

Family Connections



SPRING 2021

Looking back on four decades of service

It has been 43 years since I stepped onto the campus of The Lutheran Home at Topton. I didn't know at the time that my professional career would both begin and end here.

I will be retiring in April.

I have had a wonderful and fulfilling career with this organization and I am so proud of all we have been able to accomplish. While I am saddened to leave the incredible Diakon Adoption & Foster Care team, the time has come for me to experience the next phase of my journey in life.

I look forward to checking items off my "bucket list," hoping to travel and spend more time with my family.

When it came time for high-school graduation, I was not sure about the career path I would select. I had great interest in art and architecture, but was drawn to social work. While growing up, my parents were both very active in the community either volunteering or serving on committees or as board members. I believe that influenced me to study social welfare at Kutztown University.

While at Kutztown, I heard about a local residential facility for youths at The Lutheran Home at Topton. I was encouraged by a professor to apply for a position at the Home to care for children while the house parents were off duty. This was an eye-opening experience for me. I had never worked with youths having behavioral and/or mental health issues.

After completing my degree, I accepted a case manager position working with the same youths on the Topton campus and in later years worked with youths in group homes and in foster care.

My passion for the work really took hold when program leadership asked me to help with the development of an

adoption program. It was not long until the program was up and running. We were training families, completing home studies, placing children via pregnancy services, foster care and international programs. From then on, the programs expanded and grew.

The creation of what is now known as Pennsylvania's Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network—typically called SWAN—occurred and we were one of the first affiliates to participate.

In 1984, I left Diakon to begin my family, also working for another organization during this period. I returned in the fall of 1987.

Since returning, I have held several leadership roles. In 2000, Lutheran Services Northeast, which then incorporated The Lutheran Home at Topton, affiliated (and later merged) with Tressler Lutheran Services, based in the Harrisburg region. As a result of the affiliation, I began supervising the Tressler adoption program in York.

I found a wonderful group of people there and over time we formed a solid team. I learned a lot about interstate adoptive placements and new ways to conduct trainings while in York. I also learned a lot about working from your car on my trips back and forth to York!

More changes occurred as our programs grew and, in November 2015, I was promoted to the executive director position.



Please turn to Page 2

Looking back *Continued from Page 1*

One of the first tasks at that time was the creation of a single adoption and foster care team working out of the Mechanicsburg and York offices. That group is now called our Capital team and is thriving.

Overall, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care now consists of more than 90 staff members at all our locations and I am so proud of the group and all the services we provide to children, youths and families.

In this, my final column in *Family Connections*, I want to thank all of you, our foster and adoptive families, for the loving care and support you provide the children and youths in your homes.

You all do amazing work!

The child welfare system is not always the easiest to navigate, but I am humbled by your perseverance.

In addition, thank you to the families with whom I worked directly, who allowed me to share in the creation of your families. I deeply appreciate the fact many of you who in touch with me over the years. "Shout-outs" as well to all the

colleagues/county staff members I have come to know over the years, as well as the mentors and supervisors who guided me through my journey.

Our programs would not be where they are today without the heart and soul of the program, our amazing Diakon staff! They are devoted, hardworking men and women who give so much to make our program thrive.

It has been an honor and privilege to work with you and learn from you. I will be forever grateful for the relationships we formed. There is no doubt in my mind I am leaving the program in the best of hands!

Remember, it takes courage to let go of the familiar and embrace the new.

Thank you to Diakon leadership for believing in me and allowing me the opportunity for a fulfilling, heartwarming career serving so many children and families.

Respectively,

Kathy Roach

Executive Director, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care

Diakon welcomes new Capital region director

Annie Beck has joined Diakon Adoption & Foster Care as director of permanency services for the Capital team, based at York and Mechanicsburg. "I am excited to join the Diakon team! I look forward to continuing the great work that the team has already been doing here," she says.

A native of York County, Beck began her career in the offices of York County following college graduation. She later completed graduate school and then worked for another local foster care and adoption agency.

"However, military family life quickly became a whirlwind of various moves, as it often does. I was lucky enough to work as a site director overseeing a program that supported military families and couples and, after another move, I was able to gain quite a bit of experience overseeing a large mental health agency as director. Then once again it was time to move, and I was fortunate enough to end up close to where my roots were," Beck says.

She looks forward to her my journey with Diakon, she adds, "working with the awesome team here!"



Diakon Adoption & Foster Care earns two awards

The year 2020 will not be remembered fondly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the way it turned many aspects of life upside-down.

But there have been points of light in this tumultuous year, including two awards earned by Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

“Diakon Adoption & Foster Care continued to have a great year despite the pandemic and all the flexibility that required,” says Joyce Riche, M.A., director of permanency services for Eastern Pennsylvania. “We were fortunate to be recognized for our hard work with two very special awards.”

Riche says Pennsylvania’s annual Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network statewide meeting was to be held in June, but became a virtual meeting. Awards are given at this event.

“In 2020, Patricia Menow, supervisor of the Topton office’s foster care program, and Erin Oshansky, permanency case manager in our Topton office, along with Lauren Howard, a Berks County Children and Youth caseworker, and Dr. Alison Hill, of Berks Counseling

Associates were awarded the Permanency Teamwork Award for their work with a youth with an extensive trauma history,” Riche says.

The SWAN Permanency Teamwork Award is presented to a team that exemplifies a collaborative effort that promotes permanency for children with special needs.

“A second, national award was presented to one of our Diakon programs, again at a virtual event, in November 2020,” Riche says. The Administration for Children and Families, part of the federal Department of Health and Human Services, recognized Pennsylvania’s Older Child Matching Initiative with a 2020 Adoption Excellence Award. OCMI is a program of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services’ SWAN.

Riche says DHS first approved OCMI in 2008 and awarded the contract to Diakon Adoption & Foster Care with partners from Bethanna, Project STAR at The Children’s Institute and Family Pathways, which continue to be partners.

Please turn to Page 10



Finalizations

Khloee and Dylan
July 6, 2020
Eric and Jennifer
Berks County

Gabriel and Kaleah
July 7, 2020
Teresita
Northampton County

Emily Grace and Lydia
Ann
July 28, 2020
Michael and Jennifer
Berks County

Liliana
July 28, 2020
Sirry
Berks County

Aleah and Niyah
July 28, 2020
Bobby and Shari
Northampton County

Anthony and George
July 28, 2020
Denise
Berks County

Victoria
July 30, 2020
William and Lesa
Adams County

Kenzy
Aug. 3, 2020
James and Meredith
Berks County

Siah
Aug. 10, 2020
Justin and Elise
Montgomery County

Anastasia
Aug. 11, 2020
Yalid and Danny
Northampton County

Grayson
Aug. 12, 2020
Aida
Perry County

Cody
Aug. 14, 2020
Nicholas and Joey
Erie County

Autumn Sky
Sept. 15, 2020
Janelle
Northampton County

Thaddeus
Sept. 22, 2020
Elisa and Oliver
Northampton County

Emily Elizabeth
Sept. 25, 2020
Ronald and Mollie
Lehigh County

Jelexiz and Lillian
Sept. 28, 2020
Dawnmarie
York County

Emmalyn, Kendall and
William
Sept. 29, 2020
Marc and Stacey
Berks County

Alexander Harris
Oct. 2, 2020
Thomas and Megan
Berks County

Sophia and Olivia
Oct. 2, 2020
Kell and Constance
Berks County

Tristin
Oct. 5, 2020
Melissa
Berks County

Allan, Esense and Norma
Oct. 15, 2020
Calvin and Amber
Lackawana County

Zechariah
Oct. 21, 2020
Bradley and Jessie
Berks County

Daniel and John
Nov. 6, 2020
Theresa
Lehigh County

Matthew
Nov. 11, 2020
Christopher and Maureen
Berks County

Dillon
Nov. 19, 2020
Charles and Felicia
Berks County

Dean
Nov. 29, 2020
William and Dana
Lancaster County

Matthew
Dec. 8, 2020
Anthony and Terina
Lebanon County

Noelle
Dec. 18, 2020
Kevin and Terra
Berks County

Janelle adopted
Autumn Sky Sept. 15,
2020.



Bradley and Jessie adopted *Zechariah* Oct. 21, 2020.



Mollie and Ronald adopted *Emily Elizabeth*, in Ronald's arms, Sept. 25, 2020.



Christopher & Tanya adopted *Dominic* on April 1, 2020.



William and Dana adopted *Dean* Nov. 29, 2020.



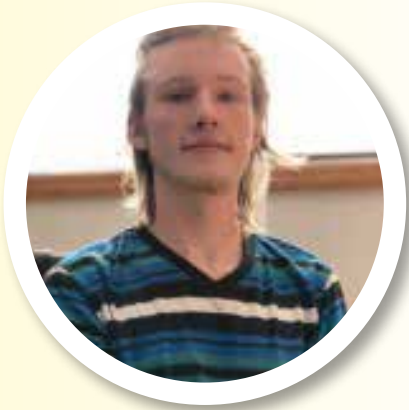
Jennifer and Michael adopted *Emily Grace* and *Lydia Ann* July 28, 2020.



Megan and Thomas adopted *Alexander Harris* Oct. 2, 2020.

Help us to find *forever* families

Waiting Youths



Jerry, age 20

So who's very likeable, enthusiastic, and honest? It's Jerry! Spend some time with him and you'll end up wanting to hug him! He has spirit and determination and is respectful! You especially notice these things when he's striving to meet a personal goal. For instance, he'd recently been working on giving up smoking. He solicited some help with support, and he was off and running, working hard to drop that habit. Was he successful? You bet! And that's typical Jerry! Jerry is close to his older brother and spends time with him. He'd like the relationship to continue forever. They do things together such as play sports, work in a specialty shop and just hang out. Jerry has finished high school and is currently exploring potential job opportunities for himself. In school, Jerry enjoyed science and learning about how things work; now he is examining various job positions and learning how those companies work. Jerry is open to a single or two-parent family who would be committed to him and his needs. Jerry requires a family who will provide him with structure and guidance, and who will be an advocate for him for his lifetime. Parental rights have been terminated for Jerry. Please contact Marian Kolcun at kolcunm@diakon.org for more information.

Nelson, age 17

Nelson is a sweet, happy, and energetic 17-year-old. Nelson has dark brown hair and brown eyes and wears eyeglasses. One of Nelson's most noted features is his smile; he has the ability to bring a smile to anyone's face. Nelson also has an infectious giggle. Nelson is described by his treatment team as "kind and helpful." He enjoys assisting others such as holding doors or helping staff with projects. Nelson desires praises and is able to be redirected by asking him to complete a task or providing him with a goal. Nelson is very artistic and imaginative. Nelson expresses his creative side by coloring, drawing, and completing craft and LEGO projects. Nelson also enjoys playing with his action figures or acting out Power Ranger moves. Nelson's favorite time of the day is meal time. He has a hearty appetite and likes most types of food. Nelson loves McDonald's cheeseburgers, French fries and a cold Sprite! However, some of his other favorite foods are pizza and chicken and rice. Nelson likes being around animals; his favorite animal is a cat. Nelson noted that he would like to be a Power Ranger when he grows up, but if that doesn't happen, he would like to be a basketball player as basketball is his favorite sport and he was on his school's team prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nelson enjoys school. Even amidst the pandemic, he dealt with the transition from in-person to virtual learning well. He ensured that he attended his online schooling while also completing his assigned school work. As his school transitioned back to in-person, Nelson handled the transition well. Nelson reported his favorite subjects are math and reading. Parental rights have been terminated for Nelson. Please contact Helene Kosciolk-Brown at kosciolkh@diakon.org for more information.



Amanda, age 16

Amanda is a young woman who describes herself as loveable, happy, caring and helpful. Amanda loves meeting new people and always greets you with a big smile, an even bigger hug, and a compliment. She will always ask about your day. She has a very kind and curious nature! Amanda loves to sing and dance. She is happy to sing any of her favorites to you including Old Town Road, I'm a Savage and Into the Unknown from Frozen. Bingo and Uno are two of her favorite games. It will take all your focus to play Memory with her, and she'll probably still win! She also enjoys swimming, riding her bike, playing at the park and just being out in the sun! Amanda enjoys going to church and being part of a community. Amanda is up for anything, as long as she gets to be with others while she's doing it. She's quite the social butterfly! Amanda has a big heart and has room in it for everyone. She is very excited to find her forever family. Please contact Katie Juliana at julianak@diakon.org for more information.



Sibling training sets us apart

One thing that sets Diakon Adoption & Foster Care apart is our sibling training.

This evidence-based curriculum helps birth and adopted children already in a resource family prepare for the addition of a foster or adoptive sibling or sibling group in their home, family and life.

Sibling trainings were on hold for most of 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the Capital region, trainers adapted the curriculum to an online format, which will be offered for the first time March 13, with additional dates to be announced.

The primary objectives and components of the in-person curriculum remain the same, including helping children understand:

- Who youths in the child welfare system are
- Grief and loss
- Empathy
- Understanding family roles and dynamics
- Coping with change.

If you are a Diakon family interested in registering children, or if you would like more information, please contact Amanda Wagner, permanency services supervisor, at wagneram@diakon.org.



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
- * **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

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care holds holiday “drive-by” gift pick-ups

As a result of the pandemic and need for social distancing, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care was not able to hold its annual holiday parties for foster and kinship families and youths.

“Though we were sad to forego that for the year, we wouldn’t give up the whole idea! Thanks to some creative thinking, the staff in the foster care units held two ‘drive-by’ gift pick-ups for our families and youths,” says Joyce Riche, director of permanency services.

“Our traditional foster families were able to drive over to our Topton office and simply drive up, wave at their workers and receive their holiday gifts. Thanks to the generosity of the First Presbyterian Church in Allentown, our kinship foster families, many of whom are from the Lehigh and Northampton counties areas, were able to do the same. They simply drove over to the parking lot at First Presbyterian Church where they were given their holiday gifts,” says Riche.

“Although it wasn’t a full party, and although we are definitely looking forward to returning to an in-person event when the pandemic allows, we were so thrilled to be involved with some holiday spirit and to continue some holiday tradition with our families.”



Pictured are from left, front, Permanency Case Managers Geanna Stenger and Marjorie Dizon; standing, Permanency Supervisor Patti Menow and Family Support Specialist Megan Miller; and Permanency Case Manager Amanda Henn in the truck.

Cayden Roth, 12, launches fundraiser for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, scholarship fund

Cayden Roth, 12, recently launched a fundraising event for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and the Diakon Scholarship Fund.

Cayden was placed with his forever family, Lori and Stephen Roth, through Diakon’s foster care program at the age of 13 months, and his adoption was finalized in April 2011. “Cayden has a history of fundraising for our program, and donating other supplies to our children in care,” says Joyce Riche, M.A., director of permanency services.

In commemoration of the 10-year anniversary of his adoption finalization, Cayden had wanted to donate some of his own money to Diakon. “He and his mom talked about that being a good idea, but if he invested some of his own money, he could probably make enough money to donate even more. So he took \$250 and bought 25 signs, hoping to double his investment. He sold all 25, for a total of \$500 within a half-hour of his initial Facebook post, which is where he advertised them. He then bought 100 more to sell.”

Overall, he raised more than \$1,700 to benefit both Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and the Diakon Youth Scholarship Fund.

“Plus, Cayden is doing the delivery and installation of the signs himself!” Riche says.



Cayden Roth, 12, with one of his posters in front of the Lutheran Home at Topton.

Two awards *Continued from Page 3*

Since its inception, OCMI has helped more than 200 older youths find permanency. The initiative targets children older than 10, who are legally free for adoption and have complex medical/mental health needs or comprise a large sibling group. At this time, 66 Pennsylvania counties make referrals to OCMI.

Karen Knodel, manager of permanency services and grants for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, accepted the award at a virtual ceremony Nov. 17. In addition to the presentation of the awards, the celebration highlighted a national adoption recruitment campaign and launched the newest public service announcement that encourages the adoption of older youths from foster care.

“Although this award names OCMI leadership and recruiters, it is made possible through the efforts of everyone involved in making permanency happen for these older youth,” Riche says. “We want to congratulate everyone. Keep up the great work that recognizes that all children, regardless of age or disability, can achieve permanency.”



Pictured are, from left, Erin Oshansky and Patti Menow.

SUPPORT DIAKON BY SHOPPING

amazonsmile
You shop. Amazon gives.

Amazon offers a program, AmazonSmile, to generate donations to nonprofit organizations all around the world and Diakon is a participant.

AmazonSmile will donate 0.5 percent of all eligible purchases to the various programs of Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries, including Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, through your selection of the Diakon Child, Family and Community Ministries charity at <https://smile.amazon.com/gp/chpf/homepage?orig=%2F>.

If you are already a member of Amazon, you can log in to your account and select AmazonSmile from the Programs and Features menu. There are bi-annual renewals when Amazon will ask for your approval to continue generating a donation from your AmazonSmile purchases.

Remember to shop online with AmazonSmile and support Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries, every little bit counts!



Diakon offers foster care for teens

One way Diakon Adoption & Foster Care serves older youths in foster care is through the Steps to Independence program and training provided to participating families.

The program was approved a year and a half ago and Diakon continues to seek families to provide homes for teens.

“On average, 50 percent of our foster care referrals on a monthly basis are for teenagers in need of loving families, and we do not have enough homes for teens,” says Casandra Dry, M.A., manager of recruitment.

The program serves youths 12 to 21 who may have emotional and behavioral needs that require additional psychiatric services, including medication, therapy and drug and alcohol interventions to support the maintenance of their placement in a resource home. It also provides additional support to families and youths through the Family Support Specialist and teen support groups.

Dry says to best serve the youths, resource families are required to complete components of Critical On-Going Resource Family Education—typically called CORE—Teen. The CORE Teen classroom training provides families with an intermediate level of learning and understanding of the root causes of behaviors and how to address the needs behind a child’s behavior.

“They will learn the impact of trauma on youths in foster care and how trauma can affect the cognitive and emotional

development of each child. Parents will learn innovative parenting techniques to effectively parent teens, developing and sustaining healthy relationships with a teen, managing and understanding youths’ challenging behaviors and personal self-care,” Dry explains.

“This training curriculum provides resource families with ongoing skills development needed to understand and promote committed, continual relationships with youths in their care. Training is held in a cohort format with opportunities for open discussions and building supportive relationships with other resource parents.”

Diakon is in the process of offering one series with plans for an additional two series this year.

Diakon continues to seek resource families willing to provide a home to these older youths and adolescents.

“We are fully committed to both preparing families for this challenge and providing on-going support throughout the placement,” says Dry.

For more information and upcoming opportunities to participate in CORE Teen Training, please contact Dry at DryC@diakon.org.

The CORE Teen Classroom training is a seven-session series, with some sessions combined into one training day. The next available series will be hosted virtually through ZOOM on the following dates and times:

SATURDAY, APRIL 17 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, MAY 3 9 a.m. to noon

FRIDAY, MAY 14 6 to 9 p.m.

SATURDAY, MAY 22 9 a.m. to noon

FRIDAY, JUNE 4 6 to 9 p.m.

FRIDAY, JUNE 11 6 to 9 p.m.

All trainings must be taken to be issued a certificate of completion.

REMEMBER:

CORE is also available for families who have already adopted or taken permanent legal custody of a youth. Because of SWAN Post-Permanency funding, families would not be charged for this training.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Families interested in learning more about adoption and foster care are invited to attend Diakon Adoption & Foster Care's free informational sessions, now being held virtually.

Please consult our website for updated lists as meeting times can change.

For information in eastern Pennsylvania, please call (610) 682-1504 or email DryC@diakon.org or check the website at www.diakon.org/adoption.

For information in central Pennsylvania (Mechanicsburg), please call (717) 795-0320 or email SpurgeonS@diakon.org or BrodeM@diakon.org.

For information in central Pennsylvania (York), please call (717) 845-9113 or email StoreyH@diakon.org or CroneH@diakon.org.

Information sessions hosted by Topton-based staff:

- Thursday, March 18, 6 to 8 p.m.
- Tuesday, March 23, 6 to 8 p.m.
- Wednesday, March 31, Noon to 2 p.m.
- Tuesday, April 20, Noon to 2 p.m.
- Thursday, April 29, 6 to 8 p.m.
- Thursday, May 20, 6 to 8 p.m.
- Tuesday, May 25, 6 to 8 p.m.
- Thursday, June 17, Noon to 2 p.m.
- Wednesday, June 23 6 to 8 p.m.
- Tuesday, June 29, 6 to 8 p.m.

Information sessions hosted by Capital-based staff:

- Tuesday, March 2, 6 to 8 p.m.
- Wednesday, March 10, Noon to 2 p.m.
- Tuesday, April 6, 6 to 8 p.m.
- Wednesday, April 14, 6 to 8 p.m.
- Tuesday, May 4, 6 to 8 p.m.
- Wednesday, May 12, Noon to 2 p.m.
- Tuesday, June 1, 6 to 8 p.m.
- Wednesday, June 9, 6 to 8 p.m.

Diakon launches Intersections group

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care is offering a new service: the Intersections Child Preparation Group for older youths.

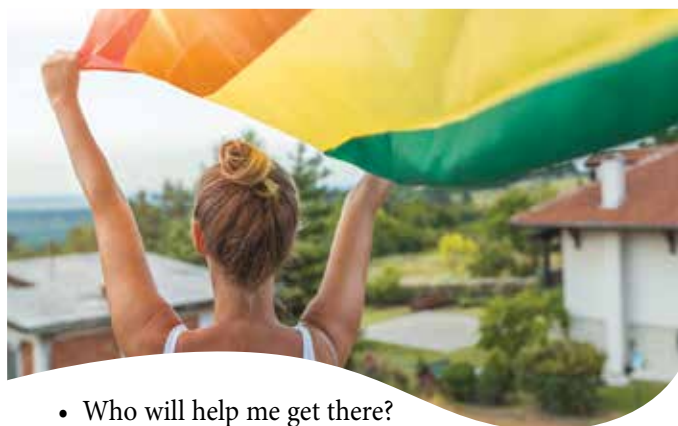
Intersections is a Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network-approved group that serves young people at the intersection of being in the child welfare system while also experiencing life as part of the LGBTQ+ community.

The program is designed to:

- Provide a welcoming place for LGBTQ+ youths
- Create positive connections
- Support teens in finding their voice
- Help youths to experience a healthy community.

Employing the tenets of the "3-5-7 Model" that is integral to the child-preparation unit, Intersections staff facilitators guide youths through a combination of group and individual sessions that help them reach achieve goals by answering such questions as ...

- Who am I?
- What has happened?
- Where am I going?



- Who will help me get there?
- How will I know when I belong?

Participants are supported in exploring these vital questions while also experiencing the opportunity to connect with others in a safe, positive and empowering environment.

Because of COVID-19, the group is being held virtually and can therefore support youths across the state.

If you are interested in learning more or have a youth in mind for future Intersections groups, please contact Amanda Wagner, permanency services supervisor, at wagneram@diakon.org.