



Clad in matching red and black-checked shirts, the new family of five hugged and cried as a virtual gallery of teary-eyed friends and loved ones clapped and offered congratulations. Their joy was infectious, even through a computer screen. The judge’s audible pen strokes made everything official as he signed the paperwork recognizing the legal adoption of two young children, both clearly thrilled to be a part of this newly minted and unique family.

Such was the scene in virtual courtrooms across Los Angeles County on Saturday, Nov. 21, as judges, social workers, attorneys, child advocates and others gathered online to formally recognize the adoption of 149 children from foster care. Marking the 21st anniversary of National Adoption Day, Los Angeles joined hundreds of jurisdictions across the country to finalize adoptions for thousands of children and youth who finally found their “forever families.”

Debbie Reza Mamic watched the proceedings from her home, unable to keep from smiling at the happiness radiating from her monitor. As the sole adoption finalization liaison at the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), she was instrumental in making this year’s virtual event happen. A veteran social worker of 24 years, the last 15 of which have been with DCFS, Debbie assists in the coordination of four adoption events per year – the largest of which is National Adoption Day in November – to finalize adoptions for children and youth waiting for a permanent home.

“Adoption is truly the happy part of this work,” Debbie said. “These are kids who – for one reason or another – couldn’t go home, and I love being able to see them find their forever family.”

More than 80,000 children have been adopted nationwide through National Adoption Day, which is a time to bring parties together to focus solely on finalizing pending adoptions. It also serves as an opportunity for child welfare agencies to celebrate families that adopt and to raise awareness for the children and youth in need of loving, permanent homes.

The first National Adoption Day was held in 2000, founded by a coalition of national partners that included the Alliance for Children’s Rights, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Freddie Mac Foundation, Congressional Coalition on Adoption and Children’s Action Network. The event has its roots in Southern California, inspired by the innovative efforts of Michael Nash, former presiding judge of the Los Angeles County Superior Court, Juvenile Division, who began organizing “Adoption Saturdays” during his time on the bench. The Saturday before Thanksgiving was specifically chosen as the annual day for the event – a time symbolic of loving families gathering together in the spirit of gratitude.

**NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY**

**149 CHILDREN BEING WELCOMED INTO A FOREVER HOME**  
More than half of the children adopted will remain with their siblings! Twenty-four percent of the children adopted are 10 years or older. Virtual adoption hearings were held November 21, 2020 for a total of 92 families.

**NUMBER OF FOSTER CHILDREN AWAITING ADOPTION 2,700**  
Nearly 22,000 children and youth in LA County have been removed because it is unsafe for them to remain home. Of those children, nearly 2,400 are between the ages of 18 to 21 and do not have a permanent, stable home.

**YOUTH IN CALIFORNIA WHO AGED OUT OF FOSTER CARE WITHOUT A FAMILY 3,037**  
More than 60,000 children are in out-of-home care statewide, with 14,436 waiting to be adopted. 5,241 adoptions of youth in foster care were finalized in 2019.

**21 YEARS OF OBSERVING NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY**  
Nov. 21st marks the 21st anniversary of National Adoption Day, which began in Los Angeles County in 1997 under the leadership of former Presiding Judge Michael Nash and became a national celebration in 2000. Adoption Day is a collaborative effort of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, Juvenile Court, the Alliance for Children’s Rights, Public Counsel and hundreds of pro bono attorneys coming together to finalize a large number of adoptions.

The adoption process bestows substantial benefits to parents and children alike. Every child deserves the chance to grow up in a stable, loving household, a key ingredient for healthy child development. A simple piece of paper can have a profound symbolic effect on adopted children and their parents, positively impacting their psychological, emotional and even physical wellbeing.

Unfortunately, busy court schedules make it challenging to find time to hold adoption hearings, which often take a backseat to more urgent matters. Given this reality, arranging to have the courtrooms open on a select weekend, with court staff, attorneys and social workers all volunteering their time, gives families the chance to have their day in court.

A self-proclaimed “Jack-of-all-trades,” Debbie serves in a variety of capacities and works closely with a number of external partners to make sure the pieces fit together.

“As liaison, I help with the referring of cases to pro bono attorneys, troubleshoot any problems that arise from the point of referral through adoption finalization, and help with the coordination of Adoption Days,” Debbie said. “While I don’t actually do line work anymore, this work is important to keeping the adoption process moving.”

Indeed, without her behind-the-scenes coordination, many of the adoptions finalized through Los Angeles’s Adoption Days would take significantly longer, leaving children and adoptive families in limbo primarily because of bureaucratic delays. Before the pandemic, she was typically providing support for 250-400 cases at a time, each representing a child or youth waiting for their adoption to be finalized. During 2020, this number grew to more than 1,000 cases due to temporary court closures and limitations on the time that many attorneys were available to do pro bono work.

In previous years, National Adoption Day in Los Angeles has been festive, complete with balloons, face painting, giveaways for the kids and special guests, including celebrities, Disney characters and even a monkey that presided over hearings alongside the judge one year. Although this year’s event was entirely virtual, the circumstances did not dampen the excitement that was apparent across the board for all who participated from their respective remote locations.

The 2020 event kicked off early in the morning with a [video](#) that included inspiring remarks from DCFS Director Bobby Cagle and other child welfare leaders, as well as appearances from actors Daniel Bucatinsky and Willie Garson, both of whom are proud adoptive parents. Willie shared a touching photo that he took with his son on their own Adoption Day, reminding families to cherish the joy and noting that the occasion is one that families will remember for years to come as they begin a new adventure.

All in all, 92 families became whole at this year’s event thanks to extensive efforts of individuals like Debbie.



Read [La Opinión](#) article [here](#) to meet the two families who opened their heart and home to children in foster care.

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