

STUDENT-FOCUSED ADDICTION SKITS DELIVER STRONG MESSAGE



High school students and their parents got to look up-close at the reality of addiction and its effect on lives and relationships, the result of an innovative partnership developed last year.

Serving as the audience for two realistic skits delivered by Kutztown University theater students, the youths and their parents interacted with the actors, both in and out of character, during question-and-answer sessions after the performances.

The unique production was a joint effort of Diakon Family Life Services, Kutztown University, Union Lutheran Church in Schnecksville, and New Life Lutheran Church in New Tripoli. From the start, the group planned the skits to target teens and their families, raising awareness that addictions go well beyond drugs and alcohol, and families need to take seriously the broad range of addictions that affect families today.

“The idea wasn’t necessarily to identify people who are experiencing addictions, but to raise awareness so kids start thinking about this before they get into any addictive patterns,” says Kathi Eichman, Diakon Family Life Services program coordinator. “These are kids in their senior high school years, moving off to college when they start to be on their own. It is an exciting time to do some preventive-type work.”

Kutztown Assistant Professor of Theatre Roxane Rix was “very instrumental in helping us. She recruited a bunch of students and gave them a charge,” says Sal Tuccio, Diakon Family Life Services employee assistance and drug and alcohol coordinator.

“The drama students went out and researched the addictions on their own,” he says. “When they had the play in its rough stage, I sat down with them and critiqued them on how they should respond to the audience.” Addictions examined included not only those to drugs and alcohol, but also to work, exercise, and even relationships.

When the Rev. Jami Possinger, associate pastor at Union Lutheran Church, and the Rev. Scott Lingenfelter, pastor of New Life Lutheran, previewed the two skits, they decided to bring their youth groups and parents together at the Union church, where they could offer both skits simultaneously, one to the adults and one to the teens, then switch audiences.

“We thought it was a powerful way to open up dialog about all kinds of addictions—some we knew our kids were already struggling with,” says Possinger. “It turned out to be just as impactful as it was on us when we first saw it.” The students’ performance was so realistic, she says, that viewing the skits was like eavesdropping on a family or college dorm.



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WISH LIST

DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE

- Gift certificates to discount department stores to purchase materials to help children create "life books"
- Gift certificates for restaurants (for children in case management)
- Bookstore gift certificates (to buy adoption books for children)
- TV with VCR/DVD combo
- Good Nites Diapers (for older children)
- Children's clothing (new) or gift cards to purchase clothing

DIAKON COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR SENIORS – SCHUYLKILL

- Donations to provide "special holiday meals" for meals on wheels clients

DIAKON PREGNANCY SERVICES

- Newborn diapers and wipes
- Baby bath items
- Newborn clothing (new) or gift cards to purchase

DIAKON HOSPICE SAINT JOHN & DIAKON HOME HEALTH

- Twin-size sheet sets (cotton extra long or regular length jersey)
- Fabric bed pads
- Baby monitors
- Pill dispensers (7-day with four time-slots per day)
- Bed alarms
- Video camera equipment for "living legacies" program

Addiction Skits Continued

"It helped the kids see the reality of what things can be like, what you need to be prepared for, and the support system you need," she says. "I don't think there was a person who saw those plays that didn't see something about themselves in the characters."

The effect was equally powerful on the students. "The first time they had an audience of kids and parents, it changed the experience for them," says Rix. "They saw how engrossed and moved people were and that there were people who were moved to the point they were seeking counseling. That blew the kids away."



DIAKON FAMILY LIFE SERVICES WELLNESS PROGRAM GOES BEYOND SINGLE FOCUS



True wellness is anything but simple or quick. That's why Terry Lieb, executive director of Diakon Family Life Services – Northeastern Pennsylvania, has introduced a program for congregations that stresses a broad approach to wellness.

"Many wellness programs are single-focused," says Lieb. "We're trying to counter that with an approach to wellness that includes the spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, relational, vocational, financial, and 'fun-al' elements."

By "fun-al," Lieb is referring to the inability to have fun. "We need to understand when we no longer have fun in our lives," he says.

Earlier this year, Lieb led an adult retreat with members of St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Perkasi, Pa. The focus was on wellness, but not solely for participants.

"We talked about how our individual wellness impacts the life of the congregation," he says. "Part of what we do is move to a trusting environment in which participants can share and trust. That, to a large part, already existed in that community."

Holly Thorrington, the congregation's administrative assistant, was comforted by the fact that she was surrounded by other Christians dealing with the same health and wellness issues. "To open yourself up to others is extremely difficult," she says, adding that Lieb's style made the difference. "He approached us in the beginning with jokes and personal stories. It was a comfortable environment, which made it easy to share."

VETERAN WINS FINAL BATTLE AT HOME

In the hospital with congestive heart failure, World War II veteran and Purple Heart recipient Larry Krumanocker wanted to return to his Allentown home to fight the final battle of his life.

“When he was in World War II, he used to lie in his trench, look up at the stars, and wish he were home,” says his daughter, Linda Toggart.

“When the doctors said there was not much else they could do, he wanted to come home.” To fulfill his wish, his wife of 57 years, Dorothy, and the couple’s two daughters—Toggart and Susan Roberts—turned to Diakon Hospice Saint John’s Greater Lehigh Valley Area office to provide the care he needed.

“We chose Diakon Hospice Saint John because of the spiritual component,” says Toggart. “Also, I am a registered nurse, and I have seen the care offered by Diakon Hospice Saint John. They do a wonderful job.”

For five months, Diakon Hospice Saint John staff members and volunteers became part of the Krumanocker family. The hospice team secured physical therapy to help Krumanocker maintain an optimum quality of life. While nurses coordinated care prescribed by the family physician, social workers helped the family sort through insurance issues. “They were incredible,” says Ms. Toggart. “They not only care for the patients, but their families, too.” Program volunteers and staff members enabled Mrs. Krumanocker to maintain her shopping and church schedule by staying with her husband when she was out. “When the coordinator couldn’t find a volunteer, he’d come sit with Larry himself,” says Mrs. Krumanocker.

“The way I see it,” says Dan Hill, volunteer coordinator, “it is not a job responsibility, but a gift to people who have become friends. This is how the hospice staff feel about the patients.”

Larry Krumanocker died last fall. With the support of family, church, and Diakon Hospice Saint John, the Krumanocker family is dealing with their loss. “One of the ladies (from Hospice) called to see how my Christmas was,” says Roberts. “She called to see how I was coping. . . it is a big help to know someone is out there and willing to help.”

And the family is comforted by the knowledge their loved one’s last request was honored. “My father didn’t die alone. Diakon Hospice Saint John helped grant his wish to be home,” says Toggart. “For that, we are extremely grateful.”



Linda Toggart, left, with her mother, Dorothy Krumanocker, and their Diakon Hospice Saint John bear.

NEW GROWTH PLANNED FOR TOPTON MEMORY GARDEN

When the first phase of the Memory Garden at The Lutheran Home at Tipton, a Diakon Senior Living Community, was completed in 2002, it quickly became a favorite spot for residents, who found the area equally perfect for contemplation as well as for celebration with visiting family and friends.

Countless gifts honoring loved ones both lost and living have helped to make the garden beautiful.

Now the Memory Garden is blossoming into a new phase. A variety of flower gardens, fountains, gazebos, ponds, and patios are envisioned for the expansion. Shade areas, lighting, teakwood benches, and wheelchair-accessible walkways promise to make the expanded garden even more welcoming.

The generosity of community donors helped the garden to take root initially, and this invaluable support is needed again. Many levels of funding opportunities are available, with donations of all sizes welcome. For more information on how you can help the garden grow, while creating an enduring legacy with your gift, please contact the Diakon Office of Advancement at (610) 682-1219.



Susan Kern of Allentown and her granddaughter enjoy the fountain within The Lutheran Home at Tipton's memory garden.

Diakon Place: Helping to Change a Neighborhood

In early October, Diakon staff and board leaders and local community and governmental officials dedicated Diakon Place, a major investment in an economically challenged East Baltimore neighborhood. Formerly an auto center and supermarket, the abandoned building, now completely refurbished, houses offices for Diakon Housing & Community Development and Diakon Family Life Services – Maryland and Diakon KidzStuff's state-of-the-art child-care center.

DELAWARE-MARYLAND



UPPER SUSQUEHANNA



Roll in the New, Donate the Old

When Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries began to replace all of its nursing care beds with new electric ones, staff members had no idea their decision would help people halfway around the world. When the two Diakon senior living communities in the Upper Susquehanna Synod—Ohesson Manor at Lewistown and Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village in Lewisburg—rolled in the new beds, the older electric and manual ones were rolled out and donated to several causes.

Ohesson donated nearly 100 manual beds to the Upper Susquehanna Synod, which in turn sent them to Liberia.

“The hand of the Lord is in all of this,” says Dr. Robert Bradford, global missions facilitator for the synod. “This project came at a particularly good time.” Just as a group of synod volunteers returned from Liberia, where they helped to rebuild Curran Lutheran Hospital, Zorzor, damaged during the Liberian civil war, they received word of Diakon’s

gift. “The volunteer work crew put a new roof on the hospital, replaced walls, laid new tile on the floor, and completed general renovations,” says Bradford. “It was ready to receive patients again—it just needed beds.” Rebels had stolen the beds and, without the means to replace them, the hospital could provide only outpatient care. But with Diakon’s contribution and the synod’s effort to help rebuild the war-torn country, the hospital will once again function as a hospital should. Responsible for shipping the beds to Liberia, the synod also has worked to raise funds to purchase new mattresses.

“We are so pleased that our beds will be used to care for others, continuing Diakon’s mission to serve those in need,” says Cork Leiter, Ohesson Manor executive director.

Buffalo Valley’s donation of beds benefited those involved in a different reconstruction effort.

Once a month, since Hurricane Katrina’s devastation of the Gulf Coast, volunteers from Christ Wesleyan Church, Milton, have been helping to rebuild area homes. During a recent trip, the crew transported five donated electric beds to offer to older adults or those with special physical needs. “We will be making life a whole lot easier for people,” says Russell Davis, facilities director at the church. The remaining 13 electric beds, out of an 18-bed donation, may be used for the homebound and terminally ill among its 1,200-member congregation. The beds could also serve area individuals from all faiths as Christ Wesleyan Church participates in a community effort, the Hands Up Foundation.

“This is just another example of how Diakon is resourceful in serving as many people as possible,” says John Allison, Buffalo Valley executive director.

LOWER SUSQUEHANNA

Violin's Tradition Leads to Special Gift



Every year Kim Elicker would buy a Christmas gift—usually a toy or a piece of clothing—for a child served by Diakon's foster care program. As she perused this last year's gift list, something caught her eye.

It was a request for a violin.

A musician, Elicker was intrigued. Just how serious was the child about playing? Investigating, she came to learn

that a teenage girl, who had played the violin for six years, had made the request because her instrument had been sold when she entered foster care.

Touched by the youth's situation, Elicker immediately approached her fellow musicians in the Hershey Symphony. One woman quickly raised her hand, offering to donate a violin that belonged to her.

"For her to say, 'here,' was a huge, huge thing," says Elicker, noting that the instrument was more than 100 years old with an intriguing story behind it. "From the beginning, this violin was always given, never sold, except for its original purchase. The girl would be the fifth owner."

The donor was no longer playing the violin and believed it was time to pass it on. "She wanted to keep the tradition of the violin alive and give it to someone who would appreciate it," says Elicker. "She even cleaned up the violin and added new strings."

The opportunity to share the holiday spirit with children and youths served by Diakon is a long-standing tradition at Zion Lutheran Church, Hummelstown. When Elicker returned to her congregation with news of the donated violin, other members stepped forward to make sure the gift included a new case, bow, shoulder pad, chin rest and other accessories, as well as Hershey Symphony tickets.

"It was very much a community gift," Elicker insists. "Because I play the viola, I understood we would need the accessories if we wanted to make it a complete gift. With the donation of the violin, we were able to do that."

The magnitude of the gift was not lost on the girl. When Kelly Smith of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care presented her with the gift, the youth "cried for several minutes and kept repeating that it was the best gift she had ever received. Ironically," says Smith, "her high school orchestra concert was that same night and she was able to take the violin and play it at the concert."

Zion's members "have gone out of their way for years to ensure that kids get their specific requests," adds Smith. "In this situation, they were able to make a miracle happen for a very special young lady."

NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Bereavement Camps Offer Safe Haven

For youngsters like Jessica Adamczyk, 11, Camp Evergreen, a Diakon Children's Bereavement Program, provides a safe haven to explore and discuss the emotions experienced after a loved one dies.

"I came here to express my feelings and talk with the other kids and the counselors. My dad died in a car accident when I was just two years old and my friend, who was 8, just died in a four-wheeler accident," says Adamczyk.

In the rural setting of Camp Kresge, White Haven, Adamczyk and approximately a dozen other campers, ages eight to 14, participated in a weekend camp this summer. Geared towards helping youngsters cope with loss through therapeutic activities and peer, counselor, and volunteer interaction, the camp helps children regain normalcy in life.

"When participants meet other kids who have experienced loss, they know they are not alone," says Christina Fedorko, children's bereavement specialist and camp organizer.

"They quickly bond and support each other throughout the weekend."

Camp Evergreen offers a myriad of activities such as fishing, swimming, boating, sand art, creating memory boxes, journaling feelings, campfire time, planting flowers and a symbolic evergreen tree. Through informal and formal activities, children discuss their experiences with death with one another and the trained volunteers and counselors.

Diakon recently began an expansion of the program to enable more children to be served.

SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Twining Village Purchased

Earlier in 2006, Diakon announced the purchase of Twining Village, a Continuing Care Retirement Community in Holland, Bucks County, Pa.



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