



Sisters now have a family

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Two-year-old Celine and 6-month-old Antoinette may not realize it, but they have much to give thanks for when they nibble on turkey Thanksgiving Day.

Their biggest blessing? Just seeing one another across a dining table.

Half-sisters by birth, the Saginaw Township children were products of a broken home and nearly were cast adrift in a state child protection system that might have placed them in separate residences.

But Tuesday, Steve and Rhonda Krugielki eliminated those fears as they formally adopted Antoinette and gave her a permanent home in the township with Celine, whom they adopted earlier this year.

"The chances are they wouldn't be together," said 27-year-old Rhonda Krugielki, the girls' biological aunt who has cared for them since shortly after their births. "We were the only chance for both the kids to be part of the same family, for them to see each other."

Antoinette was among 13 children who found adoptive families Tuesday in Saginaw County as part of the third annual Michigan Adoption Day.

Some toddled. Others bounded. But nearly all of the children -- between 10 months and 12 years old -- seemed eager to receive their adoption certifications from Probate Judge Faye M. Harrison during a ceremony at the State Office Building, 411 E. Genesee.

Harrison said the event's goal was to highlight the need for adoption of thousands of children statewide. State adoption officials and judges are finalizing greater numbers of adoptions than a decade ago under a new streamlined process, but they still can't keep pace with the number of children who need homes.

Last year, Harrison approved 86 adoptions of children through the Saginaw County Department of Human Services, but 108 more children became available for placement, said Ann Shea, the department's supervisor of foster care and adoption.

The department now has 180 children available for adoption; in nearly all cases, a judge has terminated the rights of the biological parents because of abuse or neglect.

"There's always a need," Shea said. "We never get caught up."

Aside from a plea for adoptive parents, the event showcased the joy of youngsters finding permanent homes.

"To infinity and beyond!" exclaimed 9-year-old Deondre Reason, minutes after his adoption by his biological great-aunt, Janice Reason, 37, of Saginaw.

Meanwhile, Deondre's brothers whom Reason also adopted -- 12-year-old Tony and 7-year-old Nehemiah - - were letting loose of their energy by doing cartwheels and flips in the state building's parking lot.

"It's certainly different to be their momma," said a laughing and exasperated Janice Reason, who has cared for the brothers for two years. "This is going to be a wonderful Thanksgiving, especially for the boys."

Janice Reason and the Krugielkis are typical of many of the parents who adopt children through the state Department of Human Services. Shea said relatives or foster parents adopt 93 percent of the children.

Felicia Little, 24, and her husband, Michael, 27, fall into that mold too. The Saginaw couple nearly doubled the size of their household Tuesday by adopting her biological nephews -- 9-year-old Robert, 7-year-old Dyjuan -- and their 5-year-old niece, Felicia.

They already are raising their own biological sons -- 7-year-old Miesha and 4-year-old Niesha -- and they hope to adopt their 10-month-old nephew, Michael, next year. They now are caring for him. Felicia Little said her main goal is to keep all the siblings together, and she was breathing easier Tuesday when the children had their certificates in hand. The adoption process included weekly visits from foster care and adoption workers beginning in July, when a judge ruled the children's biological mother could not properly care for them.

"It's very calming now," Little said. "I didn't want anything to go wrong."

Adoption workers say most children have lived months or years with their new parents, making the transition easier. Celine Krugielki certainly seemed no exception, as she played with her adoptive parents before the ceremony.

"Who am I?" Rhonda Krugielki asked.

"Momma," Celine laughed.

Rhonda Krugielki wasn't surprised: "We've been momma and daddy since the day both (girls) came into our home," she said. v

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