Family Reunification Day/Month Celebration Planning Toolkit

* Planning tips
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**Planning ideas and tips for your**

**Family Reunification Day event**

There’s no one right way to celebrate family reunification or host a Family Reunification Day event. Some events are as friendly as a reception with cake and punch, invitations to families and workers who support families, and a few remarks from a judge or child welfare official. Others are larger gatherings with local leaders and media, lots of families and activities, food and gifts donated by local businesses, and so on. Most events fall somewhere in between.

All celebrations are valuable contributions to supporting families who have worked or are working hard through the dependency process, to thanking the court and child welfare workers who invest themselves in this process, and to changing the community narrative about parents and families who need help.

Following are some tips and suggestions — please feel free to choose what works for you, or to add your own ideas. And most of all, enjoy!

**SAMPLE PLANNING TIMELINE:**

1.  Establish planning committee – 6 to 8 weeks before event is helpful

2.  Choose date, time and location as soon as possible – those details help the other steps fall into place.

4.  Consider which elements to try to include — snacks, photos, craft/activity tables, information/resource booths, local mascots, decorations, etc.

5. Reach out to ‘elements’ – resource booth folks (housing, employment, health, etc.), photographers, face painters, local mascots, businesses who might be willing to donate snacks, etc.

6. Will someone ‘preside’ over celebration? (i.e., welcome everyone, make comments, hand out family certificates, etc.?) Get them on board early in process.

7.  Work with the varied child welfare offices and groups – CASA, Parents for Parents Program, Office of Public Defense staff, court dependency staff, etc. – to help get the word out and to invite families and individuals.

8.  Invite speaker(s) to make brief comments – a parent who has gone through dependency who is willing to share story, a judge or attorney, or other supportive person(s).

9.  Send invitations to local community groups and businesses who have been supportive of parents working through problems.

10. Media outreach – send press release about two weeks before celebration, start doing social media outreach about same time.

**Proclamation Template**

Asking local leaders, such as County Commissioners or City Council or judicial bench members, to adopt a proclamation in support of Family Reunification Day or Month is a great way to inform them of the event and the reasons for having a celebration.

Proclamation language can also serve as a starting place for speaking points because it identifies the main messages behind the celebration, the main reasons for having a public celebration. Speakers can read the Proclamation as part of an event, or use the language to create their own key messages.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION MONTH Proclamation Language (draft)

WHEREAS, the family is the primary source of love, identity, self-esteem and support for children and adults, and provides the foundation of our communities; and

WHEREAS, the bond between child, parents and family members provides the nurturing and security that is critical for personal growth and development; and

WHEREAS, parents can encounter problems that require attention and assistance to ensure the safety and caring support of their children and their family; and

WHEREAS, because of this important bond, reunification with parents and family is the best option and preferred outcome for children removed from their homes and placed in foster care; and

WHEREAS, each year, thousands of parents work hard through the dependency process to improve and grow, and thousands of children are successfully reunified with their parents and families; and

WHEREAS, family reunification also takes investment by extended family members, social workers, foster parents, service providers, attorneys, courts and the community; and

WHEREAS, celebrating Family Reunification Day is an opportunity to recognize and support families who have successfully reunified with their children, those families currently working through the process, and the many support persons who help these families;

NOW, THEREFORE, I [We], \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, proclaim [Month, Year] to be

***Family Reunification Month***

In the **State of Washington**, and urge all residents to join us in this special observance in support of families.

 Signed this \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ day of [Month, Year]

**Media Release Template**

This is a basic template to which you can add your event’s details; a quote frome someone involved (a judge or commissioner, a local child welfare official, anyone involved in the event); who is sponsoring or involved in the event; and so on. You can put it on your letterhead if you have one, and email or mail it to your local media outlets – newspapers, TV stations, local radio outlets (email is preferable because many of them will cut and paste it onto their web sites). Send it out about two weeks before the event.

Remember, this is your press release – change whatever you see fit.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE FROM: [Main Event Contact Person]

DATE [XXX]

*Family Reunification Day [YEAR]*

[Your] County will celebrate reunified families on [Date]; public welcome

Parents who work hard to overcome significant problems and reunify their families will be recognized at a Family Reunification Day celebration hosted by [*XXX*] County [Superior Court? Family Court? CASA Office? A partnership of local court and child welfare offices?] on June XX at the [*location*].

The public is welcome to join in the celebration, which will take place at/from [*start time—end time*]. The celebration will include [some details -- *a photographer, visits by super heroes, refreshments, crafts and other activities]*.

[QUOTE FROM SOMEONE INVOLVED, such as -- *“Often times, members of the public don’t realize how hard these parents work for many months to understand and overcome the complex issues and personal struggles that caused their separation from their children,” said Superior Court Commissioner Michelle Ressa. “They can’t achieve this without a strong determination to succeed, to accept responsibility and bring their families back together. We are very happy to celebrate this important milestone in the journey of a family.”]*

This is the [*which time? Second year? Fourth?]* [*XXX*] County has celebrated family reunification, which involves the parents working through the dependency process and the support of extended families, they community, court and child welfare workers. The primary goal of dependency — the legal process in which dependent children are taken into the oversight of the state because of deficiencies in adequate care and safety within the home — is reunification of the family whenever possible.

[*Feel free to add local statistics if you like – how many families completed dependency and reunified with their children in your county in the past year, etc*. – *or other local information, like local sponsors of the event.*]

In 2018, Washington State launched a statewide celebration of Family Reunification Month, set in June, to encourage communities to celebrate the hard work and importance of families healing and coming back together. For more information on the launch of the annual statewide Family Reunification Month celebration, visit [www.courts.wa.gov/familyreunification](http://www.courts.wa.gov/familyreunification) .

**CONTACT:** *Two or three contacts for the local celebration – include both email addresses AND phone numbers.*

**OTHER OUTREACH TIPS**

 Don’t forget the power of social media in this day and age. If you have a Facebook page or a Twitter or Instagram page for your office or court, post your event and your messaging on those. Ask friends to post the event and share it around, or ask local community groups to do so. People are always looking to “feed the beast” of social media, which is much more effective if you have any nice photos to share with it (perhaps something from a previous celebration?) Don’t forget the messaging! Just a short sentence about celebrating parents who put in the hard work to learn, grow and improve for the sake of their families and children, and thanking community members who support these parents, can be a powerful statement.

**PHOTO RELEASE FORM**

Photo release forms aren’t mandatory, particularly if an event has been advertised as open to the public and media, however if you feel more comfortable getting a release before posting photos on social media or online or in a flyer, here is an easy template to use.

 I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ hereby grant and authorize \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the right to take, edit, exhibit, publish and make use of any and all pictures or video taken of me for any lawful promotional materials including, but not limited to, newsletters, flyers, posters, brochures, advertisements, fundraising letters, annual reports, press kits and submissions to journalists, websites, social networking sites and other print and digital communications, without payment or any other consideration.

This authorization extends to all languages, media, formats and markets now known or later discovered. This authorization shall continue indefinitely, unless I otherwise revoke this authorization in writing.

I waive the right to approve any finished product in which my likeness appears, including written or electronic copy. I hereby hold harmless and release \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from all liability, petitions, and causes of action which I, my heirs, representative, executors, administrators, or any other persons may make while acting on my behalf or on behalf of my estate.

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_