

## Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries and Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries



Healthy aging is a concern for many older adults, but accessing services to address that concern can be particularly difficult in rural areas.

Diakon Community Services is focused on addressing that challenge—and doing so effectively. Just ask

“Agnes.”

“Agnes” calls Diakon’s Sue Johns, her “angel.” Sue met Agnes while distributing farm-market vouchers, a Pennsylvania food program that aids lower-income individuals while supporting local farming. Sue went on to assist Agnes in obtaining a subsidy for her Medicare Part D plan, which allows Agnes to save on monthly premiums as well as co-pays. She also enrolled Agnes in a prescription safety-net service and a Medicare-related program that will save the woman more than \$1,000 a year.

Agnes is not alone in her praise. A participant of a Diakon Community Services program focused on chronic-disease management says that “The program reminded me how important it is to move. Since I took the class almost two years ago, I have missed only three days on my new walking program—and I definitely feel healthier!”

Diakon Community Services operates a variety of community-based programs in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, under contract with the county’s Office of Senior Services. Funding for many of the programs is provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging.

Activities are as diverse as the days of the week. From noontime meals and nighttime dances to home visits, Skyping with elementary-

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Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries and Diakon Child, Family & Community Ministries are two of the Diakon family of organizations that have been serving children, youths, families, and adult individuals of all ages since 1868. In 2014, the two organizations directly served 69,000 people and had a quantified community impact of nearly \$19 million.

**Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries** operates a dozen Continuing Care Retirement Communities and senior housing complexes in Pennsylvania and Maryland.

**Diakon is a member of the LSA network, an [LSA 20-500 Fund](#) supporter and is part of LSA’s [Post-Acute Care Working Group](#).**

school students, computer education classes, and health counseling, Diakon's constellation of community-based programs work to assure healthy aging.

Many of these programs are supported by federal or state funds, including APPRISE, which offers free counseling to Medicare participants; Meals on Wheels, which delivers meals to homebound older adults and those with physical challenges; Prime Time Health, which helps older adults to stay fit, eat healthily, and manage chronic conditions through education; and community-based senior centers, which offer nutritious meals, activities, classes, and other services.

In addition, Diakon supports two efforts designed to help particular segments of the older population age well. The first is Diakon Living & Learning After 50, which offers educational events and vibrant activities to active older adults who would tend not to visit community-based senior centers. Last year, the program sponsored 520 classes and workshops, 12 special events, and a major annual Senior Expo - serving 4,000 people in total. The second program, Diakon Volunteer Home Care, provides older adults with needed transportation to medical visits, social service appointments, and the grocery store. These critical services promote healthy aging by helping seniors maintain their health, dignity, and independence while remaining in their homes and communities.

"As our region's older population grows, so does the demand for social services to meet their needs. It's a common scenario—and we're tackling the challenge head-on," says Karen Wood, director of the programs.

"Whether it's teaching older adults how to remain fit and active, helping them to navigate the complexities of our health-care system, feeding those who are homebound, or giving seniors a place to go for fun, fellowship, and learning, we're there daily making a difference in their lives."

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