and chess as well as putting together model toys. Learning is another superpower for Kaseem, who enjoys school; his teachers describe him as quiet, hardworking and cooperative. Having support in the classroom helps him succeed and reach his daily goals. Kaseem would like a family who shares his interests and would allow him to keep in contact with his siblings, as this is important to him. He 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](mailto:kosciolkh@diakon.org) for more



## *Lenny, age 14*

One thing you should know about Lenny is that he loves to laugh! He tells everyone his nickname should be “Laffy Lenny,” because he not only loves to laugh but also to make others laugh. Lenny is very personable and it does not take long to get to know him. He likes to relax in a comfy chair and chat about his favorite things while also learning more about those with whom he is talking. On the list of Lenny’s favorite things are mint Oreos, chocolate pretzels and bubblegum. He has a carefree spirit and will sing and dance at the drop of a hat! Lenny would love a family who gathers in the kitchen and prepares meals together, including one of his favorite foods, sweet potatoes. Lenny also is helpful and says that in the kitchen, he’d rather do the dishes than set the table. While he is very helpful, a family who will continue to teach Lenny life skills will help him achieve success as he grows older. A family with understanding of special needs would also be beneficial to Lenny’s long-term goals. Lenny is legally free for adoption. Please contact Helene Kosciolk at [kosciolkh@diakon.org](mailto:kosciolkh@diakon.org) for more information.



## Families Needed

There are just not enough foster families to help care for the children who are referred to us for care. We are looking for families to help us spread the word about becoming a foster or adoptive parent.

Can we tell your story to others?

Please let us know and Diakon’s Office of Corporate Communications will contact you to write your story.

If you can help, please contact Kathy Roach at [roachk@diakon.org](mailto:roachk@diakon.org).



*Festival attendees find plenty of fun and games for all ages.*



*One young festival-goer shows off special skills.*

## ‘Family Fun Fest’ draws more than 200 to learn about the need for foster families

Resource families for youths in foster care are urgently needed, both across Pennsylvania and the nation. To draw attention to the situation and provide information for interested families, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care recently sponsored a Family Fun Fest.

Held on the grounds of The Lutheran Home at Topton, the event attracted more than 220 people. The day included games and crafts, food trucks, music, prizes, entertainment and a variety of vendors.

“The opioid epidemic and other factors continue to result in increasing numbers of children and youths in the foster-care system,” Roach says. “That increase has added to a nationwide shortage of resource families and a need for continuing support of families caring for youths involved in foster care,” says Kathy Roach, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care executive director.

In fact, Pennsylvania has approximately 15,000 children and youths in foster care.



*A perfect day for a buggy ride!*

## Incentives for Family Referral

One of the toughest parts of our job occurs when we cannot respond to the immediate need to place a child—because no family is available for that situation.

We need **more great families like yours** to meet the pressing needs of children and youths.

In fact, you can help us to do just that. And help yourself in the process.

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care is now providing a stipend to Diakon resource families for each family you help to recruit who completes various stages of the approval and placement processes.

Here is the incentive-payment schedule:

- \* **Identified family completes training:** **\$ 50**
- \* **Family approved/licensed:** **\$100**
- \* **Family accepts placement:** **\$100**
- or
- \* **Family accepts placement of a teen (age 13 or older) or sibling group:** **\$150**

For you to be eligible for the full amount of \$250 - \$300, the licensed home must accept a placement through one of our programs and the child must remain in the home for at least 30 days.

So that you receive credit, please ask the family calling or emailing us to identify you as their referral source.

As a Diakon family, you are one of our most-critical resources. You have made a huge difference in the lives of waiting children and youths.

Now, you can make an even greater difference by helping us to find even more families like yours!

### DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE



Central Pennsylvania Office  
960 Century Drive, Suite 101  
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055  
Phone: (717) 795-0320

Northeastern Pennsylvania Office  
One South Home Avenue  
Topton, PA 19562  
Phone: (610) 682-1504

South Central Pennsylvania Office  
836 South George Street  
York, PA 17403  
Phone: (717) 845-9113

[www.diakon.org/adoption](http://www.diakon.org/adoption)



*Troop Leader Erica Dreabit, pictured, handles the special delivery.*

## Brownie Troop creates, donates birthday boxes

*T*wenty children in kinship families are receiving a special birthday surprise, thanks to Brownie Troop #64075 in the East Penn School District in Lehigh County.

The troop created 20 “birthday in a box” boxes that included cake mix and icing with decorations, candles, balloons, streamers, decorative paper plates and napkins and a gift card for the youth celebrating a birthday.

The troop applied for and received a grant to purchase the contents and the girls decorated the boxes in a birthday theme.

## 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 – Tipton office

Location: Tipton

The Helen N. Palmer Center for Permanency,  
Old Main, The Lutheran Home at Tipton campus,  
One South Home Ave.

Oct. 10, Nov. 14, Dec. 12

Location: Bethlehem

St. Peter's Lutheran Church, 474 Vine Street, Social Room  
Oct. 30

Location: Holland

Twining Village, 280 Middle Holland Road  
Sept. 23, Nov. 25

Location: Pottstown

Manatawny Manor, 30 Old Schuylkill Road  
Oct. 15, Nov. 19, Dec. 17

Sessions run from 6 to 8 p.m. For more information, please call (610) 682-1504, email [DryC@diakon.org](mailto:DryC@diakon.org), or check our website at [www.diakon.org/adoption](http://www.diakon.org/adoption)

#### Central Pennsylvania (Mechanicsburg)

Location: Mechanicsburg

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, 960 Century Drive  
Oct. 2, Nov. 6, Dec. 4

Sessions begin at 6 p.m. For more information and to register, please call (717) 795-0320 or email [WhiteR@diakon.org](mailto:WhiteR@diakon.org) or [BrodeM@diakon.org](mailto:BrodeM@diakon.org)

Location: York

836 S. George Street  
Sept. 16, Oct. 15, Nov. 19, Dec. 16

Sessions begin at 6 p.m. For more information and to register, please call (717) 845-9113 or email [JacksonC@diakon.org](mailto:JacksonC@diakon.org) or [CroneH@diakon.org](mailto:CroneH@diakon.org).

### 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 – Tipton office

The Helen N. Palmer Center for Permanency, Old Main, The Lutheran Home at Tipton campus, One South Home Ave.  
Sept. 7\*, 14 & 21

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 Casandra Dry ([DryC@diakon.org](mailto:DryC@diakon.org)) at (610) 682-1259.

#### Central Pennsylvania

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, 960 Century Drive  
Oct. 5, 19 & 26

Time: 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. each day

To register, please call (717) 795-0320.

Location: York

836 S. George Street  
Sept. 7, 14 & 28

Time: 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. each day

To register, please call (717) 845-9113.

