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Adoption Day ceremony creates new families

10 children adopted by South Sound families as part of National Adoption Day

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Staff writer November 21, 2013 Updated 47 minutes ago

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Mark and Benita Gjurasic and Christa and Deanne Richardson welcome new members to their families at the annual Thurston County National Adoption Day Celebration. Video by Steve Bloom OLYPHOTO



Parents cried tears of joy Thursday as Thurston County Superior Court Judge Anne Hirsch finalized the adoptions of 10 children by six South Sound families during a public ceremony in Family Court in Tumwater.

“There are so many children in this world who don’t have parents and we want to help them,” Christa Richardson said of her and her wife’s motivation to adopt 2-year-old Quincy Richardson. The couple now has two adopted children and a 4-year-old foster daughter.

“They need homes, we want kids, they need parents,” Richardson said.

Hirsch said that typically, the legal formalities of finalizing adoptions happen privately in a judge’s chambers. But once a year since 2003, the Thurston County Superior Court has held a public adoption celebration as part of National Adoption Day festivities.

The public ceremony is meant to draw attention to children in foster care who need adoptive parents, Hirsch said.

"It's to teach the community about adoption and encourage people to consider adoption," Hirsch said. "There are thousands of kids in our state that are waiting to be adopted."

Mark Gjurasic, who has adopted 18 children during his lifetime, adopted four siblings — a 5-year-old girl, a 7-year-old boy, a 9-year-old boy and an 11-year-old girl — during Thursday's ceremony.

In 2012, there were 82 adoptions in Thurston County, and there were 113 in 2011. So far in 2013 there have been 67 adoptions, Hirsch said.

Hirsch said that across Washington, more than 9,800 children are in foster care, and of those, more than 1,500 have legally lost their biological parents and are waiting to be adopted.

Abuse and neglect are common reasons parents lose their parental rights, Hirsch said.

Joe and Lisa Rehberger spoke Thursday about their successful adoption of two girls, Teresa, 4, and Rosa, 2. Their new daughters have been welcomed to the family by their two older brothers, Luke, 10 and Dominic, 8.

Lisa Rehberger said it can be an emotional roller coaster to take in a foster child in the hopes of earning adoption rights, but it's worth it.

"Loving children is not hard to do and loving foster children is no different," she said.

Luke Rehberger added, "I'm glad we adopted because I wouldn't have anyone to teach basketball, soccer or golf to." Of his sister Rosa, he added, "She's almost always smiling, and when she's smiling, the rest of us have to, too."

Ashley Pope, a court-appointed special advocate for foster children, teared up as she watched the ceremony. In Pope's job, she works with foster children to make sure their best interests are being considered while they are under the state's care.

"It's days like today when you get to see children together with their forever families that makes it all worthwhile," she said. "It's a great thing, I couldn't be more happy for these families."

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