



Planning suggestions and tips for your National Adoption Day event

There's no one right way to celebrate foster adoptions or host a National Adoption Day event. Some events are as simple as a reception with cake and punch, some invited families and information booths. Others are large events with local celebrities and media, many adoptions, food and gifts donated by local businesses, and so on. Most events fall somewhere in between.

All NAD celebrations are valuable contributions to raising awareness of the many foster children awaiting adoption, both in Washington state and around the U.S.

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

TIMELINE OVERVIEW (detailed information follows):

- 1. Establish planning committee.**
- 2. Who will preside over adoptions/event?**
- 3. Choose location, time and date.**
- 4. Work with DSHS to locate foster families willing to adopt at your event.**
- 5. Invite speaker(s) to make brief comments.**
- 6. Order teddy bears/banner from NAD before Nov. 1**
- 7. Send invitations to local parent/adoption/foster groups, businesses.**
- 8. Media outreach**
- 9. Details (snacks, photos, craft tables, local mascots, decorations, etc.)**

Suggestions/tips:

- 1. Committee** — A planning committee will help you with ideas, help with community connections, and to disburse the work of putting on an event. Suggestions for a committee: Judge or commissioner who will preside at the event; court





administrator or a representative; local DSHS Children's Administration adoption worker (see number 4); a representative of a local adoptive parents' group and/or foster parents' group; a representative of a local active business or Chamber of Commerce. Other possibilities: Adoption attorney, a CASA worker, an adoptive parent, a former foster child.

2. **Judicial officer** — If the judge or commissioner who will preside over or speak at your event is not on the planning committee, make sure to coordinate with and keep her/him informed of plans.
3. **Location/date/time** — Most Washington events are held in family or juvenile courts, however a number of celebrations (such as in Chelan and Cowlitz counties), events have been held in local community centers that have donated the space. The official National Adoption Day for 2008 is Saturday, November 15, however most events in Washington are held on the Friday so courts don't have to open on Saturday. Some Washington events are also held on Thursday (Thurston County) or other days of the week prior to or after the declared date. Typical events are around two hours long, often in mid-afternoon, but again, this varies a great deal.
4. **Work with DSHS** — The adoption workers of DSHS Children's Administration are prepared to work with courts interested in hosting NAD events. They know families who are adopting or who have adopted foster children, and they know local adoption agencies or parents' groups. They can help with planning and/or connecting with these families. To find the best person in your region, contact Pam Kramer, DSHS Adoption Program Manager, at caip300@dshs.wa.gov, or at (360) 902-7968.
5. **Speakers** — No long speeches are necessary, but NAD events often include a few remarks by the presiding judge or commissioner; a county official; and/or a local adoptive parent or an adult who was once a foster child (adopted or not). We have provided speaking points in this toolkit (in the "Materials" section), and the original state Supreme Court proclamation in support of NAD, which can be read. Also for 2008, Governor Chris Gregoire may issue a proclamation in support of National Adoption Day that can be read by the judge or another official. (We will notify you as soon as such a proclamation is finalized).
6. **Order supplies** — The National Adoption Day organization provides inexpensive teddy bears for distribution to children at the events, as well as banners that can be hung up for decoration. If you are interested in these,





the order forms for the teddy bears (see “Materials” section of this toolkit for the order form) **must be received by the toy company with a check or money order no later than Nov. 5**, though we recommend a bit earlier, in order to ensure delivery by your event date. To order a banner or other materials, see the Web site at www.nationaladoptionday.org, **where you can register your event** and qualify for the banner and teddy bears and other assistance.

7. **Invitations** — To bring the community in to your celebration, you can send brief invitation letters or cards to individuals and groups that might be interested in the event (often the same folks you might invited to sit on a planning committee), such as adoptive parent groups, foster parent groups, adoption attorneys, adoption workers, active local groups or businesses, and certainly court and DSHS staff members. You can also invite these groups to set up information tables at the event for anything that might be of help or interest to the families.

8. **Media outreach** — Communications officers at the Administrative Office of the Courts and DSHS will work on media outreach for all Washington courts that plan events. We send out statewide press releases with fact sheets, media advisories to the individual newspapers and television or radio stations in each county having an event; email and call specific reporters and editors; we look for local families who are willing to speak to the media so we can include them in press materials. **All we ask is that you help us out by providing us with details of your event, and keep us informed of any changes!**
If you would like to do some media outreach on your own, please feel free to write press releases or call reporters you think will be interested. A template of a press release is included in the “Materials” section of this toolkit. Remember, this is a community event and we want as much press as possible to raise awareness of foster children waiting for adoption. NAD events are encouraged and sanctioned by the state Supreme Court. Whether you invite the press into the actual adoption hearings at your event is your court’s choice — many courts in Washington do (with the parents’ permission, of course), while other courts have a reception area for photos and snacks and media interviews with families, but keep the actual hearings private.

9. **Details** — What kind of decorations, snacks or activities to include in your event is entirely up to you. You can order decorative banners from www.nationaladoptionday.org. Balloons also make inexpensive and fun decorations that children love. **Posters and brochures** can be placed around the court in the couple of weeks leading up to your celebration (see “Materials” section for templates you can copy). **Snacks** can be as simple as cake and





punch, or you can go further with finger food tables, cookies, etc. A **children's craft table** with coloring sheets or other activities have been common at events to keep children busy while adoptions happen or adults talk (**TIP:** The children will be dressed up, so make sure they are non-messy crafts and snacks!) Other ideas for entertaining children include having a television in a corner somewhere with a **cartoon movie** running; a volunteer to **read story books** to children (there are some great children's books about adoption); or having some **books available** for them to read themselves. Other things that have been successful at NAD events: Having a 'greeter' to welcome any speakers or volunteers or media as they begin arriving (or a sign-in table can be set up and give participants a place to ask questions); placing **disposable cameras** around so families can bring home photos of their special event; making sure there is a good **photo time with the judge** following an adoption; having a **special certificate** for the new family ready for the judge to sign (see two templates in the "Materials" section); having **small gifts** for the children, which can often be donated by local businesses; remember the adoptive children will also likely have siblings and they should not be left out of the celebrating/gifting; inviting a **local mascot** to join the event (in Seattle, the Mariner Moose pays a visit); allowing room for **information booths** is a great way for local groups (anything to do with children, schools, families, etc.) to get their own word out about local resources for families; asking for small **donations** of funds, food or toys from local community groups or businesses has helped many courts provide a very inexpensive event for their community.

10. **Afterward** — Send thank you cards to everyone who planned, volunteered, donated, or worked the celebration, including judicial officers, court staff and the DSHS workers. They made your event possible, and you may want their help again next year!

Many Washington courts have found that National Adoption Day events, with smiling families and children flooding the court or DSHS offices, are among their favorite days all year long. We hope you will find the same thing. Please don't hesitate to contact any member of the Washington State National Adoption Day Steering Committee for help.

Enjoy!

