



## Media Release

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### Reunited Families Celebrated During Reunification Month

Little Rock, Ark. -- The Department of Human Services (DHS) hosted a ceremony at the Museum of Discovery on Monday to celebrate families that have overcome challenges to be reunited with children in foster care. The celebration is in honor of Family Reunification Month and was the first of its kind in Arkansas.

Nancy Dillard of White County spoke about her experience adopting her grandchildren after their parents' parental rights were terminated. She said she worked hard to make a connection with the children while they were in foster care and to share childhood photos and memories she had from the time they were babies.

"Not only could I give them their history back, I can give them their present and we can now have a future together," Dillard said, the children at her side. "You just have to stand up and stand firm for the kids."

Dillard's adoption of her grandchildren became final last summer. She says the children are thriving and are her best friends.

In 2012, nearly 3,000 children in Arkansas were reunited with their parents or a relative, making reunification the number one reason children left foster care.

"We never take the decision to remove a child from their home lightly," said Cecile Blucker, director of the DHS Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS). "But our end goal is to reunify them with their family and when that happens, it should be celebrated."

Victoria Kronenwetter, who is a DCFS caseworker in Benton County, said her passion for reunifying families comes from seeing cases in which it is not safe to do so.

"Reunification is a beautiful thing to be a part of, to witness firsthand a family make steps toward overcoming their past," Kronenwetter said.

Wendy Founds, a recovering meth addict who lost custody of her daughter twice before finally kicking the habit and reunifying her family, said she is thankful she can be a fully-participating parent again.

"Kassidy now has parents sober enough to watch her do gymnastics, fuss at her about her grades and tell her to clean her room," Founds said.

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Blucker presented Dillard and Founds with the first two reunification certificates in Arkansas and said DHS plans to encourage judges across the state to give them to families as a way of celebrating their efforts to become better parents.