

Kitsap Children Find Their "Forever Families"

By Chris Henry

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PORT ORCHARD —

Nine families, 15 new family members, dozens of balloons and one very crowded courtroom.

That was National Adoption Day in Kitsap County by the numbers.

Judge Anna Laurie on Friday presided over the annual celebration at the Kitsap County Courthouse, highlighting an eloquent solution to a difficult problem.

According to Laurie, herself adopted, there are more than a half-million children in foster care in the United States. More than 129,000 of them are eligible to be adopted.

"Many of these children dream of a permanent home and long for something as simple as a family dinner, where they know that a place will be set for them," Laurie wrote in a letter to the Kitsap Sun.

Although more than 50,000 children are adopted from foster care each year, sometimes by the foster parents who have cared for them, wait times for adoptions range from an average minimum of two years to five years or more. Clearly more families are needed.

Among the families on Friday stepping up to the plate were Jodi and Lance Thomason of Tacoma, adopting Sarah, 7, formerly a Kitsap resident.

The Thomasons didn't set out to adopt. Jodi was not able to have children, and they had accepted that. When they heard Sarah needed a home, however, they thought hard and prayed harder.

One of their biggest considerations was their ages. Jodi is 48; Lance is 51.

"We were concerned about being around for her as she got older and having the energy to keep up with her," Jodi said.

Prospective adoptive parents need to ask themselves such hard questions and answer them honestly," said Ann Kaluzny, adoption supervisor for the state's Department of Social and Health Services in Bremerton.

"You have to have that attitude 'as if she were born to you.' That's what we're looking for is total commitment," she said.

Eventually, the Thomasons' hearts guided them to a life-altering leap of faith, filling a void they weren't even aware of.

"It has added tremendously to our lives," Jodi said of becoming Sarah's parents. "If there was a hole there before, there is a mountain there now."

Hoops to jump through on the way to making the adoption official included a home study, background check and stacks of paperwork. Once Sarah moved in with the couple, there was a six-month waiting period before the adoption could be finalized. Jodi, on hiatus from her job in real estate because of the economy, has been able to stay home with Sarah during the transition. Lance is a long-haul trucker.

On Friday, Sarah, in a velvet dress and sparkling tiara, stood before the judge's bench. Her parents hands rested gently on either shoulder. She listened intently as the Thomasons dutifully pledged their willingness to make her their daughter, and she smiled broadly when Laurie said, "I now christen you 'Sarah Elizabeth Thomason,' princess for a day."

According to a national survey in 2007, 48 million Americans have considered adoption from the foster care system. If even a fraction of those followed through, Laurie said, more children would find their "forever family."

"These aren't the wealthy people of Kitsap County," said Laurie of the newly minted adoptive families. "They don't have their lives in order. They just have huge hearts."

National Adoption Day was instituted in 2000. Kitsap County has observed the celebration each year, with Kitsap's judges contending lottery-style for the opportunity to preside. Friday's adoption ceremony was the largest to date.

For more information on becoming an adoptive or foster parent, contact the Children's Administration of the Bremerton DSHS office, (360) 475-3688, or call the state's foster parent recruitment center at (888) 543-7414.

