

Family Connections



FALL 2021

Permanency Office Staff Appreciation Day at Topton

“How well can you draw a picture described by someone else, on the top of your head, on a paper plate???” This was just one of a few fun, silly, just plain enjoyable activities shared at the Topton Permanency Office’s Staff Appreciation Day,” says Joyce Riche, M.A., director of permanency services, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

“As a huge thank you to staff for another year of extremely high quality work for our families and kiddos, the 2021 Staff Appreciation picnic was held on Friday, September 17. Although mainly a “thank you” event, it’s also a bit of a self-care event, as well.”

“Our Permanency workers are among the hardest working social workers around. On a daily basis, they are assuring safety of our youth, helping to create families,



Topton Permanency Office staffers, from left, Eve Hellerick, Megan Doherty and Helene Kosciolk-Brown enjoy the Topton Permanency Office’s Staff Appreciation Day Sept. 17 as they participate in the fun activity of drawing a picture described by someone else on the top of their heads on a paper plate.



Topton Permanency Office staffers, from left, Nathaly Santos and Rachael Cortright enjoy the Topton Permanency Office’s Staff Appreciation Day Sept. 17 as they participate in the fun activity of drawing a picture described by someone else on the top of their heads on a paper plate.

which occurs prior to any placements, and supporting those families and our youth through every step of their journeys,—from the first day a youth is placed into foster care, through reunification with birth families or permanency through adoption, kinship or perhaps legal guardianship,” Riche says.

“This job always demands dedication, ingenuity and skill, but there’s never been as big of an external challenge as during the pandemic. And my goodness, have our Diakon staff stood up to that challenge! They have continued to maintain the highest quality standards, which included, during the most challenging times, using innovative ways to provide services to the very best of their abilities,” Riche says.

“Our Staff Appreciation day, then, is a time to relax, regroup, enjoy fellowship with colleagues and just plain be silly! A huge thank you to the Permanency staff at Topton!”

Older child matching initiative (OCMI) event

“The Diakon Older Child Matching Initiative (OCMI) program sponsored an OCMI matching event October 9 at Lone Lane Park in Upper Macungie Township, Pa.

“This was an event for youth who are awaiting a forever home to meet families who want to adopt,” says Joyce Riche, M.A., director of permanency services, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, Topton.

“The youth and their families participated in various activities in order to get to know one another, had lunch together and had time to socialize,” Riche says.

“Already, we have a prospective match between a family and youth from this event, and several more under consideration.”



The make-a-costume candy corn group is all smiles at the OCMI matching event that brought together prospective foster/adoptive parents and youth Oct. 9 at Lone Lane Park in Upper Macungie Township, Pa.



Prospective foster/adoptive parents and youth have fun with rock-paper-scissors at the OCMI matching event Oct. 9 at Lone Lane Park in Upper Macungie Township, Pa.

Holiday gift drive for Diakon youth with Amazon Wish List

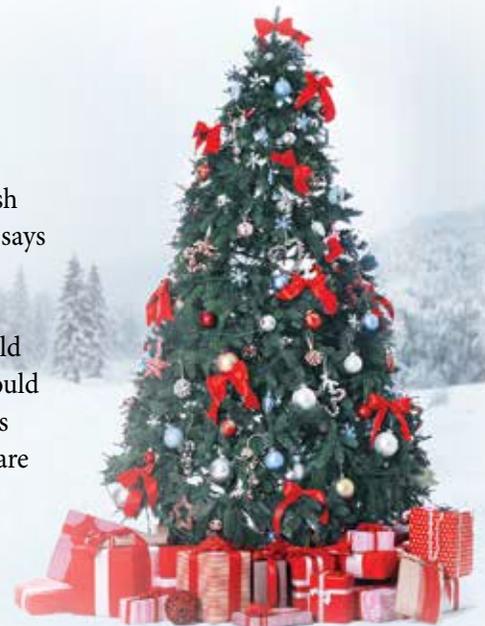
Diakon will hold a holiday gift drive for youth in its care, and is inviting everyone to help make the season more merry and bright for these young people!

“Last year, due to the issues with COVID and live events, we created an Amazon Wish List for those donors who like to donate gifts to our youth for their holiday enjoyment,” says Joyce Riche, M.A., director of permanency services, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, Topton.

“Given the continued concerns regarding COVID, we did so again this year. We would need these gifts to arrive in our office by December 3. Realizing this is very soon, we would also like to suggest that donors can instead choose to purchase gift cards for the youth as well. Gift cards from fast food places to such stores as Five Below, Walmart, Target, etc. are very much appropriate for our youth,” Riche says.

“We can arrange to get these gift cards to the youth closer to Christmas.”

If you wish to purchase from Diakon’s Amazon Wish List, please visit www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/genericItemsPage/2QPD72IK9RSML.



Thoughts on parenting

“When we imagine parenting, we see ourselves being understanding and patient; kind, yet firm. When that time comes, we are often caught off guard by our children’s behavior and may find ourselves responding with less patience and understanding than we’d like. We are left questioning our abilities, doubting ourselves and just feeling bad altogether,” says Stephanie Reed, permanency services supervisor, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, Topton.

“I thought these points were good to reflect on in those moments. Are we ‘bad parents’ or is there

something else going on? Many times we may take a behavior personally, because we mistakenly see it as a reflection of how they feel about us. Or we may be embarrassed by what our friends or family will think if they see these behaviors, especially if the behaviors are not typical of their age.”

“By recognizing our own stressors and insecurities as a parent, we may be able to better understand why a certain behavior upsets us and be more ready to tackle the behavior itself, without the emotional response it brings out in us,” says Reed.

WHY DOES MY CHILD'S BEHAVIOR TRIGGER ME?

- You are taking the behavior personally
- It causes you to question your parenting
- You were already stressed/irritated
- You have an unidentified need in that moment (hungry, tired, etc.)
- It triggers your shame/guilt
- Their big reactions trigger your anxiety or trauma
- You feel a lack of control in the situation
- You expect they should know better
- You feel your child is being intentionally disrespectful
- You didn't realize their behavior was their way of communicating

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Adapted from @_ashappyasamother

Finalizations

Elysia
January 15, 2021
Brad and Elyse
Berks County

Catalia, Alec and Nico
February 16, 2021
Francis and Anne-Marie
Berks County

Sarina
February 22, 2021
Joshua and Keena
Berks County

Donald
March 1, 2021
John and Sarah
York County

Kayden
March 9, 2021
Joshua and Melissa
Northampton County

Gabriel and Dominik
March 9, 2021
Matthew and Melanie
Luzerne County

Hayden and Hazel
March 12, 2021
Nicholas and Eleanor
Berks County

Bella and Ryan
March 12, 2021
Andrew and Kimberly
Montgomery County

Layla and Robert
March 26, 2021
Randy and Bonnie
York County

Mellie
April 9, 2021
Robert and Jennifer
Dauphin County

Brianna
May 14, 2021
Brian and Stephanie
Lehigh County

Ja'Myla
May 14, 2021
Daniel and Donna
Lehigh County

Carter and Kaleb
May 14, 2021
Tracey
Lehigh County

Kalin, Treyvon, Percel,
Scarlett and Caila
May 14, 2021
Cynthia
Lehigh County

Lilly and Bella
June 4, 2021
Troy and Claudia
Berks County

Javier and Azariah
June 4, 2021
Joel and Amber
Lehigh County

Kyah and Chance
June 4, 2021
Joey and Heather
Lehigh County

Everly
June 4, 2021
Yvonne
Berks County

Brandon and Mariah
June 4, 2021
Warren and Jamie
York County

Aleiah and Annabelle
June 16, 2021
Ashten and Nathan
York County

Destiny
June 23, 2021
Andrew and Tammy
York County

Mason and Oliver
June 25, 2021
Joseph and Bonita
Adams County

Priya and Malarie
June 28, 2021
Stephanie and Robert
York County

Gabriel, Gavin and Brianna
July 9, 2021
Chris and Sandra
Lehigh County

Eyvi, Selena, Mira,
Carlita and Rodrigo
July 12, 2021
Jonathan and Emily
York County

Josiyah, Ashley and Majesty
July 21, 2021
Edgar and Janet
Monroe County

Christopher
July 21, 2021
Susan
Lehigh County

Matthew
July 21, 2021
Katherine and Jaime
Northampton County

Sergio
August 3, 2021
Lina and Wilson
Northampton County

Aailyah
August 13, 2021
Jose and Jennifer
Lehigh County

Princeton
August 13, 2021
Lindsay
Lehigh County

Niko
August 13, 2021
Ross and Wendy
Montgomery County

Brandon and Mariah
August 31, 2021
Warren and Jaime
York County

Jahliya
September 10, 2021
Rosanna
Lehigh County

Justice
September 10, 2021
Lashawn
Lehigh County

Greyson
September 24, 2021
Mary and Danielle
Cumberland County

Brielle
September 28, 2021
Trevor and Kimberly
Northampton County

Jayden
September 28, 2021
Dolores
York County

LaRaina
September 28, 2021
Ryan and Heidi
Dauphin County

Sara
September 29, 2021
Nathan and Chelsea
York County

Isabelle and Layla
October 15, 2021
Jason and Heather
Berks County

Zamya and Yamajesty
October 15, 2021
Brad and Tara
Chester County

Chloe
October 15, 2021
Shawn and Anita
Lancaster County

Brandon and Arriana
October 15, 2021
Christopher and Heather
Berks County

Maddix
October 22, 2021
Jeana
Carbon County

Nikki
October 22, 2021
Eva
Lehigh County

Xavier and Malcom
October 26, 2021
Julia and Anne
Northampton County

Tucker
October 27, 2021
Hannah and Matt
Perry County

ShaDiamond
November 1, 2021
Letitia
York County

Faithlynn and Cameron
November 4, 2021
Jessica and Derek
Dauphin County

Zoie, Harmonie and Liela
November 9, 2021
Tanya
Berks County



Jason and Heather adopted nieces *Isabelle* and *Layla*, front in matching dresses, October 15, 2021. With them are their other children McKenna and Aiden.



Matt and Hannah adopted *Tucker*, front with glasses, October 27, 2021.



Tanya adopted *Zoie, Harmonie* and *Liela* November 9, 2021.



Dolores adopted *Jayden* September 28, 2021.



Letitia adopted *ShaDiamond* November 1, 2021.

Help us to find *forever* families

Waiting Youths

Isaih, age 13



Isaih is a boy who is intelligent, charming and very insightful. He is 13 years old. When asked, the word that Isaih used to describe himself was “cool.” He feels this is represented best by his dark brown eyes and hair. Some of Isaih’s best qualities include being polite and well-mannered. Isaih is very athletic and enjoys football. He hopes to attend Cornell University one day and play on their football team. Until then, he enjoys playing “street football” with the other children in his neighborhood and watching the Philadelphia Eagles on TV. Isaih also loves to watch TV and play video games, as most children his age do. His favorite TV show is “Transformers.” He also enjoys board games and card games; some of his favorites include Battleship, Connect 4 and Uno. When asked if he could go anywhere in the world, Isaih stated he would go two places: to Australia to see the koala bears and kangaroos, and Burger King to have his favorite meal of chicken nuggets and french fries. Isaih is open-minded and looking forward to experiencing new things in life. He has a big heart and a lot of love to give his forever family, who he hopes will make all his dreams come true. Parental rights have been terminated for Isaih. For more info: Karen Knodel, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, knodelk@diakon.org or 610-682-1527.

Nicky, age 14

Nicky, who likes to be called Nico, is a 14-year old Hispanic, Caucasian male, who is intelligent, pensive and detailed-orientated. He has been described by others as talkative and outgoing. Three words Nicky has used to describe himself are: happy, kind and creative. During school, Nicky enjoys chemistry and science classes best. In his free time, Nicky enjoys watching videos on YouTube and playing games on his computer. He is toying with the idea of being a professional gamer or working at a local video game store when he grows up. Or possibly a farmer too! When he’s not playing on the computer, Nicky can be found tilling his garden. He has quite the green thumb! He is currently growing lettuce, ghost peppers and radishes in his garden. He might try his hand at flowers next. He is also considering attending college and studying horticulture or video game development. Nicky would love to find a forever family that would take a vested interest in some of the activities he enjoys and who can provide a home that is filled with warmth and caring. He would do best in a home that has a well-structured environment with clear boundaries in place. It would also be best if there were no younger children in Nicky’s forever home. Nicky is open-minded and looking forward to experiencing new things in life. He has a big heart and a lot of love to give to his forever family. Termination of parental rights has occurred and Nicky hopes to find a forever family that will allow him to maintain contact with his birth parents and siblings. For more information, please contact Sarah Reiss at Diakon Adoption & Foster Care by emailing reiss@diakon.org.



Aaron, age 14

“He’s such a happy boy and always smiling,” is how Aaron’s staff describes him! Aaron has a sweet personality and brings smiles to everyone who meets him. Since Aaron has a love of music from the 60s and 70s, a dance party is usually nearby. He enjoys the sounds of the music and the happiness it brings to others. Aaron enjoys making crafts with the help of his staff and spending one on one time with them. A staff member states, “He loves one on one time and he’ll make you feel like you’re the only girl in the world.” Aaron is known to be a ladies man and win the hearts of his teachers and staff!



While Aaron depends on others for complete care, he has a strong will and can let you know through verbalizations and body posturing when he is unhappy or not feeling well. Aaron benefits greatly from stretching exercises and being placed on his belly. Nutrition is supplied to Aaron through a G-tube. Because of Aaron’s needs, families with medical care experience or who are willing to learn more about caring for children with medical needs is highly desired.

Aaron is often sleepy throughout the day, but when alert he is generally a content and calm child. He responds to voices he recognizes and enjoys being read and sung to. Aaron loves to laugh and wants to share his laugh with a forever family! His staff have a strong connection with Aaron and truly enjoys spending time with him. Staff would also like families to know “If all his needs are met he’s happy and content, but he’s in heaven when you’re with him.”

Aaron is not yet legally free for adoption, however when a permanent resource is identified, the county will enact final steps to terminate parental rights.

Thanks to Frank and Pat Mattes who kindly donated 10 winter coats on November 23 for our foster children!



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:

- December 22, 2021, Noon to 2 p.m.
- December 28, 2021, 6 to 8 p.m.
- January 20, 2022, 6 to 8 p.m.
- January 25, 2022, 6 to 8 p.m.
- February 17, 2022, Noon to 2 p.m.

- February 22, 2022, 6 to 8 p.m.
- March 17, 2022, 6 to 8 p.m.
- March 22, 2022, 6 to 8 p.m.
- March 30, 2022, Noon to 2 p.m.
- April 21, 2022, Noon to 2 p.m.
- April 26, 2022, 6 to 8 p.m.

Training sessions hosted by Topton-based staff:

- January 8, 15, and 22, 2022, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- March 5, 12, and 19, 2022, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Information sessions hosted by Capital-based staff:

- December 7, 2021, 6 to 8 p.m.
- December 15, 2021, 6 to 8 p.m.
- January 4, 2022, 6 to 8 p.m.
- January 12, 2022, Noon to 2 p.m.
- February 1, 2022, 6 to 8 p.m.
- February 9, 2022, 6 to 8 p.m.
- March 1, 2022, 6 to 8 p.m.
- March 9, 2022, Noon to 2 p.m.

Training sessions hosted by Capital-based staff:

- December 4, 11, and 18, 2021, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
 - February 5, 12, 19, 2022, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Sibling training, January 29, 2022, 9 am. to 1 pm.

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 Stephanie Spurgeon, permanency services supervisor, at SpurgeonS@diakon.org.

