

Media Release

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Adoption Day celebrates new families in Arkansas



Andrew Rodgers of Maumelle speaks at the Adoption Day in Arkansas celebration in Little Rock. He is pictured with the six children he and his wife Sabrina have adopted over the last four years.

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 across the state. The day is part of November's National Adoption Month. The DHS Division of Children and Family Services expects to have about 50 adoptions take place across the state this month. This month is especially important to families who have been created because of adoption.

The Rodgers family of Maumelle has grown from two to eight members over the past four years. Three of Andrew and Sabrina Rodgers' children joined their family as part of National Adoption Day celebrations held in Pulaski County in 2011 and 2012.

Andrew, 37, grew up in Mississippi in a family with 23 brothers and sisters. He said because of his positive experience growing up, he always wanted a big family. He and Sabrina, 29, got married in 2009 and soon learned they might not be able to have children of their own. Knowing there are children all over our country who need families, they said prayed about it and switched to "plan B,"

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using adoption to build their family. The first child they adopted was a 6 month old baby girl. “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, 4, Indyia, 6, Dillon, 9, Landon, 10, Andrew, Jr., 14 and Kaliyah, 15. “We want to encourage people to adopt and to consider older children and teenagers,” Andrew said. “Don’t worry about bonding with an older child, it will come. Everyday life begins with new relationships. A new relationship can give a child a chance and a new start.”

Andrew acknowledged 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. Both the children and parents have to learn. Our children have taught us how to love, how to be patient and how to work through problems.”

The Rodgers family includes 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. He added that the children attend Maumelle schools and each one is on the honor roll. “They’re good kids.”

James and Tamra Norman of west Little Rock had no experience with foster care or adoption however Tamra felt the need to do something to help children. “No one in our families has ever been in foster care or been adopted,” she said. As she was growing up, Tamra used to tell her parents she wanted to adopt children, but “I didn’t even know how any of this even worked,” she said.

Tamra never lost her interest in foster care. In their early 30’s, the Normans were a busy family with two jobs and two children of their own. When Tamra, a teacher, shared her wish to help children in need with James, they talked about becoming a foster family and he was supportive. In 2013, she contacted the Division of Children and Family Services to get information about being a foster family. The family was directed to The CALL, an organization that works with DCFS to recruit foster families through area churches, and went through foster parent training. “We started this with the full intention of being a foster family,” Tamra said. Within a few months after completing training, the family accepted a 2 year old girl to foster and soon after her baby sister also joined the Normans as a foster child. “The goal for the girls was reunification with their family and we knew that,” said Tamra. When reunification wasn’t possible, the Normans decided to see about adopting the sisters and they officially joined their family in December 2014. Annalise is now 3 and her sister, Grace, is 2.

“Our lives were not on this path – to adopt two more children – but now we can’t imagine anything else,” Tamra said. She said that when people say, “Oh, I couldn’t do that,” she says, “I

couldn't do this either, but somehow it all works." She advises people who think they want to be foster parents or to adopt children, to listen to their hearts. "Once you give into what you're supposed to do, your life will be so happy. "Our life was good, but now we're much happier." Tamra has left her teaching job and the family continues to still serve as a foster family. They currently have one foster child in their home.

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The Rodgers and Norman families took part in the Adoption Day celebration Thursday at the Pulaski County Juvenile Justice Complex in Little Rock when two children were adopted. The families joined Pulaski County juvenile court judge Joyce Warren, DHS Division of Children and Family Services staff, adoption advocates and families in a balloon release that celebrated the 711 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 waiting to have a family to call their own.

"Adoption Day is always a special day when we get to celebrate new families. It's also the perfect time to let everyone know there are hundreds of children in our state who are waiting to have their own adoption day and become part of a family that will love them forever," said Cecile Blucker, DCFS director.

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 also can become acquainted with waiting children by visiting www.adoptarkansas.org

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