



## Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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### **Adoption Day celebrates new families in Arkansas**

Dozens of children in the Arkansas foster care system will become official members of new families this month when they have their adoptions finalized as part of National Adoption Day celebrations that will take place across the state. The day is part of November's National Adoption Month. The DHS Division of Children and Family Services expects 57 adoptions across the state to be finalized this month.

The Rodgers family, of Maumelle, has grown from 2 to 8 members over the past three years. Andrew Rodgers and his wife, Sabrina, have adopted six children since 2011. Three of their children joined their family as part of Adoption Day celebrations held in Pulaski County in 2011 and 2012.

Andrew, 35, grew up Jackson, Miss. with 23 brothers and sisters, and always knew he wanted a big family. He and Sabrina, 29, got married in 2009. When they learned they might not be able to have their own children, he said they "went to plan B" and decided to adopt. Andrew said they prayed about it and Sabrina even began purchasing baby clothing hoping to adopt a baby. The first child they adopted was 6 month old baby girl. When they felt she shouldn't be raised alone, their faith lead them to adoption again. "We never wanted to be just foster parents. No matter what, we were taking these children into our home as our children and we were not giving up on them," Andrew said.

The Rodgers family now includes Neveha, 3, Indyia, 5, Dillon, 8, Landon, 9, Andrew, Jr., 13 and Kaliyah, 14. Their children include two sibling groups; however Andrew said the children don't separate themselves. "They don't tell people they're adopted. They're all brothers and sisters and they've put their pasts behind them and are moving on. We are one big family and the children get along great," he said.

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Andrew admitted adoptions don't always start off perfectly and offered advice for others interested in adoption. "It wasn't easy at first. You kind of have to start from scratch and be ready to be students. You have to learn. These children have taught us how to love, how to be patient and how to work through problems."

Karen Evans, 48, a single Little Rock woman, turned to adoption to create her family. She works as a pharmacist in the city. Karen has a brother through adoption who joined her family when she was five years old so she was always familiar with it. She said she always wanted to adopt even if she had her own children. "Adoption was always a part of my family and something that I wanted to do."

Several friends had adopted children through DCFS and encouraged Karen to look into it. She worked with the CALL, an Arkansas Christian organization that works with DCFS to recruit and train foster parents, to complete training and obtain approval to be an adoptive home. Then she was connected to a DCFS adoption specialist who set up a meeting with a little boy available for adoption.

"When I met Karrington in November 2011, it was just love at first sight," she said. She and Karrington, then 23 months old, formed an instant bond. "When I met him, he came right to me, talked and sat in my lap." Soon after that, he stayed at her home for a short visit and then was placed with her until his adoption was finalized in August 2012.

Just a few days after Karrington's adoption, Karen got a call from her adoption specialist about a baby boy available for adoption. "I had always said I wanted a newborn, so I had told my adoption specialist to keep me on the list. But now that I had a son, I thought I wanted a daughter so I told her to let me think about it. I prayed about this blessing and decided to accept it. When I called her back to say I would like to meet this baby, she told me the paperwork had been incorrect and that the baby was actually a little girl. She was born premature, her mother had no prenatal care and she was in the hospital. Still, when I heard the family's story, I knew that with love it would all be fine."

A few days later, Karen and her mother went the hospital and met her daughter, Karis. Later when Karis joined her as a foster child, Karrington, then 3, had some questions. "I picked him up at school and I had Karis with me. His car seat had been moved and as we turned down the street to our house, Karrington said, 'where is she going?' and I told him, 'she's coming home with us.' He said, 'who is her momma?' I told him, 'I'm her momma and I'm your momma. She is your sister.'" Karis' adoption was finalized in August 2013.

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Karen urged people who are thinking about adoption to just do it. “If you even have a glimmer of an idea that you’d be interested in adoption, explore it. It’s been the biggest blessing to us. The love these children give and the love you feel for them is second to none. If I’d known before how this feels, I’d have 10 children,” she said.

The Evans family took part in the Adoption Day celebration Thursday at the Pulaski County Juvenile Justice Complex in Little Rock when 7 children were adopted. They joined Pulaski County juvenile court judges, DHS Division of Children and Family Services staff, adoption advocates and families in a balloon release that celebrated the 724 adoptions that took place in fiscal year 2014 and to bring attention to the more than 700 children who are available for adoption statewide. There are more than 100,000 children (many of whom are in sibling groups) in the U.S. foster care system who are waiting for permanent families.

“Adoption Day is always a happy time when we get to celebrate the new families that are created when an adoption is finalized. It’s also a good opportunity to remind everyone that we have hundreds of children in Arkansas who are still waiting to find that special family that will be theirs for the rest of their lives. We work every day to find forever families for these children,” said Cecile Blucker, director of DCFS.

If you, or someone you know, is interested in learning more about children in Arkansas who are available for adoption, contact the DHS Division of Children and Family Services at 501-682-8462 (central office) or 1-888-736-2820 (toll free). You can also become acquainted with children waiting to become part of a family by visiting the DCFS Heart Gallery at: [www.adoptarkansas.org](http://www.adoptarkansas.org)

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