

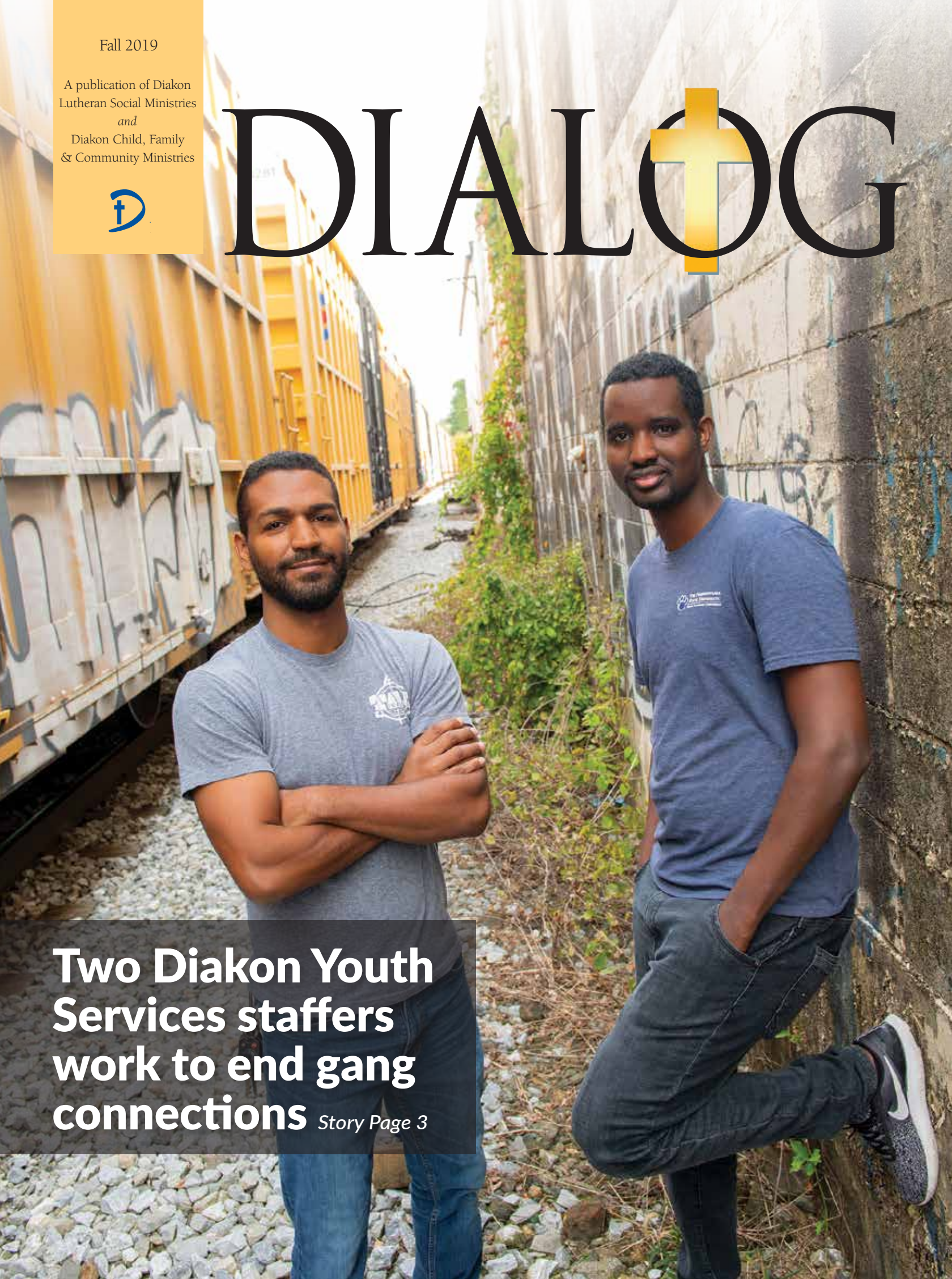
Fall 2019

A publication of Diakon
Lutheran Social Ministries
and
Diakon Child, Family
& Community Ministries



DIALOG

**Two Diakon Youth
Services staffers
work to end gang
connections** *Story Page 3*



Our Mission

In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, Diakon will demonstrate God's command to love the neighbor through acts of service.

Diakon: Many Hands, guided by One Heart, transforming the lives of children, families and older adults. With programs ranging from adoption, foster care and at-risk youth services to counseling and comprehensive senior living services, Diakon annually helps thousands of people of all faiths through compassionate service, gracious hospitality and charitable care.

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Mark T. Pile

The President's **DIALOG**

Recognizing our alumni

RICHARD HOOVER AND VIRGINIA EBERSOLE

had very similar childhoods, although in quite different locations.

Richard, who today lives in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, grew up at the Tressler Orphans Home in Loysville, Perry County.

Virginia—or Ginny, as everyone called her, who passed away several years ago—grew up at The Lutheran Home at Topton in northeastern Berks County.

Those two orphanages, the Tressler home originating in 1868 and the Topton facility several decades later, constitute the key roots of today's Diakon and the reason for our 2018 celebration of 150 years of service to people in need.

Both Richard and Ginny shared something else in addition to having grown up in the two homes for children: Both have been pivotal in promoting and preserving the history of their respective organizations.

Richard has served as a leader of the Tressler Alumni Association for many years. The alumni association is a group of now-adults who grew up at the Tressler Lutheran Home for Children, which closed in the early 1960s but whose emphasis on aiding children and youths is carried on today by Diakon.

Ginny—who was a resident of the senior living accommodations now located on the campus of the former Topton children's home—was very active in preserving information about The Lutheran Home at Topton, serving as an archivist of historical materials and looking up information for anyone interested in a family member's past at the home.



I vividly recall Ginny's gentle and caring spirit—and my occasional visits over the years to Tressler Alumni Association reunions, held on site at what became a state-operated youth development center after the sale of the Tressler property to the Commonwealth in the early 1960s. (The security procedures that had to be followed were always interesting!)

I write of Richard and Ginny because alumni of both homes were, truly, among our very first clients and special people whose history we celebrated during our 150th anniversary celebration last year, as well as every day.

Members of both alumni groups who remain with us are reminders not only of our storied past but also the significant impact this organization has on lives. We express deep appreciation for the role they have played, as well as their continuing support of Diakon.

Mark T. Pile, MSHA, MSW
President/CEO

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Diakon Youth Services 'takes to the streets' to prevent gang involvement

YUSUF MOHAMED WAS JUST 1 YEAR OLD WHEN CIVIL WAR

broke out in Somalia, forcing his family to flee to Kenya. For the next 20 years, he would live in a refugee camp, unable to travel beyond its borders.

Eventually, following college at the University of Nairobi, where he studied political science and conflict, Mohamed returned to the refugee camp and worked for a nonprofit organization as a counselor but also assisted families worried their children were being recruited by terrorist groups in Somalia.

Today, as a Diakon Youth Services caseworker, he uses his experiences to keep young people from joining gangs (see the sidebar article).



Lionel "Matt" Matias, left, and Yusuf Mohamed in York.

Mohamed's efforts are part of a joint project between Diakon Youth Services' Bridge Program and York County Juvenile Probation.

"This is a great connection," says Lionel "Matt" Matias, Bridge manager for York County. "York County Juvenile Probation saw what we have done with Bridge and wanted that same type of program connected with the Juvenile Violence Initiative meant to help rehabilitate youths who have multiple charges."

The program's exclusive curriculum is designed for juveniles

who have gun violations and known gang affiliations.

The partnership stems from a group violence effort the adult probation department in York began several years ago, says Ryan McGeehan, a York County probation officer.

"It comes out of a nationally accredited initiative meant to take care of some of the group gang and gun violence going on in the city," he explains. "It is designed to target reactionary shootings."

Enrolled youths enter the program with GPS monitoring and have a goal of completing a curriculum designed to reduce gang involvement. They also receive Bridge's standard support and intervention services.

The program's focus is on hope—and opportunity.

"They all start on house arrest and GPS. Eventually, they come off and gain freedom and flexibility if they've earned it," says McGeehan. Alternatives include adult probation and the potential of incarceration.

Program staff members meet with the youths to complete the curriculum, oversee completion of community service hours, make home visits and reward participants when they meet goals.

"It is a program with a one-track mind," says Matias. "We want to get the youths off probation. If they do what is expected of them, they're on their way."

The program, which has the capacity for expansion, is relatively new, but early results are positive and discharges are beginning to occur. "Some of the kids are really starting to benefit from the program," he adds. "They are doing what they need to do."

Refugee experience helps to shape caseworker's career

It was probably natural that Yusuf Mohamed would study political science and conflict at the University of Nairobi.

After all, he had spent the first two decades of his life in a refugee camp in Kenya, to which his family had fled when civil war broke out in Somalia.

"I studied this because of the civil war and all those horrible stories we had back home," says Mohamed, now the exclusive caseworker for Diakon Youth Services Bridge Program's juvenile violence initiative in York County.

"I wanted to know why we had to fight, why we needed to engage in violence."

He eventually returned to the refugee camp and worked as a counselor. In addition to supporting families dealing with gender-based violence, he helped those concerned that terrorist groups in Somalia were attempting to recruit their children.

"The children would go to Somalia when school closed for holidays," he explains. "When they came back, they would have these radical minds and the parents would note strange behavior. When this happened, we would intervene. We'd provide family counseling and support. We would explain it was a bad group and they did not have to join. They could stay in school."

Now living in the United States thanks to a refugee resettlement program, Mohamed uses his experience to work with youths in York County.

During youths' first four weeks in the program, Mohamed takes time to get to know them—what they like, where they go and with whom they socialize.

"It is good to know that information," he says. "One of the factors that influence violence for kids is peer pressure. We have to know the kinds of friends they are surrounded with."

After those factors are identified, Mohamed works with the youths on such issues as anger management, social skills, relationship building and communication.

"We provide one-on-one training specific to each kid," tailored for the youth's problem areas. "We also incentivize progress," he adds. "If they are doing well, we take them out to lunch. We even go fishing. We do fun activities based on what they like."

Mohamed finds great satisfaction in his work not only because of the lives he impacts, but also because of the nature of his efforts with Diakon.

"I grew up in a community where the food, health care, education and housing were provided by a nonprofit. I was supported my entire life by nonprofit organizations," he says.

"That is why I ended up working for nonprofits—to support humanity the same way I was supported."

Many stories fill a long, happy life



Brenda Staley, wellness coordinator at Diakon Senior Living – Hagerstown, with Mr. Ben.

BEN CHLEBNIKOW IS A STORYTELLER EXTRAORDINAIRE.

Not only do his stories paint a picture of a full life lived with grace and goodwill, but they also are filled with humor and as-if-it-happened-just-yesterday details—even when the story is from more than nine decades ago.

At 100, “Mr. Ben,” as he tells everyone to call him, points to a school picture that shows him seated, with hands folded on the desk in front of him.

“That’s me at age 9,” he says. “I had holes in my pants—and they didn’t cost me a penny!”

While he lightly pokes fun at trendy jeans with pre-made holes, his point is that such clothing was a fact of life in the Depression era. His father owned a hardware store in Paterson, New Jersey, but lost everything as a result of the economic turmoil.

His family had to split up temporarily, he explains, a move that sent him to work on a farm for two years while he was in high school. By his senior year, however, he was able to return to Paterson and graduate with friends.

“The farm had 50 milking cows,” Mr. Ben says. “Those cows had to be milked when they were ready to be milked! I would get up at 3:30 a.m. to do chores before school.”



Now a resident of Diakon Senior Living – Hagerstown’s Robinwood Campus, Mr. Ben spent his career in manufacturing and engineering, first with Curtiss-Wright, which made airplane engines. He attended trade school to learn machinist skills and also served in World War II. Drafted into the U.S. Army for his mechanical acumen, he gained military service that included a 13-month infantry deployment to Germany. Then, after nearly 20 years with Curtiss-Wright,

he was laid off—but he was not without work for long.

“They laid me off on a Friday. I had two interviews the next week and by Friday of that week, I was working for Mack Trucks,” he says.

“They asked me to work the next day, a Saturday, and I said okay, but with overtime pay. I thought that was only fair and the boss eventually

agreed but told me not tell anyone else. Sure, I was the new guy, but I had a growing family to take care of!”

When Mack Trucks moved in 1961 from Plainfield, New Jersey, to Hagerstown, Maryland, the company offered Mr. Ben a position in the manufacturing engineering department. He and his family made the move and he spent 30 years with the company.

A milestone celebration

Mr. Ben marked his 100th birthday late this summer, along with 75 family members and friends. His extended family includes two sons, two stepsons and dozens of grandchildren and great-grandchildren; he can list everyone’s names and where they live; he talks about using Skype to stay in touch. He worked for three weeks on the remarks he planned to make at the birthday celebration, he says, but then decided to speak off the cuff.

“I finished by saying that I hoped the next speaker’s speech would be as long as mine was. And I spoke for only three minutes!”

At Diakon Senior Living, he continues a habit he developed in 1985—regular swimming, daily if possible. He swims for enjoyment and fitness, he explains, and now for recovery. Circulation problems led to a foot amputation earlier this year; swimming and other therapy methods are helping him adapt to a prosthetic lower leg and foot.

“I’m happy to be back on my own two feet, even if I did have to buy one,” he joked during his birthday-celebration remarks.

The last of five siblings—his brother, Leo, passed away last year at the age of 101—Mr. Ben is often asked about the secret to a long life.

“Don’t make your life all work,” he says. “You need what I call therapy from your job. My boys needed cars for college. So I traded a 1957 Ford Fairlane for a Volkswagen and tinkering with Volkswagens became my therapy. I got pretty good at it. I rebuilt more than 125 VW engines and even the VW dealer in town would call me for parts.”

Ultimately, Mr. Ben believes he is still around because God has a purpose for him but has not yet figured it out. When someone suggests that perhaps he has lived that purpose his entire life, touching those around him with love, kindness and a sense of humor, he grows quiet for a moment.

“Maybe,” he says and smiles.

Couple with ‘heart for helping kids in need’ creates family for two sibling groups

DOUG AND REBECCA AUGUSTIN “DEFINITELY HAVE a heart for helping kids in need.”

When the couple attended a birthday party that included a number of children in foster care, “my husband and I saw kids with a need for families,” says Rebecca. “We were very impacted by their need to be loved and cared for.”

The Augustins have since adopted two sets of siblings through Diakon. “It hasn’t always been easy, but we see God there at every step.” Rebecca Augustin says.

To read the family’s story and view additional photographs, please visit our monthly online feature, eDiakconnect, found by going to www.diakon.org and then selecting “Keep in Touch / eDiakconnect” from the sidebar menu.



Outdoor Adventure Challenge 5K TRAIL RUN/WALK

Some 200 people participated in Diakon's Outdoor Adventure Challenge in September, raising more than \$55,000 for youth services.





Diakon drone takes flight ...

The next time you walk into a Diakon property, you might be surprised to see a drone—more properly called an “unmanned aerial vehicle”—flying overhead.

Don't worry—you aren't under surveillance. Rather, Diakon's facilities and information technology department has begun to use a drone to capture data important in constructing or maintaining buildings, equipment and property.

For example, in building-maintenance inspections, particularly those of roofs or multi-story buildings, drones “can provide a faster and easier approach, reducing cost but also health and safety risks,” says David Baker, Diakon's senior vice president for facilities and information technology.

Diakon is also using the approach to assist with construction-site inspections, promotional photography, thermal imaging and site communication and management, Baker notes.



Steve Daniels, executive director for planning and development, left, and David Baker, senior vice president for facilities and information technology, with Diakon's drone.



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Two Diakon Youth Services staffers work to end gang connections



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