

Family CONNECTIONS

A PUBLICATION OF DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE



A Tremendous Love...

Our family started in November 2008. Troy and I got married at the Myakka River State Park where we met. At that time, we thought that neither Troy nor myself were able to conceive a child and we had planned our life without children. We received the good news that we were pregnant late in 2009 and our daughter Danika was born in 2010 at 31 weeks of gestation. Early on during her youngest years, we discussed enlarging our family, but Troy and I knew we did not want to go through the NICU experience ever again. After we had reached a decision, we started praying every night for the 'sister' that God was going to bring into our home and into our family.

As a child, I had an intense desire to adopt in my adult years. I did not know that there were children that could live without their parents and once I found out, a tremendous love filled me and I had purpose. My mother was not so convinced and tried to dissuade me at that young age, but that love was always there. I remember every year buying Christmas cards for my friends and I would order them from UNICEF for over 20 years hoping that the small contribution would go towards orphaned children.

Through my place of employment, we participated in the Christmas Angels program every year for foster care children, but we had not been to Diakon. We started our journey by visiting a different agency but did not have a good fit right away and had placed our plans about adoption on hold. My coworker, who had never extended a lunch invitation, one day reached out and asked if I wouldn't mind dropping off a donation at Diakon with her and then going to lunch. When we arrived, I was taken by Diakon. I knew this was it. That night I came home full of hope and when I discussed it with Troy he was immediately on board, especially because Diakon is Lutheran, which is the church he attended in his younger years. Looking back, I would say it was a 'sign' or as we Christians know, it was an indication from the Lord that our purpose was there.

We went the next day to the office and things progressed quickly. During our classes, there was a presentation on trauma and its effects on children. It was a day full of strong emotions for both the instructors and the students.

We all went out for lunch with a gloomy feeling and considering whether or not we could deal with it. As we sat in the very small restaurant by the railroad tracks, an elderly lady, accompanied by a mid-30's woman who appeared to be her caretaker, sat at the small table next to us.

This lady was probably three steps away from me and every time I made eye contact, she gave me the sweetest of smiles. Her companion was seated in between her and I so I only had a view of her face. Troy and I were engaged in heavy conversations about the horrors of trauma. At one point, Troy got up to get a coffee and the lady's caretaker got up to go to the bathroom. This time when I made eye contact, she gave me her sweet smile and I smiled back and saw that her shirt had a Bible verse written on it. It read: "Perhaps this is the moment for which you have been created"-Esther 4:14. Troy came back to the table and found me trying to hold my tears and, when I explained, we both knew that we were going to do this. Our daughter Danika had been involved since before Diakon and that night we told her we knew it was going to happen. Bella came into our home a few months later. Her sister Lilly came into our home nine months after Bella.



There are so many pieces of advice that we would give now that we have been through this process. The most important ones are:

1. You are never going to be fully prepared and you will never be ill prepared. This is not a labor of one or two people; there is a village of people behind these children that doesn't stop with your immediate family and friends. Diakon, CYS, social workers, therapists, doctors, specialty therapists, churches, neighbors: they all help! The goodness in people shines when you adopt. Friends, who we didn't know were adopted, have come into our house to tell us their story and to lend a supportive hand without prompting, neighbors dropped off school uniforms (we still have to buy the first uniform for the girls), the church has surrounded these two girls with love and support, and the team of support through Diakon and others gave us a cushion that we did not expect. Do not be afraid.

2. Pay attention in the classes and review all material and additional classes often. Study them, memorize locations of resources, and enroll in all parenting and trauma-related classes that you are able to attend. We like to say that you should study as if you were going to college. Whether you have a biological child or not, parenting a child requires us to be resourceful and insightful about our interactions and how we provide guidance to the children. When trauma is part of the equation, two plus two does not equal four. What we know about raising our biological daughter does not always apply with our adopted daughters.

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FINALIZATIONS

Julian 8/02/22 Elijah Northampton County	Jasalynn, Janiah and Juliana 10/25/22 Keith and Christopher Northampton County	Josiah 12/27/22 Neris Northampton County	Skylette 8/29/22 Melanie Berks County	Austin and John 8/26/22 Deborah and Michael Berks County
Camillahh 11/23/22 Bambi Northampton County	Violet, Izabella and Maverick 12/27/22 Charles and Sandra Northampton County	Osiris 10/17/22 Dawnielle and Steven York County	Ryan 9/22/22 Coleen Berks County	Dallas 8/29/22 Laverne and Nancy Berks County
Ermias 8/30/22 Milagros Northampton County	Autymn, Jaxyn and Jayden 9/20/22 Jean Northampton County	Wyatt 10/04/22 Brandi and Enrico Northampton County	Zubeniah 12/20/22 Brian and Heidi Berks County	King, Harmony and Tylerlee 12/20/22 Alice and Johnnie Northampton County
Melody 9/27/22 Daniel and Jessica Northampton County	Julian and Giavanna 10/11/22 Tammy and Palumbo Berks County	Brynlee 10/18/22 Allen and Kascur Berks County	Aerianna 9/06/22 Mark & Paula Berks County	Lucas and Aries 11/02/22 Nathan and Melanie Berks County
Leah 8/03/22 Ashley and Dean York County	Jenna and Lucas 8/02/22 Chris York County	Noah 8/19/22 Russel and Frank Cumberland County	Angel 10/31/22 Lauren and Alan Philadelphia	Layla and Parker 9/08/22 Lisa and Stan York County
Eli 9/07/22 Theresa and Earl Lancaster County	Chance 8/23/22 Michael and Jean Cumberland County	Owen 8/19/22 David and Cheryl Cumberland County	John 10/19/22 Vernon and Ruth Berks County	Serenity and Tistan 10/12/22 Dalton and Katlyn York County
Chasity 12/19/22 Meredith and Bill York County	Jaylen 12/21/22 Jacob and Krystal York County			



The H family adopted Matthew, Juan, Serenity, Jaydon, Jocelyn and Jenna, with all adoptions occurring 2013 through 2022.



Neris adopted her nephew, Josiah, on December 27, 2022.



Alice and Johnnie adopted King, Harmony and Tylerlee on December 20, 2022.

FINALIZATIONS

Continued from Page 2

Taliah and Ny'Aylah 1/19/23 Reisch Family Cumberland County	William 11/02/22 Derek and Ashley Montgomery County	Juniper 12/01/22 William and Stacy Berks County	Evelyn 12/19/22 Dianita and Richard Berks County	Ny'Riah and Jayden 12/20/22 Hugo and Kristin Berks County
Kristin 12/21/22 Melissa and Yarnell Berks County	Tatum and Hayden 12/20/22 Jeremy and Naomi Berks County	Hayden 12/21/22 Michelle Berks County	Tyler, Dominic, and Isabella 12/20/22 Johnnie and Alice Norhampton County	Madison 12/20/22 Lissette and Eladio Northampton County
Bella and Mason 7/11/22 Morgan and Justin Daughin County	Emmit 1/24/23 Blair and Edward Northampton County	Hayden 7/11/22 Diane and Cecil York County	Bentley and Joziah 7/19/22 Tammy and Andrew York County	Reesmee 8/02/22 Courtney and Jon Cumberland County



Jasalynn, Janiah and Juliana were adopted by their maternal uncles, Keith and Christopher, on October 25, 2022.



Taliah and Ny'Aylah were adopted by the R family on January 19, 2023.



Melanie adopted her daughter, Skylette, on August 29, 2022.

A Tremendous Love... *Continued from Page 1*

Be resourceful. Reach out for advice. Enroll in classes. The sacrifices you make in proactively preparing pay in dividends when you see your children are well adapted.

3. All children need advocates. Biological and adopted children need advocates to fight the larger battles for them until they learn to fight them on their own. We learned through this process that love, although fundamental to a child's development, is not enough. Children in the foster care system were separated from their parents (trauma) and were placed in temporary placement and most times moved again (more trauma) and sometimes separated from their siblings (more trauma).

Understand that your role as a parent is and will always be to ensure these children thrive in life. It takes advocating for them. It takes asking questions, being informed and writing letters, making phone calls and visiting with their team, school and therapists. It takes educating those around you. It takes being their voice because they are looking at you to do it for them. This is where the network that you developed becomes your best support system.

4. Look at the biological family with care and compassion. The children love their biological parents no matter what. They are too young to understand any wrongdoing done by adults. All they know is that they love their parents and family.

If contact is allowed by the judge, form a bond with the parents. It will not take away from your relationship with the children. In fact, it will strengthen your relationship in the long term. In our experience, adoptees want their biological family engaged. Some of the family might have had problems that you and I will not face and they probably made choices that you and I will not had made. Be compassionate and wise. You are doing it for the children and their well-being.

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Thank You to everyone who supported our Diakon Adoption & Foster Care families and children during the holidays!

Hovus, Inc.
 St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church
 Gleasy Bilger and family
 Service Electric
 Buckeye Partners
 Christ Church Children's Center
 Concordia Preschool
 Frank & Pat Mattes
 Thrivent Group (Marlane Druckenmiller)
 Carmella Kornberger
 Stitchers Group at Topton
 Jamie Dwyer
 Andrew Kelhart
 Carl Hildebrandt
 Stacey King / Center Ice Figure Skating Club
 John Barrone
 Nativity Church
 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day
 Saints youth group
 Jodi Sentz

Konhaus Print & Marketing
 Dreamworx Roofing
 West Shire Decks
 West Shire Concrete
 Philadelphia Steak & Hoagies, Inc.
 Grove Financial & Associates (Davinder Sidhu)
 Four Arrows (David D. Buell, Business Development at Four Arrows)
 TC Preferred Properties
 Clarke Benefits- Mark Clarke
 Ark Fitness
 The Mirarchi's
 Seletech Inc
 Dani's Pixel Chix
 Roots A Hair Salon
 Little Stinker Soft Wash
 Emily Fogelman Designs
 Bryan Beers Photography
 Floortek & More

Karns Performance
 Brooks PowerSports Inc.
 Polished Salon, Spa & Wellness
 GreenTrail Solutions, Inc.
 Accountabilities, Inc.
 Weiss Physical Therapy & Rehabilitation
 Freedom Asphalt
 Bob Ruth Ford, Inc.
 PaySmart Payroll Services
 AJ's Truck & Trailer Center
 Alliance Business Technologies, Inc.
 Handyworx LLC



For more information about how you can support our foster and adoptive families 365 days a year, please visit diakon.org/adoption!

Waiting Youths

Help us to find forever families



Damien

Damien:

Meet Damien! He always greets you with a smile, and his positivity is infectious! Damien loves to be active, and is open to trying any new activity. He has recently started to learn to ice skate! He cares deeply for people and animals; his dream is to find his forever home where he can sit on the couch with a cat next to him.



Davionne

Davionne:

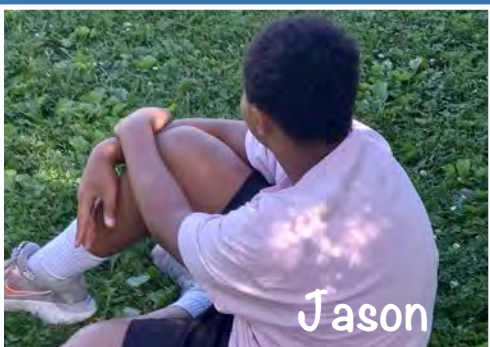
Davionne, who likes to be called Davi, has a comical personality and sweet nature. Davi is fascinated with electronic devices like his tablet. He loves cell phones, and he enjoys playing video games. Davi can be very active and enjoys playing sports with others. Other times, he is quiet and focused on making cardboard phones and playing with his collection of stuffed animals. Davi enjoys spending time outdoors and doing fun community activities with adults who care about him.



Gio

Gio:

Gio is a kind and caring 17-year-old young man. When he's not at the gym lifting weights, you can find him hanging out with friends or watching movies. Gio's goal is to become a physical therapist because he loves science and physical fitness. He also loves animals and his favorite is a snow leopard. Did we mention that he loves snowboarding? Gio is sarcastic, humorous and always smiling or trying to make others laugh.



Jason

Jason:

Jason is silly, sweet and adventurous. He enjoys taking walks, watching superhero movies, doing puzzles and cheering on his favorite teams! Though they're rivals, Jason is "team Pennsylvania" and roots for both the Steelers and the Eagles. Jason hopes to find a home that loves to celebrate, especially his favorite holidays, Halloween and Christmas.



Derek

Derek:

Derek is a handsome, energetic, happy and resilient boy who loves swimming, karate, watching cartoons, playing video games and being outdoors. He is great with making arts and crafts and riding his bike. He likes doing projects and does best when he feels supported and encouraged. Derek is also a huge Philadelphia Eagles fan! He was so thrilled when they won the Superbowl because he believes in dreams coming true!



Preston

Preston:

Preston is a super personable and charming young man who enjoys the outside just as much as he loves cozying up inside. Camping, hiking and biking are things Preston loves participating in, but once the fun is done, do not be surprised if you find him napping the rest of the day away. He loves to talk about anything and everything and can talk for hours about his favorite video games or movies. Preston also loves playing football and basketball and is looking for his forever team.

We asked Diakon Adoption & Foster Care recruitment and family development specialist Marianne Zellner for some suggestions for resource parents to help smooth out any bumps in the road with placements and biological siblings.



First, we suggest preparing before your placement even arrives in your home. We encourage siblings six years or older to participate in our sibling training (provided via take-home packet and individual casework sessions) while each family undergoes the approval process. Including your child(ren) in the decision-making process is also a good idea when considering placements. While waiting for a placement, spend time talking about potential scenarios that could happen with your other children in your home. Once there is a placement in your home, set individual time aside for each child in the home, birth and foster, on a regular basis. Resource parents may need to work at encouraging a sibling relationship by finding common interests, giving them projects or tasks to work on with one another and finding new activities they can experience together.



Are you and your family ready for some fun spring activities? Here are a few staff suggestions!

1. Local parks. Check your city's or township's parks & recreation page for events.
2. Run a 5k or do a 1-mile Fun Run.
3. Food truck events like the Spring Food Truck Festival in Wrightsville on April 24.
4. Start a garden together...even if it's just a small flower bed or a pot of fresh herbs!
5. Local Easter egg hunts.
6. Volunteer together.

A Tremendous Love... *Continued from Page 3*

We had a lot of surprises during this process:

- We were surprised by the amount of support that continues to be given to us. The overwhelming goodness of people still floors us.
- The innocence and resilience of these children fills our hearts with strength.
- We had always heard that there was a lot of paperwork and that it was prohibitively expensive to adopt. I was surprised that the paperwork can be completed in one or two weekends if you diligently sit to finalize it. We did not have any out-of-pocket expenses that we can recall. If we did, they must have been minimal.
- We thought we knew good people until we met the team that surrounded these children.
- The number of children in the foster care system is very large and some kids age out of the system without having had a family to call their own.
- The beauty of these children cannot be described here. We were surprised by the immediate connection we had. It was the same as with my biological daughter. The minute we placed eyes on her, those feelings filled our hearts; it was the same with both Lilly and Bella.

Things we learned:

- We learned the definition of trauma.
- We learned that a 5-year-old can be more resilient than a 50-year-old.
- We learned what it is to kneel next to a child's bed, cry with them and guide them through prayer because we did not know how to change their circumstances.
- We learned to advocate for siblings.
- We learned parenting techniques.
- We learned to admire children for their strength.
- We learned to breathe in together, time-ins and rocking a 6-year-old to sleep is important, because nobody had done so before.
- We are STILL learning...

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 at diakon.org/adoption for updated lists as meeting times can change.

Contact Info:

EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

☎ (610) 682-1504
✉ DryC@diakon.org

PENNSYLVANIA (Mechanicsburg)

☎ (717) 795-0320
✉ baconj@diakon.org

PENNSYLVANIA (York)

☎ (717) 845-9113
✉ kirkpatrickl@diakon.org

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

- Mar. 2, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- Mar. 8, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- Mar. 14, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- Mar. 22, 2023, 12-2 p.m.
- Mar. 28, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- Apr. 6, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- Apr. 12, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- Apr. 18, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- Apr. 26, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- May 4, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- May 10, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- May 16, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- May 24, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- Jun. 1, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- Jun. 7, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- Jun. 13, 2023, 6-8 p.m.
- Jun. 20, 2023 12-2 p.m.
- Jun. 28, 2023 6-8 p.m.

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

- Mar. 4, 11 and 18, 2023, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- May 6, 13 and 20, 2023, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

TRAINING SESSIONS hosted by Central PA staff. Please register to receive the Zoom link by emailing Lois Kirkpatrick at KirkpatrickL@diakon.org

- Apr. 15, 22 and 29, 2023, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- June 3, 10 and 17, 2023, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

March 10, 2023
MATCHING EVENT
Blossom Hill Mennonite Church,
Lancaster, PA. 5-7 p.m.

June 15, 2023
JUBILEE DAY
Mechanicsburg, All day event

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

- Apr. 5, 12 and 19, 2023, 6-9 p.m.
- June 7, 14 and 21, 2023, 6-9 p.m.

March 18, 2023
PARKLAND COMMUNITY DAY
Parkland High School, 9 a.m. - 12 p.m.

May 2, 2023:
LOWER MACUNGIE COMMUNITY DAY
Lower Macungie Community Center 4-8 p.m.

May 6, 2023
BERKS STREET ART FESTIVAL
Reading-Muhlenberg Career and Technology Center 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

July 16, 2023
READING PRIDE CELEBRATION
Jim Dietrich Park 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.
LOOK FOR US AT SEVERAL IRON PIGS BASEBALL GAMES THIS SPRING AND SUMMER!

Hope for the Journey Conference

Each year, Diakon's foster and kinship care program offers families the opportunity to watch the Hope for the Journey Conference. This conference is designed to encourage and provide parents and caregivers who are meeting the everyday needs of children impacted by adoption and/or foster care. A completely digital and customizable conference, the 2023 Hope for the Journey provides five different learning modules. Each learning module includes a teaching session, a "Going Deeper" video segment that dives into a specific topic and a "Practical Perspectives" video that brings real-life examples to better encourage and equip.

This year, Diakon Adoption & Foster Care's Topton office will be offering one in-person training session and two additional virtual sessions. The conference is only available from April 14 - June 30, 2023. The in-person session at our Topton office is scheduled for April 21, while the virtual sessions will take place at later times – an evening session in May (split into two smaller sessions) and one full Saturday in June. Current Diakon families will be invited to register and gain training hours. For more information, please contact Patti Menow at MenowP@diakon.org.