

Local families grow on Adoption Day

Parents say adopted kids felt like theirs from the very start

By K.C. Mehaffey

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World photo/Mike Bonnicksen

Bernadino "Dino" Hamilton is greeted by his mom, Laura Hamilton, after the state quarterfinal football game between Cashmere and Omak high schools Saturday afternoon. Dino, a player on the Cashmere team, missed part of the game to be legally adopted by the Hamilton family as part of the Chelan-Douglas National Adoption Day.



World photo/K.C. Mehaffey

Cory and Paula Fetzer adopted their 3-year-old great niece, Rebecka, during a National Adoption Day celebration in Okanogan County Superior Court Friday. Here, Rebecka is posing while her father takes her picture with his phone to send to her 18-year-old sister, Ashley.

CASHMERE — "Dino, he just fits."

That's what Laura Hamilton said about her 15-year-old foster son, Bernadino "Dino" Contreras, two days before she and her husband, Clete, adopted him.

The Cashmere couple became Dino's legal parents on Saturday.

Hamilton said from the day Dino moved in with them 15 months ago he seemed like part of the family.

He was one of four children adopted by three families during a National Adoption Day ceremony and celebration at Foothills Middle School in Wenatchee.

Okanogan County held its celebration on Friday, when two couples each adopted a young child at Okanogan County Superior Court.

Three-year-old Rebecka was already an extended family member for Cory and Paula Fetzer, of Wauconda, when she went to live with them at four months old.

"She's my great-niece," Paula Fetzer said, but, "she's always called us mom and dad." They became her legal parents on Friday.

Andrew Kresek, a Tonasket carpenter, said he and his wife, Bethany, have fostered children for about three years.

Then, two years ago, when Kaden was just a baby, he was placed in their home. "He just felt like ours," Kresek said. "He came to live with us when he was two months old, and we just kind of took over as parents."

All three families said the decision to adopt seemed right from the very start. None of them planned to adopt on National Adoption Day, the timing just happened that way.

"We want our community to be aware of what a wonderful thing adoption is," said Okanogan County Judge Jack Burchard, who signed off on the adoptions in court Friday.

The courtroom was decorated with balloons and streamers. Cake, ice cream and soda pop donated by the local Safeway, Dairy Queen and Odom Corp. awaited the celebration to follow.

During her adoption, young Rebecka indicated she'd heard enough talking and questions from the judge. "It's time for a birthday," she told Burchard.

Tim Hargraves, Okanogan County CASA coordinator, said there are many foster children who are looking for adoptive homes.

Nationally, there are more than 500,000 foster children, and 123,000 of them are waiting to be adopted. In Washington state, more than 9,300 children live in foster care, and 1,300 are legally adoptable, he said.

Hargraves said that most foster children wait more than two years to find a family, and one in five wait five years or more. Some never find a permanent family, he said. Every year in the United States, more than 29,000 foster children become adults without ever becoming adopted.

"Every child deserves a forever family," said Sue Baker, executive director of the Chelan-Douglas CASA program, adding, "We're hoping the community will look at the numbers of children that are in our system, and step up and be that family."

Baker said it's hardest to find adoptive parents for teenagers, because many people want to raise children from the time they are little.

But that didn't stop Dino Contreras from hoping.

"I knew sometime I was going to eventually find someone," Dino said before his adoption.

Contreras had been in the foster care system for several years before he moved from Wenatchee to Cashmere to live with the Hamiltons in August 2009. He said the move was hard, at first. "It was a tough change, going from a school with like 600 kids in your class to like 100 kids, but I really like it now," he said.

He's involved in sports, and even agreed to miss playing in Saturday's Cashmere High School football playoff game to become part of the Hamilton family, although he hoped they'd finish the adoption in time to get to the second half of the game.

Laura Hamilton said she wanted the adoption to be complete before her husband goes to Afghanistan as a soldier with the U.S. Army Reserve in January.

Hamilton said that, to her, Dino was not like some other children she has fostered. "A lot are reserved, and keep to themselves. Dino was just himself," she said.

She has no qualms about adopting a teenager, and although he may soon be an adult. "He'll always have a place to come back to when he goes to college," she said. "And if he ever needs help, he'll always have a family to come home to."

Now, Dino not only has new parents, but new siblings — five of them, ranging in age from 11 to 22. And, the Hamiltons have an 11-year-old foster son as well.

To go with his new family, he picked out a new name — Bernadino Dwite Allen Hamilton — but he'll still go by Dino.

He said it took him quite a while to decide on his name. "I think it feels good because I still have my first name, that my mom gave me," he said.

K.C. Mehaffey: 997-2512

mehaffey@wenatcheeworld.com

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Andrew and Bethany Kresek adopted Kaden, 2, during a National Adoption Day celebration in Okanogan County Superior Court Friday. After the adoption, Kaden enjoyed M&Ms during a celebration with his new teddy bear.

