

# The Many Hands of our Mission

*The Many Hands of our Mission* provides information on Diakon staff members celebrating anniversaries in January through June. A list of all staff members celebrating work milestones is shown at the end of this online publication.

Everyone celebrating an anniversary is asked to provide additional information by answering a brief survey, along with submitting a photograph.

Those who responded are listed below. Please congratulate everyone celebrating work anniversaries. Thank you for your continuing service and commitment to our ministries and to those we serve!



## SHANNON DUNNIGAN

Adoption & Foster Care – Topton  
 Permanency Case Manager II  
 Years celebrated: 5

### WHAT IS A FAVORITE WORK MEMORY SINCE BEING EMPLOYED AT DIAKON?...

The holidays. Although they are hectic, the kids love attending the Christmas party or getting their gifts at the December home visits.

**TELL US ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT AT WORK...** When I am not at work, I love going shopping, spending time with friends and family, and watching TV or movies.

### WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT MOTIVATES YOU TO FULFILL THE MISSION AT DIAKON?...

As a case manager, we are often the voice for the children on our caseload and the families we work with. Making sure their needs are heard and met is what motivates me to fulfill the mission statement.

### HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?...

Success is being happy and fulfilled by the work you do.

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT WORKING AT DIAKON?...

My favorite thing about working at Diakon is all of the relationships I have made with the children we serve, families we work with, and my coworkers.

### WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO DOING THIS SUMMER?...

This summer I am looking forward to going on vacation, relaxing on the beach, and going to concerts.



## CHELSEA GEROULD

Adoption and Foster Care-  
 Topton  
 Recruitment and Family  
 Development Specialist  
 Years celebrated: 10

### WHAT IS A FAVORITE WORK MEMORY SINCE BEING EMPLOYED AT DIAKON?...

Hearing from families I worked with early on in my career and knowing I've helped build families.

### TELL US ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT AT WORK...

Travel.....I have a bit of wanderlust. If I wasn't a social worker, I'd find my way into travel journalism.

### **WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT MOTIVATES YOU TO FULFILL THE MISSION AT DIAKON?...**

My own children, living by the values of Diakon ensures that I am being the best I can be and providing my children with a positive role model.

### **HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?...**

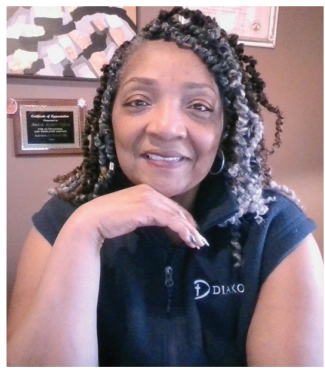
The joy of those around me and what I bring to them.

### **WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT WORKING AT DIAKON?...**

The friendships I have established since originally starting my career with Diakon in 2006.

### **WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO DOING THIS SUMMER?...**

New travel adventure in and outside the United States.



#### **ANITA BYERS-SMITH**

Diakon Family Finding and Family Engagement, York Office  
Case Manager II, FFEE  
Years celebrated: 5

### **WHAT IS A FAVORITE WORK MEMORY SINCE BEING EMPLOYED AT DIAKON?...**

I cherish my time as a Program Assistant in the York Office, where I formed meaningful connections with the children

I transported to family visits. Each moment reminded me of the importance of compassion and connection in their lives. To nurture their spirits, I played soothing music and shared age-appropriate videos, creating a warm environment where they felt safe and loved. After their visits, I provided compassionate support, encouraging them to express their feelings in a safe space. Connecting with them during those vulnerable moments was genuinely fulfilling.

**TELL US ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT AT WORK...**I love spending quality time with my family and adventurous with my husband, Craig Smith and pup, Harry D! Our joyful escapades enrich my spiritual journey and ending the day with cozy nap.

**WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT MOTIVATES YOU TO FULFILL THE MISSION AT DIAKON?...**A key motivator at Diakon for me is recognizing that every connection I facilitate—whether identifying a relative, engaging a kinship resource, or reuniting a child with a loved one—can significantly alter that child's life. It's about restoring belonging, preserving identity, and fostering hope. I find strength in advocating for family, especially when systems lean toward separation. This alignment with Diakon's mission—to serve those in need and demonstrate God's love—gives the work profound meaning and momentum.

**HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?...**I define success by my impact on children and families. It is rewarding every time I help

a child find a safe, loving home with relatives or trusted adults.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT WORKING AT DIAKON?...**Collaborating with families to uncover the support they may not have recognized and playing a vital role in breaking cycles to foster healing and stability for children and families.

**WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO DOING THIS SUMMER?...**This summer will be full of emotions and adventures. I lost my beloved senior dog, Platinum, on April 15 and am planning a memorial for him. I'm also on the family reunion committee, with our first gathering in July, and I'm taking a summer class for my Master's in Human Service Counseling at Liberty University.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS...**I'm thrilled to share that I'm a Diakon TAP recipient! This opportunity is a major stepping stone that I've dreamed of pursuing for over 20 years, and now, thanks to Diakon, I'm finally on my way to earning my Master's Degree! Despite the challenges and fears I face along the journey, I couldn't be more grateful for this chance. Along with being part of an incredible team focused on family finding has been an amazing experience. Each of us brings unique skills and backgrounds to the table, and we're so comfortable sharing and supporting one another, even while working remotely. It's inspiring to see how we come together to uplift the team as a whole!



## DEBBIE HERB

Diakon Community Services  
for Seniors  
Coordinator, Center Services  
Years celebrated: 10

### WHAT IS A FAVORITE WORK MEMORY SINCE BEING EMPLOYED AT DIAKON?...

Wow...so many memories. Watching our senior center members enjoy events where they are all together - Elvis or the carnival.

### TELL US ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT AT WORK...

Spend time with family, especially my grandsons.

### WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT MOTIVATES YOU TO FULFILL THE MISSION AT DIAKON?...

loving, serving and caring for the seniors that we serve....right where they are at this point in their life. For some...we are their family.

**HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?...** Being surrounded by those you love...JOY in your heart. "Don't let anyone dull your sparkle!"

**HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?...** My team and friends - The Senior Center Staff - dedicated to those they serve. (and I do love those we serve!)

### WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO DOING THIS SUMMER?...Camping

### ADDITIONAL COMMENTS?...

Ten years has gone by so quickly. I am grateful for those I work side-by-side with, for our wonderful volunteers and appreciate the chance to serve our seniors who have done so much for us and have so much wisdom.



## JENNIFER CROSSEN

Diakon Family Life Services  
Family Based Therapist/  
Clinical Team Lead  
Years celebrated:10

### WHAT IS A FAVORITE WORK MEMORY SINCE BEING EMPLOYED AT DIAKON?...

Our celebrations for doing well at audits and any time we get both offices together for lunch or breakfast

**TELL US ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT AT WORK...**I collect and sell vintage and antiques, create handmade vintage inspired crafts, garden and foster pregnant and orphaned cats.

**WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT MOTIVATES YOU TO FULFILL THE MISSION AT DIAKON?...** I love being invited in to be a part

of the fabric of our clients' lives, encouraging the change and positive movement that occurs within our families.

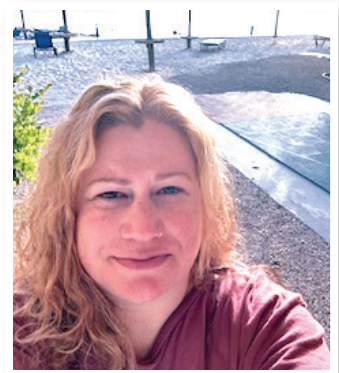
**HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?...** Being thanked by a family for helping them.

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT WORKING AT DIAKON?...

I enjoy the spirit of camaraderie with all of the therapists, it is a helpful and encouraging environment, mirroring the work that we do with our families.

**WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO DOING THIS SUMMER?...**Going on our annual long vacation to Florida, and swimming in our pool.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS?...** Michelle is the best boss ever!



## NICOLE DIAZ

Adoption & Foster Care –  
Topton  
Prep and profile specialist  
Years celebrated: 5

### WHAT IS A FAVORITE WORK MEMORY SINCE BEING EMPLOYED AT DIAKON?...

My favorite memory was being present for the adoption of children that I had worked with their entire time in care.



**TELL US ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT AT WORK?...When I'm not working, I enjoy Friday family nights, spending time with my dogs, and watching the Phillies play.**

**WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT MOTIVATES YOU TO FULFILL THE MISSION AT DIAKON?...**

The children I work with are what motivates me.

**HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?...** Success is experiencing personal growth and finding happiness.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT WORKING AT DIAKON?...**My co-workers.

**WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO DOING THIS SUMMER?...**Going on a family vacation.



### **SARAH KOLBE**

Diakon Community Services -  
Pottsville Office  
Office Manager  
Years celebrated: 10

**WHAT IS A FAVORITE WORK MEMORY SINCE BEING EMPLOYED AT DIAKON?...**

I don't have one specific favorite memory. I am thankful for the ways our team stepped up

to the plate during COVID and carried out huge feats together that we previously did not think we could accomplish. Although many things are out of my control, I love being able to say, "Yes, we can do that."

**TELL US ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT AT WORK?...**

I enjoy spending time with my husband, daughter, sisters, and the rest of my family. We've created a (self-certified) Monarch Waystation in our backyard and love tending the garden and watching for caterpillars and butterflies. I also recently reached a personal milestone: a 1,600-day running streak, running at least one mile every day from November 25, 2020, to April 13, 2025. I'm currently 56.7% of the way toward a big running goal.

**WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT MOTIVATES YOU TO FULFILL THE MISSION AT DIAKON?...**

The work that we do is so important and truly makes a difference in the lives of those we serve. I love being a member of the larger Diakon team that supports so many in a wide variety of ways.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT WORKING AT DIAKON?...**

I have found a place to use my skills and be challenged each day. Our team complements each other well. Even though we never know what the days will bring, we work together and support each other.

**WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO DOING THIS SUMMER?...**

We will be traveling and visiting family.



### **SHARI VANDERGAST**

President/CEO  
Years celebrated: 10

**WHAT IS A FAVORITE WORK MEMORY SINCE BEING EMPLOYED AT DIAKON?...**

I have a few... One is the opening of the Helen Palmer Center for Permanency in the Old Main building at Topton. I really appreciated seeing so many of our foster and adoptive parents, as well as how many staff participated. I really enjoy participating in our staff appreciation and recognition celebrations every year. Our staff are so dedicated to those we serve, so it's always a great pleasure to thank and appreciate everyone!

**TELL US ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT AT WORK...**

I really enjoy serving on the boards of Kutztown University and Prelude Services. My husband works for DeSales University, so we volunteer there together as well. I'm also a big reader - usually finishing a book a week borrowed from my local library. Spending time with my family is also a big priority for me.

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**WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT MOTIVATES YOU TO FULFILL THE MISSION AT DIAKON?...** With the support of our staff, we have touched more lives within our child and family programs every year since I started in 2015. While so many things have changed since the pandemic, one thing has remained the same - our commitment to providing support to children and families in Pennsylvania and Maryland. We have seen significant growth in both our behavioral health and family preservation services in the last 10 years, and I hope that we can continue to serve more families in the future.

**HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?...** Being able to make a difference in people’s lives and helping them to create a better life, where they can do the same for others!

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT WORKING AT DIAKON?...** Our very long history of supporting children and families. We began by providing care for kids in orphanages over 155 years ago. Today, we provide services to older adults, adults, families, and children through our work in adoption and foster care, family preservation, affordable housing, behavioral health, youth services, and community services for seniors. I LOVE how we have grown and diversified what we do and hope to continue this growth into the future. I have also really enjoyed supervising student interns over the last 10 years.

**WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO DOING THIS SUMMER?...** I love attending our staff and volunteer appreciation and recognition events, which are usually held in the summer. I also enjoy live music, and always look forward to attending Musikfest, the country’s largest free music festival each year.

### JAN 2025 SERVICE ANNIVERSARIES

Name	YOS	Position
Michele Spicer	15	Prep and Profile Specialist II
Shari Vandergast	10	President CEO

### FEBRUARY 2025 SERVICE ANNIVERSARIES

Name	YOS	Position
Arlene Lopez	5	FLS Therapist School Based

### MARCH 2025 SERVICE ANNIVERSARIES

Name	YOS	Position
Sandra Ayala	5	Office Manager FLS
Lenora Broda*	10	Family Life Services Therapist
Debbie Herb	10	Program Coord Center Services
Sarah Kolbe	10	Office Manager CS

\*Retiring May 30, 2025

### MAY 2025 SERVICE ANNIVERSARIES

Name	YOS	Position
Ryan Ackley	5	Wilderness Services Supervisor
Jennifer Crossen	10	Clin Tm Leader Family Life Svs
Chelsa Gerould	10	Recruitment Family Dev Spec II
Darriel Hadley	5	Case Manager II PS
Erin Oshansky	15	Asst. Director Permanency Services

### JUNE 2025 SERVICE ANNIVERSARIES

Name	YOS	Position
Nicole Diaz	5	Prep and Profile Specialist II
Anita Byers	5	Case Manager II FFE
Shannon Dunnigan	5	Case Manager II PS