

Family CONNECTIONS

A PUBLICATION OF DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE



STAFF ARTICLE:

Summer Things to Do



School is out and summer is in full swing. Sometimes it can be difficult to keep children busy during the summer, and boredom and the nagging questions of “what’s next?” and “what can we do today?” is often bounced around families daily. We asked our staff for some of their ideas for staying busy and avoiding the summer boredom lull, and their answers did not disappoint.

What are some of your suggestions for fun, summer family activities?

MEGAN MILLER, Diakon Family Support Specialist: Have a water day!

Plan your activities around water. You can do things like a water balloon fight, water bucket relay races, sprinklers or hose tag! Hook up the hose and have the “tagger” stand in one spot holding the hose. Have the “runners” pick a start and end spot on either side of the tagger. The runners have to make it from one spot to the other without getting sprayed by the hose! If they get sprayed, they switch spots with the tagger. Another great idea is to have a picnic by the lake/creek! Find a local lake or creek where you can spend time playing and eating lunch or dinner together. Most locations have picnic tables and shaded areas to sit. The kids can splash in the water to cool off! Use the time there to

look for fish, collect bugs, or make mud pies! The dollar store has small aluminum trays the kids can use to fill with mud. Have a contest to see who can make the most creative pie or the most realistic pie! Have the kids use things like flowers, leaves, sticks or stones to decorate their pies.

CASANDRA DRY, Manager of Family Recruitment: Going for walks in local state parks is a great family fun idea. Some parks have playgrounds, swimming pools and even picnic areas so you can make a whole day out of it. For those local to Montgomery County, check out their free splash park! This is a great outing to cool down on a hot summer day. Additionally, most local communities have events like farmers markets and movie nights hosted in parks, so be sure to check out your local listings for events to attend. Another idea would be to visit your local farms and go berry picking and find some local trails to bike on.

What are some ways to give kids some structure during the summer?

MEGAN: Establishing a routine. Routines are important all year round, especially for our kids. Remember that during the school year our children stick to a structured schedule with their teachers, so it is hard to adjust to being home in the summer without structure or routine. Not only do children feel safer and have the ability to form healthier habits with routines, but parents feel less stressed and more

Skate Night and Give Local Recap

May 14, our families and staff enjoyed a Family Skate Night fundraiser as a part of our Give Local York campaign and appreciation event for Diakon foster families. This event had 125 people attend and families were able to skate together, in addition to meeting other Diakon families. Additionally, Diakon was able to provide information about SWAN and waiting youth to the Fox 43 news channel and new prospective families that attended. Overall, the event raised over \$2,000 for the campaign.



Thanks to everyone who came out to visit our community highlight table at the Iron Pigs on June 21!



Single Dad Didn't Look Back

— RICHARD KROPP,
Diakon Adoptive Parent



I had thought about adoption for a few years before actually making the decision to pursue it.

The big thing that made me decide to go for it as a single parent was seeing one of my best friends adopt a toddler with special needs a few years before. I think I needed to see her succeed to convince myself that it was a real possibility for me too. I have worked with children as a pediatric physical therapist my entire career. I felt I was somewhat uniquely positioned to draw on those experiences of working with children with special needs to help influence my parenting. I knew I wanted to be a dad. After researching some agencies, I attended the orientation night at Diakon and never looked back or had any hesitation from that point forward.

I adopted Ben in August 2019 when he was four years old. After living with a wonderful foster family nearby, he was placed with me for pre-adoptive foster care in January 2019. Unknown to me, they were only a few blocks away from where I live; we may have even crossed paths at some point in the past... it truly is a small world. A few months after Ben's adoption, the pandemic hit, and while so many negative things came from that, including all the illnesses and deaths, it ended up being a blessing for us. At the time, Ben was in Head Start, spending much of



the day in his Head Start classroom and the afternoon with his previous foster family (who also operate in-home daycare) before my school job finished for the day. If not for the unexpected shift in our schedules, Ben and I would not have been able to spend as much time together, which helped with our bonding. In addition, since it was just the two of us in the house together, and I was working from home, it served as a great opportunity for us to connect. At the same time, Ben was learning boundaries and expectations as I was balancing work and caring for him. As schools moved to hybrid and then full in-person instruction, my job also transitioned similarly to Ben's school's plans, so it worked well for us to move gradually forward.

For families considering adoption, I would highly recommend they attend one of the orientation sessions to see what it is all about and what the process is about. Despite having a friend who had previously gone through the foster care and adoption process, I do not think I fully grasped what it was like for her. What surprised me the most was how many steps there really are in the process and how much time it can take. I do not say that to discourage anyone by any means because, in retrospect, I feel that it was very helpful to not only prepare me emotionally and mentally for a child being placed

with me but also provide me with a firm knowledge base on foster care, adoption, laws, and parenting skills. The training sessions regarding behavior and different strategies to address behavior while understanding the influence of trauma were the most valuable part for me.

Whether working at school with children with special needs or parenting at home with Ben, you can never have too many strategies in your toolbox. Certain ones work better for certain children, and I have found that when something works, you have to stick with it and be consistent to see results.

My other piece of advice, especially for single parents considering adoption, is to go for it! You may feel that you do not have what it takes to be a parent, but the process and training provide you with much of what you need. The biggest recommendation for single-parent or two-parent households is to ensure you have a network of support. It is said that it takes a village to raise a child, which is very true. The pandemic made that very difficult for a while, and we relied on phone calls, Zoom, and outdoor meetups to maintain our connections. As we emerged from the restrictions and resumed certain parts of our lives that were placed on hold, we could reconnect further with our "village," and they continue to serve as a supportive extended family for Ben and me.

My other piece of advice, especially for single parents considering adoption, is to go for it!

FINALIZATIONS

Giovanni
January 4, 2022
Donald and Anastasia
Berks County

Camri and Carli
January 18, 2022
Nicole
Northampton County

India and Vincent
December 1, 2021
Shelley
York County

Zoey
March 8, 2022
Richard and Mikan
Montgomery County

Scarlett
March 15, 2022
David and Bridget
Lehigh County

Elias and Eliah
January 13, 2022
Angel
Northampton County

Julian
February 2, 2022
Elijah
Northampton County

Bentley
February 22, 2022
Chris and Tara
Berks County

Miya
March 8, 2022
Barbara and William
Northampton County

Eloise
March 18, 2022
Joshua and Alexa
York County

Michelle, Macklim and Delia
January 28, 2022
Francis and Catherine
Lehigh County

Arabelle and Rylenn
February 2, 2022
Eric and Jane
Lehigh County

Calvin
February 23, 2022
Gerald and Robyn
Cumberland County

Michael
March 8, 2022
Michael and Renee
Northampton County

Elijah
April 14, 2022
Tina
Bucks County



Joshua and Alexa W. adopted their daughter, Eloise, on March 18, 2022.



Ryan & Katie K. adopted their son, Alex, on April 22, 2022.



Richard & Mikan L. adopted their daughter, Zoey (being held by Mikan), on March 8, 2022.

Summer Things to Do *Continued from Page 1*

organized. This creates a calmer environment where parents and children can really enjoy the daily activities together instead of constantly worrying about “what’s next?”

Do you have any tips/suggestions for making a routine and sticking to it during the summer?

CASANDRA: Engage the children with making a weekly plan: establish what activities you will do each day or each week. Something else that is important is having realistic expectations on how much time certain activities will take, like breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, etc. When you make your schedule, be sure to leave the times flexible and

understand that you may not be able to stick to it perfectly.

MEGAN: Keeping bed time and wake-up time during the summer can be very helpful. While they may be a little later now that school is over, keeping them a consistent time every day will allow your children to get adequate sleep each night, and wake-

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FINALIZATIONS Continued from Page 4

Alexander
April 22, 2022
Ryan and Katherine
Berks County

Kaylena
April 26, 2022
Tonya and David
Northampton County

Adris
April 22, 2022
Cheryl
Berks County

Daniel
March 14, 2022
Nathan and Cynthia
York County

Ahrielle and Kamyha
May 24, 2022
Deborah and Larry
Montgomery County

Layla
April 14, 2022
Anton and Michelle
Delaware County

Sara May
May 3, 2022
Benjamin and Holly
Berks County

Ophelia
April 26, 2022
Ashley and Dean
Lebanon County

Asaad
April 20, 2022
Rhoda and Trimicka
Dauphin County

Markus
May 11, 2022
Kelsey and Jerome
York County

Amina
April 26, 2022
Elaine
Northampton County

Haydien
May 3, 2022
Tonya
Berks County

Landon
March 24, 2022
William and Miranda
Wayne County

Jadi
May 17, 2022
Natasha and Jeremy
Lehigh County

Nyzir
June 30, 2022
Luz Dancer
Lehigh County



Shamyiah adopted Sanjay, (formerly Sahbay) on May 31, 2022. Pictured with Sanjay is Shadell, Kristen, Ashley (all three county workers), and his adoptive mother, Shamyiah.



Frank & Catherine adopted Michelle, Macklin and Delia, on January 28, 2022. Macklin is pictured with his siblings and Frank's and Catherine's biological daughter, Nora.



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up well rested for a new day. Another easy way to keep a schedule would be to keep a meal chart. Something simple you can keep on your fridge or pantry, that is visible for everyone to see. Your meal chart can have the times you eat your three core meals, and you could even include snack times also! A final tip would be to limit screen time. Screen time certainly

doesn't need to be taken away for the summer, but it is helpful to have set hours when screens are allowed! Maybe your children enjoy TV when they wake up and before they go to bed. Your schedule might look like "two hours of TV in the morning, and two hours of TV before bed." To redirect your children from screens during down time, try playing music

they enjoy so they still have some background noise to listen to.

We hope these ideas help your family enjoy summer in a stress free, fun filled way. If you decide to try any of these ideas, send photos to Melissa at: KindallM@diakon.org for a chance to be posted on our Facebook page!

Waiting Youths

Help us to find forever families



Zayden is an active, energetic and lovable 7-year-old with an infectious smile. He enjoys swimming, as well as playing basketball and football. Zayden likes Beyblades, Bakugan, and his favorite colors are red, blue, and green. Overall, Zayden is a good eater and enjoys a good cheese pizza!

Zayden would do best in a patient, nurturing and trauma-informed family. While Zayden likes animals, he would do best in a home without them. A home where he is the youngest child is preferred.

Zayden's parental rights have not been terminated, and maintaining birth family connections is important to him.

For more information, please contact: Kristina Kulp, kulpk@diakon.org



Johnathan is a sweet and talkative 13-year old. He has a large stuffed animal collection he loves to show off. His favorite television show is "Sponge Bob SquarePants" and he also likes "MacGyver." If Johnathan could travel anywhere, he would love to see Disney World and Universal Studios.

If you are an approved resource family, and would like more information about Johnathan, please contact his worker, Tara Miller at millert@diakon.org.



Brittany is a caring and sociable 17-year old who readily welcomes new people into her life. She is always excited and ready to meet new friends. She has room in her heart for everyone who crosses her path and talks fondly of people with whom she has connections. Brittany is always smiling, laughing and brings joy with her wherever she goes.

If you are an approved resource family, and would like more information about Brittany, please contact her worker, Katie Juliana at julianak@diakon.org.



Nelson is a polite, generous, enthusiastic 18-year old who always has a smile on his face. Nelson has a distinct, infectious laugh that brightens up the room. He enjoys being around people and is grateful for even the smallest things. Nelson's favorite thing to do is build Legos. He follows assembly instructions precisely and carefully puts them together. His favorites are always superhero sets, especially Iron Man, Spiderman and Batman.

If you are an approved resource family, and would like more information about Nelson, please contact his worker, Katie Juliana at julianak@diakon.org.



Dashawn is a personable, funny, sweet 13-year old young man who loves to be active and busy. He loves to be outside in the sun! Basketball is his favorite sport, but you might also find him playing football or riding his bike. Dashawn would love to play on a team and have people cheering him on from the sidelines! Dashawn cheers for Cleveland Browns and Golden State Warriors.

If you are an approved resource family, and would like more information about Dashawn, please contact his worker, Katie Juliana at julianak@diakon.org.



At 16, **Dale** is a young man who is polite, well-mannered, easy-going, talkative and enjoys being around others. Some of Dale's favorite activities include riding his bike, skateboarding, playing basketball, working out, swimming, playing video games and listening to music. He is learning how to play the drums and the acoustic guitar. He also loves to try new food. Dale is on mission to go on an "Around the World Food Tour," where he intends to sample as many different, multi-cultural foods as possible. Dale hopes to find a job where he can give back to the community, possibly working with teens in foster care or with an animal rescue. He also enjoys working on cars and is considering a career in car mechanics.

If you are an approved resource family, and would like more information about Dale, please contact his worker, Sarah Reiss at ReissS@diakon.org.

BACK TO SCHOOL

— MADELYN FREEMAN, Diakon Communications Intern

Back to school. Three words I know I hated when I was growing up. Going from lots of free time, vacation, staying up late and sleeping in to the first day of school can be jarring for many kiddos, as it definitely was for me. Summer, for some, leads to a lack of structure and the transition back to a more rigid schedule can be a painful one. We asked some of our staff for their tips to getting their kids back into the swing of the school year before it starts, to ease the transition.

Julia Benton, Recruitment and Family Development Specialist at Diakon suggests gradual reimplementation of the school routine and frequent communication with your children, so that they can be involved with the changes. If your family's summer schedule

is different from your school routine, "work your way back to the school schedule in a slow transition," recommends Julia. "For example, if school requires wakeup at 6:30 and you have let your kids sleep in till 7:30, start by a week or two of wakeup at 7 and then another week or two of 6:30 so they have time to adjust," before the school year resumes. She suggests doing the same for bedtimes as well.

Another way to make the transition easier is to "begin the conversation about the return to school a few weeks before the start date," suggests Gwen Albert, Recruitment and Family Development Specialist at Diakon. "Include discussions about the new schedule, covering topics like what the time to wake up will be,

when the bus comes or when you will have to leave home for school," in order to start acclimating your child to what will be expected of them when school starts.

For many kids, back to school can mean a lot of new things: new school, teachers, friends, bus and so much more. The unknown can come with a lot of anxiety and apprehension, so eliminating any of the mystery may help your children with their fears. Gwen suggests trying to visit your child's school before classes start, and to at least drive by if you are unable to go inside. For elementary children, taking them to play on the playground is a great way to acclimate to the new space. Additionally, "if your child has a yearbook, you can look through the yearbook and identify their new teachers and principals," suggests Gwen, so they recognize some faces on their first day. Lastly, if you are able, encourage your children to make new friends during the summer, at community playgrounds, pools or during organized activities so they can look forward to going to school with those friends when summer ends.

Overall, having "an open-door policy with your children when it comes to discussing their fears, worries and areas of excitement" about the upcoming school year is a great way to be able to support your children, says Gwen. By listening and engaging with your children, you will be fostering healthy communication and building trust which will go a long way in your relationship with your child. Change is always going to be a part of life, so by helping your children to navigate change in a healthy way, starting when they're young, will equip them well the rest of their lives.



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.

Contact Info:

EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

☎ (610) 682-1504

✉ DryC@diakon.org

✉ www.diakon.org/adoption

PENNSYLVANIA (Mechanicsburg)

☎ (717) 795-0320

✉ KirkpatrickL@diakon.org

✉ BentonJ@diakon.org

PENNSYLVANIA (York)

☎ (717) 845-9113

✉ StoreyH@diakon.org

✉ CroneH@diakon.org

INFORMATION SESSIONS hosted by Diakon staff. Please register to receive the Zoom link by emailing recruitment@diakon.org

- Aug. 2, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Aug. 10, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Aug. 18, 2022, 12-2 p.m.
- Aug. 23, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Aug. 31, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Sept. 6, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Sept. 14, 2022, 12-2 p.m.
- Sept. 22, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Sept. 27, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Oct. 4, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Oct. 12, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Oct. 20, 2022, 12-2 p.m.
- Oct. 25, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Nov. 1, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Nov. 9, 2022, 12-2 p.m.
- Nov. 17, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Nov. 22, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Nov. 30, 2022, 12-2 p.m.
- Dec. 6, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Dec. 14, 2022, 6-8 p.m.
- Dec. 20, 2022, 12-2 p.m.
- Dec. 28, 2022, 6-8 p.m.

TRAINING SESSIONS hosted by Capital-based staff. Please register to receive the Zoom link by emailing Lois Kirkpatrick at kirkpatrickl@diakon.org

- Aug. 6, 13, 20, 2022, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Oct. 1, 8, 15, 2022, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Dec. 3, 10, 17, 2022, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

TRAINING SESSIONS hosted by Topton-based staff. Please register to receive the Zoom link by emailing Casandra Dry at dryc@diakon.org

- July 16, 23, 30, 2022, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Sept. 10, 17, 24, 2022, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Nov. 5, 12, 19, 2022, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

EVENTS IN THE CAPITAL OFFICE AREA

July 30, 2022:

PRIDE FEST CENTRAL PA

For more information, contact: Zac Rebeck at rebeckz@diakon.org

August 2, 2022:

NATIONAL NIGHT OUT

For more information, contact: Heather Crone at croneh@diakon.org

August 16-20, 2022:

DALLASTOWN CARNIVAL

For more information, contact: Lois Kirkpatrick at KirkpatrickL@diakon.org.

October 8, 2022:

FALL FEST AT LEG UP FARM

For more information, contact: Heather Crone at croneh@diakon.org

KINSHIP SESSIONS hosted by Topton-based staff. Please register to receive the Zoom link by emailing Gwen Albert at albertg@diakon.org

- Aug. 3, 10, 17, 2022, 6-9 p.m.
- Oct. 5, 12, 19, 2022, 6-9 p.m.
- Dec. 7, 14, 21, 2022, 6-9 p.m.

EVENTS IN THE TOPTON AREA

August 5, 2022:

READING PHILLIES

First Energy Stadium

August 21, 2022:

LEHIGH PRIDE

Jewish Community Center

October 8, 2022:

OUT IN THE PARK

First Energy Stadium

For more information, contact: Casandra Dry at DryC@diakon.org