

# Family Connections



SUMMER 2017

## Sibling training expands to the Capital region

Since September 2015, staff at Diakon Adoption & Foster Care's Topton office has offered a sibling preparation group for biological and adopted children living in prospective foster homes.

We are pleased to announce this sibling training has come to the Mechanicsburg and York offices as well!

The purpose of sibling training is to teach children and youths about the child welfare system, reasons children come into care, and possible feelings associated with being separated from their birth families. The training also assists children and youths with developing empathy and coping skills.

The first sibling training in the Capital region was held in Mechanicsburg in February. Three sisters—Lily, 12, Isabella, 7, and Sophia, 6—were asked to share their thoughts about the training.

"They helped us learn more about what the kids have gone through," says Lily.

Isabella adds: "I liked throwing the balls and answering the question that was on the ball about siblings."

"It was fun," says Sophia, who asked her parents when she can attend another session.

To participate, children must be at least 6 years old and have completed kindergarten. Prospective families receive information about sibling training when they register for family training. Families already licensed also can register their children to participate in an upcoming training.

The day-long sibling training program runs concurrently with weekend training for prospective foster and adoptive parents. Morning and afternoon snacks are provided to all participants, along with a one-hour break for lunch for both children and parents. Families can bring a lunch or drive to a local restaurant.

After lunch, parents complete a short family activity with their children before returning to their own training session. Training sessions run from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

For more information and to register, contact Michelle Brode (brodem@diakon.org) in Mechanicsburg; Cheryl Drake (drakec@diakon.org) in York; or Sandy Schreffler (schrefflers@diakon.org) in Topton.

### Upcoming training dates are:

**YORK** Nov. 18

**MECHANICSBURG** Aug. 5

**TOPTON** July 8 • Sept. 9 • Nov. 5





## Painting party pick-me-up

**D**iakon Adoption & Foster Care staff took time to enjoy a little rejuvenating fun at a painting party in January. The team-building/wellness activity led to lots of laughter, along with many lovely pieces of art.



# Finalizations

Aubrey and Alani  
Sept. 29, 2016  
Jonathan and Brandi  
Berks County

Mia  
Oct. 11, 2016  
Julie  
Northampton County

Lilliana  
Oct. 12, 2016  
Gregory and Nicole  
Berks County

Lacey, Mason and Eva  
Oct. 27, 2016  
Tyler and Katie  
Berks County

Brantley and Summer  
Nov. 4, 2016  
Edward and Michele  
Chester County

Finnley  
Nov. 22, 2016  
Milly and Bernice  
Northampton County

Noah  
Nov. 22, 2016  
Ross and Wendy  
Northampton County

Elijah and Lilliana  
Nov. 29, 2016  
Jeremy and Vicki  
Northampton County

David  
Dec. 6, 2016  
Randy and Patrick  
Northampton County

Ethan and Caleb  
Dec. 7, 2016  
Greg and Jennifer  
Berks County

Addison  
Dec. 7, 2016  
Heather and Mary  
Berks County

Vanessa  
Dec. 12, 2016  
Edward and Deana  
Adams County

December  
Dec. 14, 2016  
Ellen  
Berks County

David  
Dec. 14, 2016  
David and Sandra  
Berks County

Orion  
Dec. 21, 2016  
Miguel and Stephanie  
Berks County

Mackinze, Kasidy and  
Isabella  
Dec. 21, 2016  
Paul and Carolyn  
Berks County

Jayden  
Jan. 27, 2017  
Ricky and Brandilynn  
York County

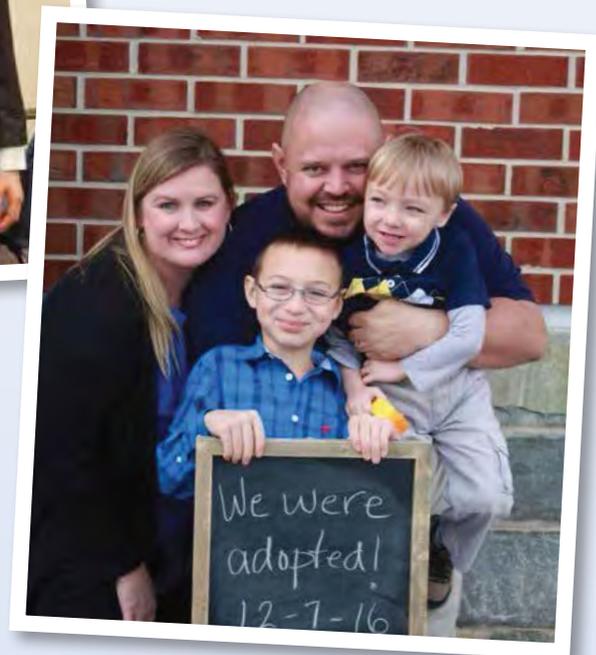
Lucas  
Jan. 18, 2017  
Andrew and Amanda  
Berks County

Aaron  
Feb. 9, 2017  
Phil  
York County

Mason  
March 15, 2017  
Nathan and Holli  
Northampton County



Phil adopted *Aaron* on  
Feb. 9, 2017.

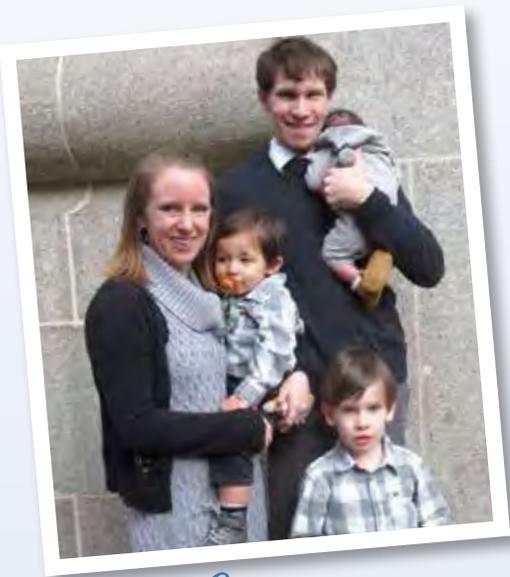


Greg and Jennifer adopted  
*Ethan* and *Caleb* on  
Dec. 7, 2016.

# Finalizations continued



*David* was adopted Dec. 6, 2016, by Randy and Patrick.



*Lucas* was adopted Jan. 18, 2017, by Andrew and Amanda.



*Finnely* was adopted Nov. 22, 2016, by Milly and Bernice.



*December* (left) was adopted Dec. 14, 2016, by Ellen.



*Vanessa* was adopted by Edward and Deanna on Dec. 12, 2106. Also pictured is her new brother, Alexander.



Ricky and Brandilynn adopted *Jayden* on Jan. 27, 2017.

## Trinity finds her forever family thanks to Wendy's program

On the day her adoption was finalized, Trinity wore a big smile—and a tiara. She and her new family received services through a special program funded, in part, by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and its Wendy's Wonderful Kids program.

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care has participated in the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program since 2007. Diakon shares the foundation's goal of assisting older youths find permanent homes. Often, these young people have been waiting the longest for their forever family.



*Pictured with Trinity are parents Jenna and Michael and siblings, left to right, Nathaniel, Joelle, Grace and Zoe, in front of Trinity.*

## Showing love for foster children

Staff of the Mechanicsburg office of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care gratefully accepted donated placement bags for youths coming into foster care placement from the FOSTERLOVE PROJECT.

The FOSTERLOVEPROJECT is a nonprofit that exists to provide resources for foster children and families. Bags are filled with comfort items such as a blanket, stuffed animal, a book and personal care items including toothpaste, a toothbrush, and children's soap. The goal is to ease children's transition into foster care and provide them with something to call their own.



# Help us to find *forever* families

## *Xzavier, age 9*

Fun and talkative, Xzavier has a great personality and a smile that lights up a room! He has many interests, but really enjoys playing basketball and playing outside. Superheroes and action figures are of great interest to Xzavier; his favorite superhero is the Hulk. Xzavier eagerly accepts praise and approval from the adults in his life, and enjoys giving and receiving affection once a trusting relationship is developed. A prospective family will need to show and communicate to Xzavier that he will be safe, secure and loved in his forever family. For more information, please contact Helene Kosciolek, (610) 682-1564, [kosciolekh@diakon.org](mailto:kosciolekh@diakon.org).



## *Jenny, age 11*

Jenny is fun and free-spirited, with a beautiful smile. She loves to play with her stuffed animals and Barbie dolls, as well as be outside. Jenny enjoys participating in art class, which helps her express herself. She enjoys school, but requires emotional and learning support as well as life skills. All families will be considered for Jenny, but she would do best in a home in which she is the youngest or only child. Experienced foster families with knowledge of children with special needs will be highly considered. For more information, please contact Helene Kosciolek, (610) 682-1564, [kosciolekh@diakon.org](mailto:kosciolekh@diakon.org).



## *Cash, age 13*

Cash'mere, or "Cash" as some call him, is a sweet and respectful young teen who describes himself as having a "good sense of humor, generous, and happy most of the time." He is very caring and attends non-denominational church services at the group home in which he lives. He feels that God is an important part of his life. To Cash, family means "love and care" and he would so much like to be part of a loving family he could call his own. For more information, please contact Helene Kosciolek, (610) 682-1564, [kosciolekh@diakon.org](mailto:kosciolekh@diakon.org).



## *Jerry, age 16*

Jerry is a motivated, courageous, and appreciative young man. He loves to play all sports, and recently played on his school's basketball team. You often can find Jerry playing video games, and he enjoys watching John Cena from Wrestle Mania on WWE. Jerry holds many goals for himself, including graduating from high school and becoming a police officer. His dream job is to be part of the CIA. Jerry's brother means the world to him and it is very important that he maintain that relationship. Jerry would benefit from having a two-parent family in which he can be the youngest or only child. For more information, please contact Julianna Angelo, (717) 795-0312, [angeloj@diakon.org](mailto:angeloj@diakon.org).



# Help us to find *forever* families

## Forever families Continued from Page 6

### *Derek, age 16*

Derek is one of the kindest, most polite young men you could ever hope to meet. He may seem shy at first, but as you get to know him and he feels comfortable, he relaxes and opens up. Derek's very favorite thing is baseball. He has played on a team before and hopes to do so again. His favorite team is the Pittsburgh Pirates, but he'd be happy to watch or go to any game. It doesn't need to be an MLB game; he'd love to go to a Harrisburg Senators game! For more information, please contact Kathryn Juliana, (717) 795-0479, [JulianaK@diakon.org](mailto:JulianaK@diakon.org).



### *Kodie, age 14*

Described as sweet, funny, helpful and outgoing, Kodie is very social and loves meeting new people. His talkative nature endears him to others quickly and he is always full of compliments! He likes to be busy and likes going to school. Kodie needs a family who is able to provide care for him for the rest of his life. For more information, please contact Kathryn Juliana, (717) 795-0479, [JulianaK@diakon.org](mailto:JulianaK@diakon.org).

### *Shareea, age 15*

Shareea describes herself as hard-working, responsible, helpful, smart and friendly. She enjoys playing volleyball and soccer and loves doing yoga and Zumba in her free time. Shareea has been on the Distinguished Honor Roll for every marking period thus far in her high school career and is very proud of her 3.95 GPA! For more information, please contact Kathryn Juliana, (717) 795-0479, [JulianaK@diakon.org](mailto:JulianaK@diakon.org).



# Help is here when you need it



I have often heard the saying, “Raising children is one of the most challenging things you will ever do in life.”

It is not uncommon for parents to seek help and support as their children mature and grow through the many stages of development. And it doesn’t matter if you’re a birth parent or an adoptive parent, support is essential from time to time. I know that in raising my children, there were times I needed a bit of advice or the help of a professional.

There are, in fact, many ways we can seek support by just talking to friends or other parents, reading, joining a support group or seeking the services of a professional.

In this country, approximately one million children have been adopted over the past 15 years from the foster care system and through international adoption, and almost all of them came into their families with experiences that pose some risks for their continuing development. Some of those experiences include early deprivation, health issues, prenatal substance exposure, neglect, abuse, trauma, attachment issues and genetic factors.

As a result, much healing work is needed and some children and families need to seek professional services to understand and address their needs and improve their overall relationships and well-being.

In Pennsylvania, post-permanency services are available to any adoptive family, whether you adopted publicly, privately, internationally or through kinship or if you are raising a child via permanent legal custodianship.

It just takes a call to the Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network Helpline at 1-800-585-SWAN (7926) to explain your situation, hear more about the services offered and select the agency with which you would like to work.

I encourage you to make that call as soon as you sense you may need help, rather than wait until problems escalate to a crisis.

What services are available? All free, services include case assessment, case advocacy, respite services and support group services.

Case assessment provides a thorough analysis by a trained adoption professional to help you determine your family’s strengths and challenges, and then create a plan tailored to meet your needs. Advocacy by a trained adoption professional coordinates services to meet your family’s needs and facilitates collaboration with community resources of your choice.

Parenting is hard work so sometimes we need a bit of R&R—rest and relaxation.

Respite is the opportunity to recharge and take a break from the unique challenges you may face. Maybe you need a few hours to yourself or an overnight break. Experienced families, a family member or a friend can be your respite provider in your home or in their home.

In addition, respite includes financial help with camperships or extracurricular activities for your child. Maybe you have several children and you want to spend one-on-one time with just one child, participating together in an activity. As you can see, there are many options with respite.

Support group is another great opportunity to connect with other parents in similar situations, providing a place in which you can share, listen and learn together, and discover that you are not alone in the challenges you face. Diakon offers three support groups in various locations in our service area.

For more information about post-permanency services, please see our website at [www.diakon.org/adoption](http://www.diakon.org/adoption) or visit Pennsylvania’s Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network at [www.adoptpakids.org/Adoption](http://www.adoptpakids.org/Adoption).

All of us need help at one time or another, so don’t hesitate to make the call.

—Kathy Roach  
Executive Director  
Diakon Adoption & Foster Care



# Sharing Christmas Spirit

## Senior living community residents spread holiday joy

*R*esidents of two Pennsylvania Diakon senior living communities—Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village in Lewisburg and Cumberland Crossings in Carlisle—donated Christmas presents for youths in foster care.



*Michelle Brode and Deena Stehman from Diakon Adoption & Foster Care pick up Christmas presents for foster youths donated by Buffalo Valley residents.*



*Cumberland Crossings residents put presents under their Christmas tree for Diakon foster youths.*

# *Sharing Christmas Spirit* continued from Page 9

## Air Products plays Santa for foster youths

Every year, Air Products and Chemicals, Inc., of Allentown, Pennsylvania, contacts Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and requests names (first names only) of children in foster care. The company's generous staff members buy gifts for each child, then wrap and deliver the gifts to the Topton location. Diakon Adoption & Foster Care staff make the deliveries to the foster children.



*Air Products staff delivers a load of Christmas presents – no reindeer needed!*



*Gifts donated by Air Products staff makes their way to foster children served by Diakon.*

*Santa's helpers from Air Products deliver presents for children in foster care.*





*Attendees fill the Henry Auditorium at Diakon Adoption & Foster Care in Topton.*

## Learning to help hurt children feel safe

Children who have been maltreated can benefit from the concept of “connection before correction” to help them begin to feel safe enough with adults to trust again. This important point was made in a day of specialized training in April attended by Diakon Adoption & Foster Care staff.

The staff spent the day learning about the effects of good care and poor care on the developing brain and how a brain-based research model can aid in understanding and helping maltreated children and their caregivers in foster and adoptive settings. The interactive training was conducted by Jonathan Baylin, Ph.D., a mental health expert and co-author of two books, “The Neurobiology of Attachment-focused Therapy” and “Brain-based Parenting.”



*Dr. Baylin describes ways to help prevent development of “blocked care” in foster and adoptive settings.*



# A Special Request: *Existing Resource Families, we need your help!*

So that Diakon Adoption & Foster Care can better respond to children in need of placement, we need more families—more great families like yours. Here’s how you can help both us and yourself in the process.

For each family you help to recruit, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care is providing a stipend for your family. As the recruited family completes various stages of the approval and placement processes, you, the experienced resource family, earn stipends of varying amounts.

## Here’s how the program works:

- When the identified family completes training, you earn \$50
- When the family is approved/licensed, you earn \$100
- When the family accepts placement, you earn \$100
- When the family accepts placement of a teen (13 or older) or sibling group, you earn \$150

## Why are we doing this?

We urgently need more families to meet the pressing needs of children and youths. We’re asking for your help because you know what it takes. You know the challenges and the rewards. You have already demonstrated that you are committed to the well-being and happiness of children and young people in need.

If you have questions about this stipend program, please call one of the Adoption & Foster Care offices:

- Central Pennsylvania, Mechanicsburg (717)795-0320
- Northeastern Pennsylvania, Topton (610) 682-1504
- South Central Pennsylvania, York (717) 845-9113





## **SAVE THE DATE**

### Join us June 3 for a unique matching event

The Diakon Wilderness Center near Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania is a place where facing challenges helps youths to grow and succeed in life. Now, the wilderness can be a place where youths and families come together!

The Wilderness Center will provide a relaxing setting for a matching event at which waiting youths and interested families can meet, get to know one another and enjoy team-building and challenge activities, including the low- and high-ropes courses and 50-foot Alpine Tower. This matching event is for licensed families who are interested in teens.

**Details:**

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care Matching Event

Saturday, June 3, 10:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Registration: 10 to 10:30 a.m.

Diakon Wilderness Center

571 Mountain Road

Boiling Springs, PA

RSVP to Julianne Angelo; Phone: (717) 795-0312;

Email: [AngeloJ@diakon.org](mailto:AngeloJ@diakon.org)





*The Hykes and their two sons.*

## Welcoming our dynamic duo – the joy of foster parenting teenagers

May 16, 2017

*A*bout this time two years ago, my husband and I decided to move forward with something that had been weighing on our hearts for many years—to welcome children into our home and hearts through foster parenting.

Our adult daughters were settled and married; both have children of their own and while we are not “young,” we believed we had much to offer a child.

As we went through the education and certification process, it became clear to us what type of child would be a good fit for our family. Because we had daughters, we thought it would be less likely for us to compare them to boys, so boys it would be! Then, because of our age, we thought teenagers would be a better fit. Lastly, if there was a sibling group of brothers, that would be perfect!

Many of our friends thought we had lost our minds or were experiencing a mid-life crisis; others considered our plan a wonderful thought, but were we sure? Honestly, we were never more sure of anything in our lives! Our extended family was nothing but supportive. While some were surprised, they were always supportive.

*The following blog post is taken from Diakon's Many Voices. One Heart. blog found at <http://blog.diakon.org>. It often features posts on adoption and foster care.*

In May 2016, we traveled two hours to meet a dynamic duo, biological brothers who had been in the foster-care system for more than four years. At the ages of 14 and 15, they struggled to order from the menu at lunch. The younger found it difficult to make eye contact, the result of nervousness though he was quite the chatter box.

They both spoke very openly of past foster families that had not worked out, but the one thing they both made very clear was that they wanted a family!

In fact, that is one of the best things about teenagers—they have no problem telling you what they want and are still young enough to believe anything is possible. We spent three hours with these two delighted teenagers and hated to say goodbye. We were already eager to see them again. And, it turned out, they felt exactly the same way.

The next month that dynamic duo moved into our home. In the past near-year, we have discovered many things!

*Continued on Page 15*

## Dynamic duo *Continued from Page 14*

Some of the lessons are that teenagers who don't have a family realize what they are missing. They often knew their biological parents well—and miss them—so while they more than likely understand they now have the opportunity for a better life, their hearts still hurt. We encourage them to talk about their past, and we talk about ours, acknowledging that they haven't always been part of our family.

We also realize that many of the challenges we encounter are not because the children are in foster care; those challenges are because they are normal teenagers! Teenagers are not neat, they don't pick up after themselves, they listen to loud music and they will have a smart mouth at times...they are simply growing up!

They weren't born knowing how to be adults and, in some cases, haven't been exposed to things that we never even think about, such as ordering from a menu. We learned that nothing will keep you young like the laughs of teenagers in your house, hearing about young love and the enthusiasm of wanting to learn to drive.

There are things that have happened that we totally expected, such as struggling through the holidays, and then there were things we didn't see coming—like the fear that overcomes them when they realize they love you and their new home but simultaneously fear it could all disappear.

Through it all, the No. 1 thing we have learned is to keep the lines of communication open. We never ask questions such as, "How was your day?"—which could result in just an "Okay." In our home, we ask what was the best part of their day, allowing the conversation to open from there. But be prepared if you try this with your own teenagers—you may learn more than you were expecting!

For those who thought we were crazy, we just laugh and say a little crazy helps—adding that we wouldn't change a thing.

Sharon Hykes

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care parent

*Editor's Note: The brothers' adoption was finalized last week!*

*The Hyke family gathers to welcome their "dynamic duo."*



## 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. Here are the remaining session dates in 2017.

#### Eastern Pennsylvania – Topton office

Location: Topton  
Children Services Building (Annie Lowry Building), The Lutheran Home at Topton campus, One South Home Ave.  
June 15, July 20, Aug. 17, Sept. 21, Oct. 19, Nov. 16, Dec. 21

Location: Bethlehem  
St. Peter's Lutheran Church, 474 Vine Street, Social Room  
July 26, Sept. 27, Nov. 29

Location: Pottstown  
Manatawny Manor, 30 Old Schuylkill Road  
June 20, July 18, Aug. 15, Sept. 19, Oct. 17, Nov. 21, Dec. 19

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

#### Central Pennsylvania (Mechanicsburg)

Location: Mechanicsburg  
Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, 960 Century Drive  
June 7, July 5, Aug. 2, Sept. 6, Oct. 4, Nov. 1, 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: Carlisle  
St. Paul Lutheran Church, Rm. 201, 201 W. Louthier St.  
May 31, July 26, Nov. 29  
Sessions begin at 10:30 a.m.

#### South Central Pennsylvania (York)

Location: York  
836 S. George Street  
June 6, July 11, Aug. 1, Sept. 5, Oct. 3, Nov. 7, Dec. 5  
Sessions begin at 6 p.m. For more information and to register, please call (717) 845-9113 or email [KeeferJ@diakon.org](mailto:KeeferJ@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 the remaining training class dates in 2017.

#### Eastern Pennsylvania – Topton office

Location: Topton  
Children Services Building (Annie Lowry Building), The Lutheran Home at Topton campus, One South Home Avenue  
July 8\*, 15 and 22  
Sept. 9\*, 16 and 23  
Nov. 4\*, 11 and 18  
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 Sandra Schreffler at (610) 682-1504.

#### Central Pennsylvania – Mechanicsburg Office

Location: Mechanicsburg  
Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, 960 Century Drive  
June 3, 10 and 17  
Aug. 5\*, 12 and 19  
Oct. 7, 21 and 28  
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 Michelle Brode at (717) 795-0320.

#### South Central Pennsylvania – York Office

Location: York, 836 S. George Street  
Sept. 9, 16 and 30  
Nov. 4, 11 and 18\*  
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 Jolene Keefer or Heather Crone at (717) 845-9113.