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## Adoption Day offers window into birth of new families

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Abigale Collins (left) shows Judge George N. Bowden that she is 3 years old as Abigale and her new brother, Michael (center), sign her adoption papers Friday morning at the Snohomish County Courthouse in Everett.



Mark Mulligan / The Herald

Seven-year-old Dylan Clementson holds on to his father Chris Clementson's hand during the adoption proceedings. Dylan and his brother Connor, 13, were both adopted by the Clementsons on Friday.



Mark Mulligan / The Herald

Mike Irvin hugs Victoria "Tori" Irvin, 12, after completing formal adoption proceedings during National Adoption Day on Friday in Snohomish County Superior Court in Everett.

By [Julie Muhlstein](#), Herald Columnist

Grandmas and granddads are new parents. An aunt is a mother, for the third time. One man, who had mentored a boy as a Big Brother, is now a father.

And 20 fortunate children have the love and stability of a forever family.

[National Adoption Day](#) was observed Friday in [Snohomish County Superior Court](#). Two judges presided over adoptions on a day meant to raise awareness of foster children -- about 100,000 nationwide -- awaiting permanent homes.

There were balloons, teddy bears and kids dressed in their birthday-party best. In a place where celebration isn't the norm, whole families posed for pictures with judges, who wore colorful leis over black robes for the occasion. Proceedings that are usually closed to the public were open.

Papers were signed and formalities followed, but [Judge George Bowden](#) and [Judge David Kurtz](#) took time to chat with each child and parent. They asked children about chores and pets. And Bowden said "one of my requirements is that parents take kids out for ice cream."

For some families, the red-letter day came after years of arduous effort and hope.

"Last Monday I turned 60, and on Friday I became a mom," said Linda Levinson, who adopted her 2-year-old grandson Levi. "I've had him since he was born," she said.

The Marysville woman said Levi's biological parents had their parental rights terminated. Born drug-dependent, Levi stayed in the hospital two months, Levinson said. "I was there every day," she added.

She and Levi live in the Smokey Point area with an older son, Shane Levinson, and his 9-year-old daughter Makayla. "We're an unconventional family, but it works," she said. "I'm grandma-mom, Shane is uncle-dad, and Makayla is cousin-sister."

Bowden let Levi and Makayla bang the gavel together.

Amber and Casey James of Monroe adopted 5-year-old Charles on Friday. On Adoption Day 2009, they adopted Charles' two older sisters. Temera is 10 now, and Cheyenne is 9. "He is my nephew, and the girls are his full siblings," Amber James said.

They have had the girls since Temera was 2 and Cheyenne was 6 months old. "Our goal was to adopt them. We were very lucky to get Charles," Amber James said.

Starr Irvin, 64, joked Friday that she had told friends she was going into labor. She and her husband Mike Irvin, also 64, adopted their 12-year-old granddaughter Victoria "Tori" Irvin. A seventh-grader at Granite Falls Middle School, Tori has been with them since she was a baby.

"We've been working toward adoption, but we wanted her to have a say," Starr Irvin said. Mike Irvin said he and his wife have raised six children. "She'll be the seventh -- all girls," he said. The Granite Falls couple's next-youngest daughter, Alexis, is 21.

Heidie and Tim Waxham, of Lake Stevens, adopted 2-year-old Autumn on Friday. Their 8-year-old son Bryce wore a "Big Brothers Rock" sweatshirt. They became licensed foster parents "so we could adopt her," said Heidie Waxham, adding that Autumn was born to one of Waxham's cousins.

The little girl's adoption was an extended family affair. Heidie Waxham's parents, who live in southwest Washington, were there to celebrate. They are the adoptive parents of Autumn's half-brother, who is 12.

Andrea and Nathan Vanderpool adopted 2-year-old Jenny, who will grow up with a sister nearly the same age. The Skagit County couple adopted 2-and-a-half-year-old Ella as an infant.

During a short program, Snohomish County [Executive John Lovick](#) read an Adoption Day proclamation. In our county, he said, more than 1,100 children are now in foster care. Of those, 140 are legally and permanently separated from parents and are waiting to be adopted.

Two Everett boys are among the lucky ones. Chris and Chrissie Clementson are the new parents of brothers Connor, 13, and 7-year-old Dylan. Chris Clementson met Connor as a Big Brothers volunteer.

"I looked into being a Big Sister to Dylan," Chrissie Clementson said. With tears in her eyes, she recalled the younger boy wanting to tag along on Connor's outings with her husband.

"This happened so fast, I didn't have to be a Big Sister," she said. "I got to be a mother."

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