

# FAMILY CONNECTIONS



FALL 2011

VOL. 10 | NO. 2

www.diakon.org

## Mother and son, if only for a moment

**M**y name is Dominique Watts, and I am a mom.

I had thought about those words for years, since I was a child. When would it happen? How would it happen? What would he or she be like? All I knew was that I wanted a healthy child to whom I could pass on my love of sports, music, and words.

I always knew I would adopt. I have an older sister who was adopted, so it was always part of me.

Matt Shaffer, of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries, contacted me about a little boy who needed a home. Matt spoke about his needs and we agreed to meet. I was very hesitant. But to Maryland I went with my friend, Jenna. I had never really thought that I would adopt a child with special needs.

My life forever changed on March 17, 2010.

I don't know how to explain it. But the first time I met Dovid, it was over for me. I knew in my heart—he was my son.

My medical experience to that point was that I had put on a few bandages. So, obviously, I had a lot of learning to do. So I learned. I learned how to suction, change a trach, give medication, feed him, and everything

*Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. JAMES 4:14*



Dominique shares a quiet moment with Dovid.

else I had to learn. I learned all those things from his nurses and from Jenna, who was extremely knowledgeable already.

But all of that was nothing compared to what I learned from Dovid.

After months of back and forth travel to Maryland, I finally got to bring my little man home in January.

Most people would think all those dreams I had of having a child with whom I could share my love of sports, music, and words were not going to be realized with Dovid, given his extensive needs. Well, they would be wrong.

I sang Dovid almost every song I know, taught him how Prince makes me want to move, and that even though he was probably too young, everyone

should listen to hip hop at least once—so I made an exception to his age and let him (the edited version, of course!)

When we were alone in the early mornings, I would read to him things that I wrote—and a few of my favorite pieces from other writers.

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## A passion for serving children in all that we do

BY: ELISA ESH

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE

I have recently been appointed executive director of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. I began work in the field of adoption nearly 12 years ago as a recruiter for older foster children in need of adoptive homes and most recently served as director of recruitment and family development for Diakon.

Our former executive director, Lauren Conzaman, now serves Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries as Vice President of Diakon Child and Family Services. She has been an integral part of the work that our program has provided to thousands for almost a decade. We will continue to utilize Lauren's strong leadership as she will continue to provide senior management of our programs, which promote permanency, safety, and well-being for children in foster care.

My focus has always been and will continue to be in line with the mission of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care: to provide safe, loving, and stable homes for children in need. Our program serves hundreds of children and families each year. We also work with Pennsylvania's Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network—known as SWAN—to provide invaluable adoption services to hundreds of vulnerable children through our three offices.

I also have a special passion for service provision to older youths in foster care. Diakon Adoption & Foster Care continues to look at current child welfare trending and the need to provide comprehensive services to children at risk of aging out of the foster care system to very uncertain futures. Grants such as the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network Older Child Matching Initiative, the Wendy's Wonderful Kids programs in Maryland and Pennsylvania, and the DiaKINnections program serve at-risk youths, providing them with support, permanency, and connections that will be lifelong, durable, and integral to their success into adulthood. These programs currently serve more than 200 children each year.

I am honored to be part of a team that is committed and passionate about the work we do with children and families each day. Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, our resource families, county teammates, donors, and others in the community who believe every child deserves a family will continue to work collaboratively because, "It takes a village to raise a child."

## Mother and son

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In March, Dovid became very ill. It got to the point where we knew it was almost the end for him. It was, and still is, the hardest thing I have ever had to go through: To watch my child be in pain and not be able to help. To know that we wouldn't be able to do the things I had planned for us to do.

But I still had one more passion of mine left to pass on to him. March Madness was in full swing. So on March 27 Virginia Commonwealth University was playing the Goliath of college basketball—Kansas.

I joked with some of the nurses at the hospital that Dovid had picked VCU for

the upset. So there we were watching the game. To every single person in the world's surprise, VCU won! I had a sports moment with my son. But more than that, I had a sports moment that was a perfect metaphor for his life. His short life.

He died the next day.

Dovid was always the underdog. The struggles most kids face pale in comparison to what Dovid endured. Every day was work. Every breath was a fight. You know what, though? Dovid won.

In five years, he taught more people about love, compassion, and perseverance than I think anyone could. That is his victory. That is his legacy.

It breaks my heart that I can't hold him anymore, but I carry him with me every day. Though it's hard, I share his story with as many people who ask or will listen. My hope is that more people, people like me who had never considered special needs adoption, will open their minds and be taught that the "special" part of "special needs" is not at all what they think it means.

A lot of people think I chose Dovid.

Dovid chose me. And I am forever grateful.

*Dominique Watts is a Mass Communications Specialist Third Class in the United States Navy. She is currently stationed in Diego Garcia.*

## Help us to find forever families



### Catherine, 15

Catherine has a great sense of humor and will have you smiling and laughing immediately. She enjoys swimming, biking, Karate, and horseback riding. She also likes listening to music, creating art projects, hanging out with friends, cooking, and shopping. Her favorite singer is Justin Bieber and she insists that she will marry him one day!

Catherine does really well with younger children and pets and would love to become part of family that has both. She is in need of a forever family that will provide her with a safe and loving home, is willing to understand her past, and will stick with her through tough times.

Catherine's future goals are to graduate from high school, and to attend college to become a lawyer or child-care professional.

For more information on Catherine, please contact Elizabeth White at (717) 795-0479 or white@diakon.org.

### Chalid, 14

Chalid is a polite, soft-spoken teen who is extremely respectful and enjoyable to be around. He loves sports and being part of a team, and has played football in the past.

Chalid has a huge smile and a big heart. He is very intelligent and a great card player. Recently, Chalid attended a Reading Phillies game at which he was able to meet some of the players to get autographs on his new baseball. Chalid is shy at first but opens up after he is able to trust and connect with someone.

Chalid gets along well with other children and would do great in a home that has siblings with whom he can interact. He is interested in having a mom and dad or single mom-/single dad-family, and would love to have pets as well. He is legally free for adoption; all families will be considered.

If you are interested in learning more about Chalid, please contact Lydia Lee at (610) 682-1257 or leel@diakon.org.



### Eric, 16

An intriguing young man with hazel eyes and brown hair, Eric longs for a family connection. He has been in foster care for nearly three years, spending that time in various foster homes, while also playing baseball, basketball, and learning Karate. Eric recently participated in the Sea Cadets program, which requires much discipline and structure and which sparked an interest in a possible military career as a Navy Seal.

Currently, Eric is an 11th-grade student in regular education classes. He realizes the importance of school and devotes himself to his academics, knowing it is the stepping stone to his future. Eric admits he is not the best student, but says he'll continue trying hard. He also knows that school is not only for knowledge, but socializing and fun. Eric enjoys relationships with many friends. He has a good sense of humor. Once he's comfortable in a setting, his carefree side surfaces. Eric enjoys attending school functions such as dances and sporting events. He also likes alone time to listen to music.

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## Help us to find forever families Continued from Page 3

Eric is seeking a supportive family that will help him work on his coping skills. He would like both a mother and a father figure and would prefer to be the youngest child in the family. He does best when he knows exactly what is expected of him, as well as the consequences and rewards for his behaviors. He likes pets, especially dogs.

For more information about Eric, please contact Marian Kolcun at (570) 825-6425, ext. 653, or [mkolcun@e-csc.org](mailto:mkolcun@e-csc.org).



### Franklin, 12

Franklin is a sweet, caring young man who loves to help out and gets along well with adults. He enjoys building things, playing cards, swimming, and doing puzzles. He has a great imagination and is very creative. Franklin has been making progress in his current placement and has been doing well in school.

Franklin is excited to find his forever family and hopes to have a dog to care for someday. He is open to many different types of families, but wants to be sure that his forever

family allows him to maintain contact with some of his birth family. Franklin would do best in a permanent home where he is the only or youngest child, as well as with a family who will advocate for his special needs and support him in his learning. All families will be considered for Franklin.

If you are interested in learning more about Franklin, please contact Lydia Lee at (610) 682-1257 or [leel@diakon.org](mailto:leel@diakon.org).



### Jewel, 16

Jewel is a happy teenage girl who would like to have a family of her own that she can depend on and that will take good care of her. She has several medical conditions that require extra love and attention from that special connection.

Jewel enjoys looking at magazines, especially those with Justin Bieber in them. She enjoys listening to music, and some of her other favorite musicians include Michael Jackson, Beyonce, Pink, and Lady Gaga.

Jewel also loves Disney movies, American Idol, and putting puzzles

together. She also has her own collection of stuffed animals.

For more information about Jewel, please contact Kristen Jacobs at (717) 795-0343 or [jacobsk@diakon.org](mailto:jacobsk@diakon.org).



### Justin, 19

Justin is a very special young man. Although he is considered medically fragile because of his need for a G-tube, Justin has a great quality of life.

Justin has spent the majority of his life in care because of his family's inability to meet his developmental and medical needs. At age 2, Justin was placed in the custody of Baltimore City Department of Social Services and has remained in foster care since then.

While Justin has been fortunate enough to experience minimal numbers of foster placements, he has never had the opportunity to know what it is to have a permanent, loving, and caring family. Justin will age out of Maryland's foster care system in less than two years, so it is important to find the right fit in a forever family for Justin by the time he turns 21.

For more information on Justin and what it takes to become an adoptive

family for a waiting youth with special needs, please contact Matt Shaffer at (717) 385-1719 or shafferma@diakon.org.



## Karimah, 15

Karimah is a soft-spoken and sweet-natured girl with brown eyes and a bright smile. She can be shy when you first meet her, but after she becomes comfortable, she is vibrant and talkative. She sees herself as a generous and outgoing person who is a good listener, a good student, and a loyal friend.

Karimah's favorite activities include singing, drawing, and reading. She is a talented singer who enjoys singing at her church, taking part in the school chorus, and singing pop songs in the car. Her favorite type of music is gospel and her favorite artists are Marvin Snap, Kurt Franklin, Mary, Mary, and Gladys Knight. She also really likes Justin Bieber. She enjoys writing songs and playing the piano, having learned to play by ear.

Karimah also enjoys watching TV. Her favorite shows are Hannah

Montana, Shake It Up, and Good Luck Charlie. She also enjoys dancing. Her favorite types of movies are horror, comedy, and drama. Her favorite movie stars are Johnny Depp and Jim Carey.

Karimah enjoys spending time with her six biological siblings, who live in five separate homes, which she visits once or twice a month. The person Karimah looked up to most was her mother, who passed away in December 2005.

At school Karimah gets along well with her teachers. Her best subjects are math and science and her most challenging subject is reading (although she loves to read). Karimah enjoys learning and plans to graduate high school, attend a four-year college and then law school as she hopes to become a lawyer. Her other career choices include being a singer or an actress.

Karimah is open to all types of families of any race, in any demographic area. She hopes to have siblings and pets, especially dogs and cats. She would like her family to travel and hopes to one day visit Paris and South Beach, Florida.

For more information on Karimah, please contact Karen Knodel at (215) 355-6500, ext.193, or kknodel@bethanna.org.

## Shani, 15

Shani is an African-American young lady with dark-eyes and short hair. She has an attractive countenance, which is complemented by a happy, smiling disposition. Although she may be shy at first, she actually is pleasant, polite,

and personable, and once she starts talking she'll engage in any conversation.

Shani is sensitive to others' feelings. She has an open heart that's ready to embrace those who are warm and positive. She can burst into song upon demand. She loves to sing, and enjoys a variety of music. She'd love to become a professional singer or dancer, a nurse or hairstylist. She is still discovering her many talents.

Shani often needs reminders to help out around the house and admits to keeping only about half of her bedroom neat. She would rather help out with the cooking. As for eating, she's somewhat fussy, but when she finds something she likes, she'll eat a lot of it.

Shani is in 10th grade itinerant learning support at school. She tries her best with schoolwork, but says that a little help from her parents is always welcome. Shani is a fan of volleyball, soccer, and cheerleading.

Shani would like a family to help guide her in a positive direction. She relates well to females and would benefit from having one female parent or a female couple as parents. It would also be best if she was the youngest child in the family. Shani likes pets, but sometimes has allergic reactions to them depending on their fur type.

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**If you are interested in learning more about any of these children, please contact**

**Elisa Esh, executive director of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, (717) 724-7979 or eshe@diakon.org.**

## Help us to find forever families Continued from Page 5

For more information about Shani, please contact Marian Kolcun at (570) 825-6425, ext. 653, or [mkolcun@e-csc.org](mailto:mkolcun@e-csc.org).

### Stephanie, 13

Stephanie is a friendly and outgoing girl who enjoys reading, doing puzzles, and listening to music. She has brown hair and hazel eyes. She loves watching football and singing. One day, Stephanie hopes to become a professional singer or movie star. Her favorite singers are Justin Bieber and Miley Cyrus.

Stephanie participates in a learning and emotional support classroom in the 7th grade. She enjoys going to school to learn and to be with other kids. She does well in her academics, especially when

provided with extra motivation throughout the day.

Stephanie loves to meet new people and enjoys telling others about herself and her accomplishments. She is social and personable and always has a smile. Stephanie is working hard to make good decisions in her life and is



blossoming socially and emotionally. She is eager to find a forever family who will help her to reach her fullest potential.

Stephanie is in need of a loving and patient family who will give her the attention and support she deserves. She would love to be part of a family that has other children, as she is very nurturing with kids of all ages. Currently, Stephanie visits with her sibling in Lehigh County, Pa., and would like to continue that visitation. Parental rights are terminated and all families will be considered; Stephanie is legally free for adoption.

For more information about Stephanie, please contact Jennifer Tregear at (610) 682-1519 or [tregearj@diakon.org](mailto:tregearj@diakon.org).

## 2011 COMING EVENTS

### **Nov. 3: Dinner at Isaac's**

Enjoy your dinner at Isaac's in Mechanicsburg or Wyomissing from 5 to 9 p.m. and Isaac's will donate a portion of the proceeds to Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. See page 15 for a form you must complete and submit when you pay for your meal.

### **Nov. 9: Dining with Diakon - Eastern Pennsylvania**

Join a host of local celebrities and business professionals as they cook up their favorite dishes while raising support for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. For more information, contact Dawna Trump at (717) 795-0464 or [trumpd@diakon.org](mailto:trumpd@diakon.org).

### **Nov. 14: Dinner at Friendly's**

Eat at Friendly's between the hours of 5 and 8 p.m. and part of the proceeds of your meal will be donated to Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. Two locations for your convenience! See page 15 for more information.

### **June 2: Highmark's Walk for a Healthy Community**

Friends and supporters of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care will be walking for their good health while collecting donations on behalf of Diakon. Grab your walking shoes and join this group for a 3.1-mile fun walk around Bethlehem. For more information, contact Carol Powers at (610) 682-1290 or [powersc@diakon.org](mailto:powersc@diakon.org).

## Forever families await children of all ages. Just ask Idris.

*SWAN's Older Child Matching Initiative program assists harder-to-place children over the age of 10. Here is one child's success story.*

**I**dris, 14, captures attention immediately with his handsome face, warm eyes, and smile that can brighten up a room. But, until recently, behind his kind eyes were the memories of a past filled with hardships and disappointments.

“For three years, Idris didn’t have a family to love and care for him” says Elisa Esh, executive director of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. “There were prospects and plenty of inquiries, but there were few families that could stay completely committed and dedicated to him.”

So Idris was placed in various foster homes and residential facilities. And his behavior deteriorated. He was untrusting in many ways and anxious about the adoption process. But he still craved the love of a family.

During a visit to his most current residential facility, Idris and Esh watched a friend leave with his new family. “Idris had his face pressed up against the window, waving goodbye to his friend, and I asked him if he was sad to see the boy go,” Esh says. “Idris turned to me with a serious and pensive look on his face, and he responded matter-of-factly, ‘No, I’m not. I’m happy for him and I hope I never see him here again.’”

Coming from a 14-year-old boy, I found this to be extremely poignant and mature. It showed me that Idris was ready to leave the world of residential care to which he had become accustomed over the years.”

A couple months later, a potential family for Idris came along. The family was made aware of every detail of Idris’s past, present, and possible

future—and they barely blinked an eye.

“They saw what we all saw in Idris—a lonely, complex, brilliant young man with a ton of potential,” says Esh. “They didn’t care what his profile said about him or what his latest diagnoses were; they saw a little boy who had been left behind by life and needed the love of a family.”

The family began visiting Idris weekly and as their visits increased, so did Idris’ trust. He recently started calling them Mom and Dad, and their visits and support became very important to him.

“Idris was placed with the family in July, and he was very excited about leaving his facility and having that final proud walk out the doors, just as his friend did months before him.”

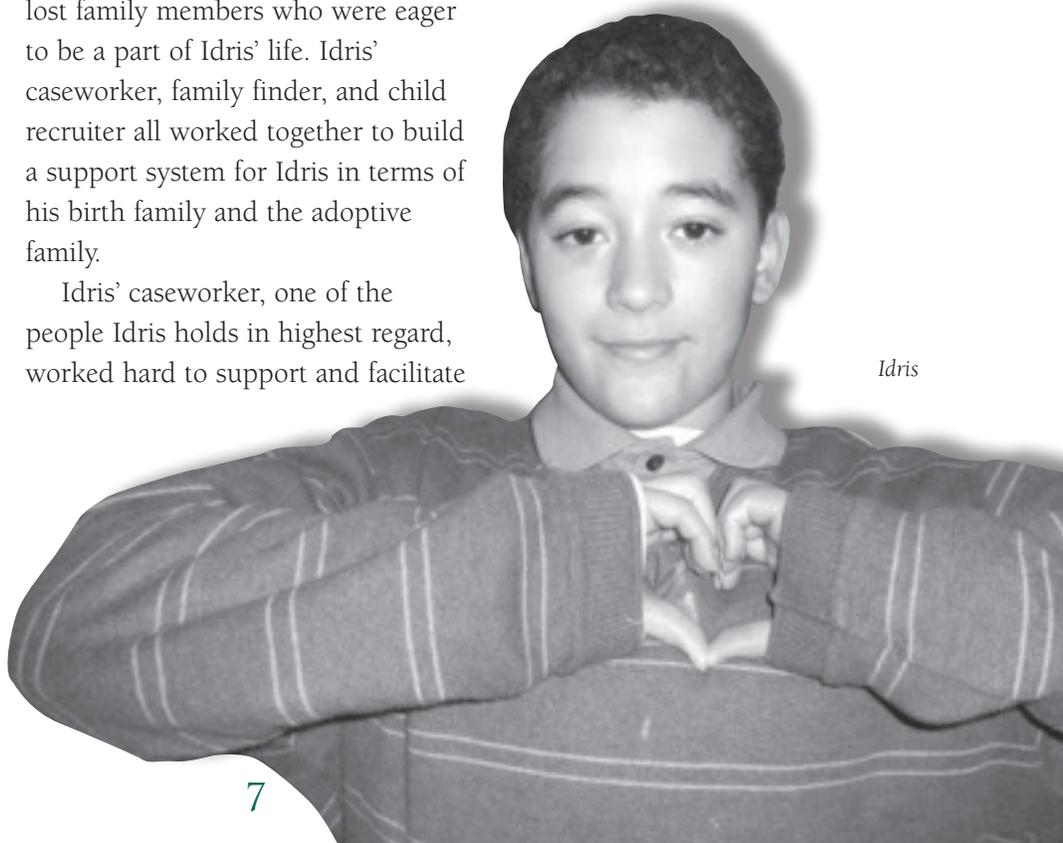
By searching for contacts on both his maternal and paternal side, staff members were able to locate 27 long-lost family members who were eager to be a part of Idris’ life. Idris’ caseworker, family finder, and child recruiter all worked together to build a support system for Idris in terms of his birth family and the adoptive family.

Idris’ caseworker, one of the people Idris holds in highest regard, worked hard to support and facilitate

the visits between Idris and the adoptive family, as well as contacts between Idris and his birth family. His family finder worked diligently to provide him with links to his past, so that he could have a possible future with these relatives.

“Idris’ adoptive family gave him a bracelet with different colors on it that symbolize him, his birth family, and his adoptive family—and how they all come together to make one brilliant system,” says Esh. “Sometimes it takes three months or, as in Idris’ case, sometimes it takes three years, but somewhere there is a family that will see the child for who he or she truly is. It’s just a matter of patiently waiting for those angels to come around—and not giving up until they do.”

To refer your waiting youth in need of permanency, contact Elisa Esh, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, at (717) 724-7979 or [eshe@diakon.org](mailto:eshe@diakon.org).



*Idris*

# FINALIZATIONS

## Brent

March 11, 2011  
Robert and Stephanie  
Hanover, Pa.

## Christopher

March 16, 2011  
Jeffrey and Kimberly  
Denver, Pa.

## Michael

March 17, 2011  
James and Stefanie  
Shillington, Pa.

## Christopher & Anthony

April 20, 2011  
Daniel and Melissa  
Fleetwood, Pa.

## Cayden

April 27, 2011  
Stephen and Lori  
Breinigsville, Pa.

## Brandon & Tyshonn

May 4, 2011  
John and Donna  
Coopersburg, Pa.

## Marcy

May 4, 2011  
Karen  
Dillsburg, Pa.

## Xavior & Makayla

May 11, 2011  
Samuel and Vicky  
Reading, Pa.

## Daniel

May 11, 2011  
Herbert and Brenda  
Dillsburg, Pa.

## Malachi & Jordan

May 31, 2011  
Ross and Wendy  
Gilbertsville, Pa.

## Anthony & Amber

May 24, 2011  
John and Marianne  
Scranton, Pa.

## Sofia

May 24, 2011  
Rony and Keila  
Dover, Pa.

## Ali Jo & Patryk

June 14, 2011  
Dan and Billie Jo  
Hummelstown, Pa.

## Alexander

June 15, 2011  
William and Alicia  
Temple, Pa.

## Jayna

July 6, 2011  
Michael and Lisa  
Richlandtown, Pa.

## Jordan

July 6, 2011  
Peter and Patricia  
Lebanon, Pa.

## Alexis

July 6, 2011  
Jason and Jen  
Shillington, Pa.

## Jayleon

July 13, 2011  
Jesennia  
Reading, Pa.

## Brandon

July 19, 2011  
Joe and Robin  
Camp Hill, Pa.

## Marin

July 26, 2011  
Linda and Gary  
Hanover, Pa.

## Audrie

July 26, 2011  
Chris and Amber  
Dover, Pa.

## Elizabeth

July 27, 2011  
Stephen and Sherry  
Robesonia, Pa.

## Xavier

August 9, 2011  
Craig and Danyell  
Whitehall, Pa.

## Michael

August 10, 2011  
Edward and Mary  
Laureldale, Pa.

## Teontae

August 17, 2011  
Cory and Tessa  
Dallastown, Pa.

## Anthony, Emma & Christina

August 23, 2011  
Dean and Michelle  
Aspers, Pa.

## Chaun & Jett

August 24, 2011  
Michael and Stefani  
Bernville, Pa.

## Ada & Iris

August 24, 2011  
Donald and Mary Jo  
West Pittston, Pa.

## Marina

August 24, 2011  
Michael and Greta  
Mohnton, Pa.



*The extended family comes together as Jordan is adopted by Pete and Trish of Lebanon on July 6.*



Elizabeth, pictured with Judge Sprecher and her new family, is adopted by Stephen and Sherry of Robesonia on July 27.



Judge Sprecher poses with Stephen and Lori of Breinigsville as they adopt Cayden on April 27 at the Berks County Courthouse.



Alexis is adopted by Jason and Jennifer of Shillington on July 6.



Thad and Joanna of York County adopt Jay on May 4.



Michael and Lisa of Richlandtown adopt Jayna on July 6.



Sofia poses with her new family as she is adopted by Rony and Keila from York on May 24.

## PLACEMENTS

### Sofia

October 23, 2010  
Rony and Keila  
Dover, Pa.

### Daniel & Jacob

March 11, 2011  
Michael and Jennifer  
Lewisberry, Pa.

### Jeremiah

May 24, 2011  
Gary and Cathy  
Bethlehem, Pa.

### Alexis

July 31, 2011  
Robert and Christine  
Dauphin, Pa.

### Michael, Mary & Aliyah

August 5, 2011  
Mimi and Doug  
Richland, Pa.



*Robert and Stephanie of Hanover adopt Brent on March 11.*



*Aiden and Avery are adopted by John and Marianne of Scranton on May 24.*



*The family comes together to celebrate the adoption of Tatyana by Rick and Belinda of Littlestown on March 28.*



*James and Stefanie of Shillington adopt Michael on March 17 in front of Judge Sprecher at the Berks County Courthouse.*

## DiaKINnections

### *Finding families for older youths in foster care*

Through its Diakon DiaKINnections program, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care has gained a renewed focus on services for older youths in danger of aging out of the foster-care system.

Child welfare in Pennsylvania is an ever-changing field with regulations that differ from one county to the next to address the needs of various regions. The most recent sweeping changes largely have been a result of legislation called “Fostering Connections,” which focuses on locating kin and “fictive kin” (godparents, neighbors, church family, etc.) in an attempt to prevent the placement of children in foster care. This legislation has helped define a variety of new programs to help older youths.

More than 1,000 children age out of the foster-care system each year in Pennsylvania. That situation has profound societal ramifications. Of the children who age out of the foster-care system with no family:

- Only 54% earn a high school degree
- Only 2% obtain a bachelor’s degree
- 84% become parents and may have involvement with children and youth agencies for their children
- 51% are unemployed
- 66% of males that age out will be convicted of a crime
- 35% will be homeless

As a result, the shift in finding connections for older youths has led to more children in foster care being safely reunified with birth family, extended family, or fictive kin. In addition, foster placements have plummeted, programs designed to serve children long-term have closed

or reduced their capacity, and other services created to support this trend.

In response, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care implemented the DiaKINnections program in January 2010. Through DiaKINnections, staff members work with older youths in providing intensive family-finding “detective work” to locate relatives the youths haven’t seen in years or who may not know of the youth’s existence or placement in foster care.

In a recent assessment of DiaKINnections, which included a sampling of 67 children served, youths were connected on average to more than 13 people (kin and fictive kin) willing to support them for a lifetime. In addition, nearly 70% of these children found a resource willing to provide them permanency through kinship placement or adoption. These children will be more

likely to mature into healthy adults with less chance of dependence on adult welfare services or the judicial system.

After these important connections are made, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care provides therapeutic child preparation to both the family and the youth not only to address the newly blended family’s feelings about the reconnection process but also to maintain and support the new connections.

DiaKINnections staff members hope that, one day, youths aging out of the foster-care system will simply be a sad and historical footnote of today’s culture. Until then, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care will continue serving foster children by reconnecting them with their family and preparing them for success as young adults and throughout their lives.

## Scouts volunteer at Diakon Adoption & Foster Care

Emmeline Knowlan of Girl Scout Troop 1229 of Barnesville, Pa., whose family adopted two children from Diakon Adoption & Foster Care in Topton, has been volunteering in the adoption office doing such tasks as scanning “lifebooks,” organizing child-prep supplies, and arranging emergency toys and clothing for foster children. Knowlan, who is focused on achieving her Gold Award in Girl Scouts, often works beside fellow Girl Scouts as well as her brother, a Boy Scout from Troop 755 of Clamtown, Pa.



*Local Scouts spend time volunteering at the Topton office of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. From left are Lauren Christ, Connor Knowlan, Emmeline Knowlan, and Alexandra Miller.*

## Third annual adoption event at the Harrisburg Senators provides family fun

The third annual Diakon Adoption & Foster Care/SWAN Older Child Matching Initiative Night at the Harrisburg Senators took place in August with the goal of spreading adoption and foster care awareness throughout the greater Harrisburg area, recruiting potential adoptive and foster families, and providing waiting families and youths with the opportunity to interact in a fun, low-stress atmosphere. This year, 18 SWAN-affiliated agencies, more than 50 waiting families, and 21 waiting youths from throughout Pennsylvania attended.



*Children have their faces painted before the game.*



*Youths greet the players as they take the field.*

The event received extensive media coverage from ABC 27 and FOX 43 news channels complete with live news feeds and segments highlighting a few of the children and families. Throughout the evening, children and families enjoyed carnival games, prizes, an all-you-care-to-eat buffet, and a Harrisburg Senators baseball game. Tracey, a waiting youth, was chosen to throw out the ceremonial first pitch, and the 21 waiting youths formed a “high-five” tunnel for the Harrisburg Senators baseball team before joining the players on the field for the National Anthem.

## Adoption staff win teamwork award

A group of staff from Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and Berks County Children and Youth adoption programs recently won a teamwork award at the SWAN annual permanency conference. Chelsa Gerould, Michelle Koontz, and Christine Smith-Hoh, along with Berks County Child and Youth staff members Clarissa McDonald, Liz Monick, and Barbara Jakubek, won the award for work in helping a youth find permanency. The group went above and beyond to assure that the young person transitioned smoothly and was supervised successfully to remain in kinship placement, sustaining connections identified through DiaKINnections with child prep support. Michelle Koontz had the privilege of accepting the award on behalf of the group.



*Accepting the teamwork award, left, is Michelle Koontz. She is joined on stage by the rest of the team, left to right, Barbara Jakubek, Liz Monick, Christine Smith-Hoh, Chelsa Gerould, and Clarissa McDonald.*

## Reading Phillies host adoption night

This May, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network hosted an awareness/matching event at the Reading Phillies stadium. The purpose was to heighten awareness of the need for foster and adoptive families, while waiting youths also had the opportunity to meet potential adoptive families. In addition, they helped with activities such as disseminating information, applying tattoos, doing face-painting, and helping children create



“spin-art.”

Three waiting children were invited to throw out the first pitch.

Thirteen Pennsylvania agencies displayed information; 40 families attended the game and matching event.

*Three waiting children threw out the first pitches before the start of the game.*



*Children and families enjoy the excitement of baseball, and more.*

## Adoption staff attend Iron Pigs awareness event

Staff of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care recently attended Community Night with the Iron Pigs minor league baseball team for the Philadelphia Phillies. The purpose of the event was to provide information about various non-profit organizations to the community. Approximately 20 non-profit agencies set up informational booths. Staff from Diakon Adoption & Foster Care spoke with members of the community and provided information on becoming adoptive or foster families.

## Diakon employee honored with Blue Ribbon Award

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care staff member Josh Lieb recently received the Blue Ribbon Award for his work with families and children in Berks County. Berks County Children and Youth Services held its annual Blue Ribbons for Kids ceremony in April at which they recognized individuals and organizations for work with children throughout the county and dedication to preventing child abuse. Lieb, who works from the program's Topton office, is a child-specific recruitment specialist for Diakon's DiaKINnections program.



*Josh Lieb*

## Summer fiesta celebrates resource families

More than 100 families and children attended this year's annual Topton Resource Family Appreciation Picnic in June. With the theme "fiesta," the event was held at Long Lane Park in Allentown and included treats such as tacos with all the fixings. Children participated in activities that included face-painting and sack races and enjoyed a visit from the television cartoon characters, Dora and Diego.



Left, children enjoy some friendly competition in a sack race. Above, Dora and Diego stop by for a visit.

## College sorority donates items to children in foster care

The Omega Chi Chapter of the Kappa Delta Pi Honor Society of Cedar Crest College in Allentown, Pa., recently donated toiletries, tote bags, backpacks, and scrapbooking supplies to children served by the Northeastern Pennsylvania office of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. Pictured with some of the items are, left to right, Allison Fritchman with her son, Emmitt, and Megan Brainard.



## We're thankful for your generosity

Your financial support helps to bring together more families through adoption and foster care.

Through your support, you can help Diakon Adoption & Foster Care touch the lives of children and youths in need. From donating books for our resource libraries to offering financial assistance to help subsidize adoption fees, or providing items for foster children, your support is vital. Over the years, generous donations have helped our mission become a reality in so many young lives.

You, too, can make a difference! Simply use the envelope in this issue of *Family Connections* or log onto our Web site's convenient and secure donation form at [www.diakon.org](http://www.diakon.org) to make your gift.

*For more information on how you can support Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, please call our Office of Development at 1-877-DIAKON-7, option 2, ext. 21219. Thank you!*



Enjoy dinner with your family while supporting Diakon Adoption & Foster Care

# Visit Isaac's or Friendly's on these dates and part of the proceeds will be donated.

## JOIN US FOR OUR "COMMUNITY NIGHT" FUNDRAISER

Isaac's Restaurant & Deli will be holding a "Community Night" to benefit the Diakon Adoption & Foster Care programs. Enjoy an evening out with your family and friends while supporting these programs. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the cost of your meal will go directly to Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.



### Isaac's Restaurant & Deli

Rossmoyne Business Center 4940 Ritter Road, Mechanicsburg  
AND Spring Ridge - Village Square 94 Commerce Drive, Wyomissing  
Call (717) 766-1111 for takeout orders Call (610) 376-1717 for takeout orders

**Thursday, Nov. 3, 2011, 5-9 p.m.**

Bring this flyer with you to Isaac's on Nov. 3, complete the information, and hand it to the cashier when paying. This form can be used for dine-in, take-out & online orders!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of people in party: \_\_\_\_\_

Total cost of meal (excluding tax): \_\_\_\_\_

*\*Coupons, discounts, or specials not valid during this fundraiser.*

Thank you for partnering with Isaac's & Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

I want to receive Isaac's special offers and discounts by email.

Email: \_\_\_\_\_



# Great Tasting Fundraising

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care

is hosting  
Family Fun Night at Friendly's!

Come join the fun  
on Monday, Nov. 14, 2011

from 5:00 - 8:00 pm

because a percentage of all sales  
will go to support their cause!

Come join us at:

3125 Market Street, Camp Hill, PA  
6894 Hamilton Blvd., Trexlertown, PA



NO COUPON IS REQUIRED TO SUPPORT DIAKON AT FRIENDLY'S

# FAMILY CONNECTIONS

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 U.S. POSTAGE  
 PAID  
 LEHIGH VALLEY, PA  
 PERMIT NO. 121

*Family Connections* is published by Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, in cooperation with the Office of Corporate Communications of

**Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries**  
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To be removed from our mailing list call (610) 682-3690 or email your full name and address to [giving@diakon.org](mailto:giving@diakon.org).

## A Christmas wish from the staff and children at Diakon Adoption & Foster Care

A few dollars can go a long way to help the children of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. Won't you consider giving one or more of these items to them? Or simply send us a check and tell us what you would like us to buy on your behalf.

- Gift cards for book stores
- Department store gift cards
- Fast-food gift cards
- New, compact duffle bags
- Walmart gift cards



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