



Challenges

Resource families accept challenge for children's sake

Although the world of foster care and adoption is ever changing, Diakon's heritage remains active and unaltered—to find families for children in need.

In continuing that tradition, Diakon recently turned its attention to “resource families,” or foster parents who are willing to make a permanent commitment to a child and adopt him or her, if family reunification fails.

“The parents coming to us are being asked to do what is difficult, for the sake of the child,” explains Suzanne Piccolo, director of the York office of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. “We

are asking them to take a child from the foster-care system and work with the county to reunite the child with his or her family. Often this takes years of effort, visits, court hearings and very sad children. We then say that if that doesn't work out, we would like you to offer that child a permanent home.”

While this emotional and mental switch from shared to full parenting can be difficult, many families have no problem in saying yes. One such family is the Millers.

Michelle and Scott Miller have worked with Diakon for six years as both foster and adoptive parents. Although they

admit their original intent wasn't necessarily permanent expansion of their family of four, they have adopted two children and are in the process of adopting a third.

“We start out as foster parents [with every child]. Our ultimate goal is reunification,” says Michelle Miller. “We look at each child who comes into our home as a gift that we've been given. Whatever time we have to make a difference in that child's life is an opportunity that we otherwise wouldn't have had.”

Although the Millers knew from the start that the first child they adopted

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Diakon Youth Services

Effective Sept. 1, the services traditionally called TresslerCare are being offered under the brand Diakon Youth Services.

This change is consistent with naming directions our organization is taking, tying all programs to the Diakon brand, and also eliminates any potential confusion over how “TresslerCare” services would relate to such programs

as Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. The foster care components of TresslerCare were earlier merged with Diakon Adoption Services, in light of changes in the foster care field focusing on permanency for children and youths.

A further internal realignment moves therapeutic and related services to Diakon Family Life Services, which

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DIAKON
LUTHERAN SOCIAL MINISTRIES

Intensive residential program *meets need for shorter stay*

The Diakon Youth Center is expanding its offerings beginning in the fourth quarter with a new male and female Intensive Residential Program that lasts 35 days and includes AfterCare services.

This program, which addresses counties' requests for shorter stays, is a combination of what happens on the Boiling Springs campus every day, says Douglas Provard, residential program director.

"During the school year, the students in the 35-day program will be enrolled in school," he says. "The first four weekends they will participate in the outdoor component, which includes wilderness experiences such as the high ropes challenge, the alpine tower, ground initiatives, and hiking and camping. In addition, they will

take advantage of clinical and additional educational services—Balanced and Restorative Justice, life skills, conflict mediation, goal-setting—that we provide on campus."

The first week of the program involves coordinating counseling services with Diakon Family Life Services, which provides the Youth Center's Medical Assistance-funded treatment services.

That period "also gives us time to enroll the youths in school and have them complete their initial Treatment Team meeting," Provard says. "After that, we transition smoothly into the remaining four weeks of the program."

Those four weeks include clinical services such as D&A assessment, D&A individual counseling, D&A treatment/education group, mental health counseling and voluntary attendance at AA and NA meetings. The youths also participate in weekly Life Skills and Victim Impact groups and must complete a minimum of 12 hours of community service. Once a week, youths have the opportunity for family visits.

"What is unique to this program is that we will offer a discharge meeting that follows a family group decision-making model," Provard says. "The meeting takes place at a neutral site in the youth's home community."

Discharge meetings, such as the one offered in the 35-day program, are a growing trend in the industry, he says.

"It is helpful because it gives us, the county probation officer, Children

and Youth workers, the child, and the family the opportunity to be on the same page at discharge and discuss what the home environment will look like when the child returns home."

Following discharge, youths benefit from eight weeks of AfterCare services, including reintegration links to community services, weekly phone contact with the family to monitor the student's progress, and biweekly face-to-face meetings with the student and family.

For more information on the new program, currently offered in Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry and York counties, readers should contact Rich Weikel at (717) 258-3168, ext. 111, or via e-mail at weikelr@diakon.org.

Short-term residential program replaces Challenge+Plus

Completing the 31-day Wilderness Challenge Program is no longer a prerequisite for the Diakon Youth Center's Short-Term Residential Program (90 days).

Students who enter the program in September will take advantage of four weekends of outdoor components. But, Monday through Friday, they will be fully immersed in the campus' school and clinical services, giving them four more weeks of school for the first 30 days.



WAP reunion *highlights* youths' continued progress

Graduates of the Weekend Alternative Program returned to the Diakon Youth Center's Boiling Springs campus in August for a reunion that focused on the youths' continued progress.

"It was a great experience that included graduates of the program as well as their families," says Corey Carothers, program director. "In addition to good food, the graduates and their families toured the campus."

Anthony Stukes, assistant director, was responsible for planning a large part of the reunion and for coordinating an activity with the graduates in which they sat together to talk about life after their graduation from the program.

"We call it a heart-to-heart. We wanted to sit down and see what was really going on," Carothers explains. "The reunion wasn't meant to be just about food and games. We wanted it to be therapeutic. We wanted to make it a branch of the program."

The 10 youths who attended the reunion shared success stories that included holding a job, staying in school, getting better grades, staying off drugs, avoiding delinquency charges, and getting off probation.

One 19-year-old former WAP student came back to thank staff members for helping him enroll in college.

"I'm going to [college] full-time and wanted to thank [the counselors] for

it," he says, crediting his counselors for taking him to visit the school and helping him to visualize a future career in medicine.

Although the youths in attendance had graduated anywhere from one week to three years earlier, they all had a similar message for the WAP staff. "They wanted to let us know that we really had helped change the direction of their lives, and they wanted to say thank you," says Carothers, recognizing the effort each one made to return to the campus for the reunion.

"They all say thank you when they leave the program, but the value of what they've achieved doesn't always sink in right away."



WAP *expands programs* to meet demand

When Corey Carothers, program director for the Weekend Alternative Program, realized the wait for admission to his program was almost two months, he jumped into action.

"I knew this was too far out, so we came up with the idea of expanding our capacity from 69 to 84 youths," he says. "We opened up a new group for 15 kids and brought in experienced staff from the course, residential and our home-based program in Chester County."

All 15 youths began the program the same weekend and, like everyone else, would finish together.

"It alleviated a large part of the waiting list," says Carothers. "It was a successful concept that we will continue for as long as necessary to keep the wait to a minimum."

For more information, or to make referrals, readers may contact Carothers at (717) 773-5660 or by email at carothersc@diakon.org.

Family Day a huge *SUCCESS*

The families of youths enrolled in the Diakon Youth Center's various residential programs turned out in larger-than-expected numbers for the first ever Family Day celebration, traveling from as far away as Levittown, Pa., and Baltimore, Md.

Approximately 90 parents and guardians had the opportunity to meet and speak with teachers and staff about how their son or daughter was doing in the program. They also toured the residences, saw some of the projects on which the youths were working, and even bought flowers grown in the greenhouse as part of the horticulture program.

"Some of the students did a choral presentation, and we ended up with a picnic at the recreation field," says Douglas Provard, residential program director. "We plan on having a Family Day at least twice a year. It is an excellent way to give families another opportunity to be involved in their children's treatment."

PERRYfamilies program to continue *for third year*

Once again, the Carlisle Health & Wellness Foundation has generously renewed its grant funding for Diakon Youth Services' PERRYfamilies Program.

With this third installment from the foundation, Diakon continues to bring its in-home individual and family counseling services to families in the county.

Last year Perry County agreed to match the foundation's funding, making it

possible for Diakon to provide services to a greater number of county residents. The county will continue this service at the current level by requesting funding through the needs-based process in upcoming years.

The PERRYfamilies Program stresses skills building, specifically in areas such as anger management, drug and alcohol abuse, conflict resolution and assertiveness training. Families participating in the

Regional News

DIAKON YOUTH CENTER AND DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE – CENTRAL REGION

Youths from the foster care component of Diakon Adoption and Foster Care in Mechanicsburg and the Diakon Youth Center in Boiling Springs recently played baseball with former Los Angeles Dodger **Ron Perranoski** at Doubleday Country Inn and Farm in Landisburg.

The outing, an annual tradition for the programs, gave the former Major League pitcher the opportunity to share stories and offer advice to the kids on how to stay out of trouble and lead productive lives.

DIAKON FAMILY-BASED SERVICES – SOUTHEAST

Twenty youths from the Bridge Program, serving Chester and Delaware counties, participated in Project Aware, a juvenile crime-prevention program sponsored by the Delaware Correctional Center at Smyrna, Del. The program is designed to encourage youths to change negative behaviors and attitudes. **Ron Davis**, Bridge program director, says this annual event provides many youths with a better understanding of the consequences of making poor choices.

DIAKON YOUTH CENTER

Rebecca Chamberlin has accepted a promotion to Wilderness Challenge Program supervisor. She graduated in 2002 from Kenyon College with a degree in sociology, and is a 2004 graduate of the National Outdoor Leadership School. Rebecca has been an instructor for the challenge program for the past year.

program are eligible for up to one year of services.

In addition to providing weekly individual and family counseling sessions, program counselors keep in regular contact with schools to ensure that the youths are doing well academically and behaviorally.

Diakon Youth Services

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means Diakon Youth Services can offer you behavioral health and drug and alcohol services that meet recent changes in state funding.

In spite of these changes, Diakon Youth Services remains a single point of contact for you to request quality youth care, including foster care, foster-adopt, and kinship services; family-based prevention, aftercare and accountability programs; sexual behavior/offender services; and at our Diakon Youth Center, the Wilderness Challenge Program, Weekend Alternative Program, and short- and long-term residential treatment programs.

While our name may have changed, our heritage of commitment and care for children and youths—dating to 1868—has not. We look forward to continuing to serve you.

Resource families accept challenge for children's sake

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would eventually become part of their family, the same was not true with their second.

“Originally we were working with the mother to reunify. It got to the place where she never followed through with what she needed to do,” she says. “We were approached by Cumberland County as a possible resource, and we said we would be willing to adopt.”

Although this type of unexpected change can be emotionally difficult, the Millers insist that they never hold back when it comes to showering love on any child who comes into their home.

“There is not one child who has come into this house that we have not loved completely,” says Mrs. Miller. “To hold back emotionally would be a disservice to that child.”

Although there will always be a need for temporary foster care and children who are legally free for adoption, there is a growing need for resource families like the Millers, Piccolo says.

“There is a great and growing need for those who are willing and able to offer the best of both to a child as resource families,” she says. “We have been blessed that so many are stepping up and taking the challenge for the sake of the children.”

To learn more about this program, contact Shirley Cherry (York) at (717) 845-9113, Cindy Garfinkle (Mechanicsburg) at (717) 795-0320, or Kathy Roach (Topton) at (610) 682-1526.

Educational credit hour curriculum quickly proves worth

Although it just was unveiled in the spring, the educational credit hour curriculum offered by the Wilderness Challenge Program already has proven helpful for some youths.

Diakon Youth Center staff members worked with schools and caseworkers this summer to make sure teens unable to finish summer school could still start the fall semester on time.

“We had very positive reactions from them because they could use the course to make sure the youth finished the

required credits in time, keeping them on track for the start of the school year,” says Jason Brode, program director.

Earlier this year Brode worked with Capital Area Intermediate Unit Curriculum Specialist Karen Ruddle and Wilderness Challenge Program staff members to ensure that the challenge services and activities were in line with Pennsylvania academic standards.

“We matched the standards to course activities and came up with 348 instructional hours that school dis-

tricts have the opportunity to translate into credit hours,” Brode explains.

The instructional hours also are available on Wilderness Challenge programs offered during the school year, beginning with the start of the fall schedule on Sept. 19.

To make referrals to the Wilderness Challenge Program or for more information, readers may contact Brode at (717) 258-3168, ext. 124, or via e-mail at brodej@diakon.org.

Community service *continues to be* positive link

Since the Diakon Youth Center began coordinating service projects in “home” counties so that youths in the residential programs could reach out to their own communities, requests for help have continued to roll in from Lancaster, Cumberland, York, Dauphin, and Perry counties.

Earlier this year when the Lancaster Council of Churches built a new facility for its food pantry, youths from the program painted and helped with the move.

“We found the organization through the United Way,” says Abby Belford,

Youth Center residential program case manager. “That project lasted about three weeks.”

This summer youths also were busy helping the York Chamber of Commerce with a flower-planting project, setting up booths for the Amani Festival in Carlisle, and collecting trash for the Harrisburg Department of Parks and Recreation.

“We also helped with the *Tour de Cure* on June 11 at the Carlisle Fairgrounds for the American Diabetes Association,” Belford added. “The kids helped unload trucks one day and directed traffic the next day.”

Putting the youths back in their hometowns gives them a sense of community, Belford believes.

“It also gives them the chance to link up with positive members in their community whom they may possibly use as a resource in the future.”

To make referrals to the Diakon Youth Center Residential Programs or to request assistance from a community service team for a project in your county, readers should contact Rich Weikel at (717) 258-3168, ext. 111, or by e-mail at weikelr@diakon.org.