

State and Child Welfare Partners Promote Need for Adoptive Parents

When you've taken more than 130 children into your home as foster parents, most would think they've done more than enough to help others. But for Dave and Stephanie Wooge of Franklin County, adopting a few of those who needed a permanent home was just the next logical step.

For the past 17 years, the Wooges have taken placements of many children with various levels of behavioral issues, developmental needs, mental health issues, educational needs, medical diagnoses, physical challenges, various cultures, and histories of abuse.

But when the opportunity presented itself to make some of those children a part of their family, the Wooges, who live in a rural home outside of Ottawa, decided it was the right thing to do. They have adopted or taken guardianship of seven children, with the last three being a sibling set.

Stephanie Wooge said she and her husband first became interested in foster care when a relative served as a foster parent to a child. Once aware of the need, they began incorporating foster children into their own home, where they also have parented two biological children.

"We realized if we don't do it, who will?" Stephanie said. "All children deserve to have a home, to experience family life."

The Wooge family met with Governor Sam Brownback on Oct. 30, to participate in the official proclamation signing of November 2015 as Adoption Month in Kansas. During the month, the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF), its contractors and community partners are taking part in a series of events to call attention to the need for more adoptive and foster families.

"It hasn't been difficult integrating the adopted children into our family," Stephanie said. "It's been that way for our biological children ever since the

oldest was two years old. The biggest reward is watching the kids grow and learn how to be a part of a family. But that can also be a challenge for our adopted children learning how our family works.”

DCF contracts with KVC and Saint Francis Community Services to provide foster care and adoption services for Kansas. DCF and its partners hope more families like the Wooges will recognize the need for adoptive families during November. Currently, there are approximately 350 children available for adoption in Kansas.

“Every child deserves to know the love and stability that a healthy family can offer,” DCF Secretary Phyllis Gilmore said. “When returning home is not a safe option, we want children to have choices when it comes to both temporary and permanent care.”

Most children available for adoption have experienced abuse and or neglect. Every attempt is made to maintain a child’s connection to his/her relatives, culture and community. Relatives are given first consideration as a placement option. Although many children have an adoption resource identified, hundreds wait for a loving family to pick them.

The Wooges are one of eight families nominated for the Kathy Reilly Adoptive Family Award, an annual honor given by KVC to one of their adoptive families “who has risen above and beyond with regards to adoption.” The award will be announced during KVCs National Adoption Day celebration in Olathe on Nov. 20.

I’m so glad the State is celebrating Adoption Month, because there are so many more kids in the system who need a family,” Destiny Wooge said, the oldest of the three siblings recently adopted into the Wooge family. “Hopefully by raising awareness, a lot more children will get to experience the love and affection of a family.”

Nov. 21 is National Adoption Day this year. In several locations across Kansas, judges will finalize adoptions that have been coordinated by KVC and St. Francis. As the final step of the adoption process, these events are often emotional culminations of months of effort. Celebrations at Shawnee County Courthouse (9 a.m.) and Johnson County Courthouse (10 a.m.) will be open to

the public and to media. On Nov. 20, a similar celebration of adoptions will be held at Wyandotte County Courthouse (1 p.m.).

Numerous other events will occur statewide to celebrate and promote adoption. Churches across the state will recognize Adoption Sunday on Nov. 8. DCF and its partner organizations will participate in the following events during the month:

Adoption Month Events

- Nov. 5, 6 KCSL will sponsor the Governor's Conference on Abused and Neglected Children at the Capital Plaza Hotel in Topeka.
- Nov. 6 KVC will host a Family Fun Night at Gage Park in Topeka.
- Nov. 14 KVC will hold a tailgate party rally for adoption at the football game at Pittsburg State University.
- Nov. 20 KVC will host a Carnival Night at the Ball Conference Center in Olathe.
- Nov. 21 Saint Francis will host an adoption celebration at Exploration Place in Wichita.

Also, a photo tribute to adoption by KCSL called Klicks for Kids is displayed at numerous locations across the state. Displays will be at:

Klicks for Kids Locations

- Oct. 29-Nov. 9 Olathe Westside Church of the Nazarene
- Nov. 2-30 Topeka Civic Theater
- Nov. 2-16 Lyon County Bank Branches
- Nov. 3-30 Topeka Capitol Building Rotunda
- Nov. 5-11 West Side Church of the Nazarene in Wichita
- Nov. 6 Governor's Conference for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect at the Capital Plaza Hotel in Topeka

Nov. 12-30 Exploration Place in Wichita,

Nov. 16-30 Emporia Library

To learn more about the children who are currently available for adoption, visit www.adoptkids.org or call 877-457-5430. On the website, you can view photos and read profiles of each child available for adoption.

How the Media and Public Can Help

Please help us spread awareness of the need for adoptive families by displaying our posters and sharing our social media posts on National Adoption Month. Next week, broadcasters will receive the National Ad Council's new adoption public service announcement, with Kansas-specific contact information. Please share this message throughout November.