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Giving thanks for families



Tribune Photo/Andy Loree
David and Mandy Anderson sit with their children (from left to right) Jayden, 13 months, Christopher, 3, Alex, 4 and Frankie, 2, in the couple's Grand Haven home. The Andersons adopted Carlos, Alex and Frankie last year.

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BY ASHER PIMPLETON

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Long before the David and Mandy Anderson got pregnant, they had already made the decision to adopt.

"We had wanted to adopt all along," said Mandy Anderson.

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"Adoption was just an open option," added her husband, David.

After six months of waiting for Catholic Social Services to find a child for them to adopt, the Grand Haven couple met the three little boys who would soon become new additions to their family.

Since siblings Alex, Christopher and Frankie officially became Andersons in September 2002, David and Mandy said that life has never been the same.

"You find yourself saying things you never thought you would say -- such as, 'Stop licking your brother,' and 'Don't drink out of that puddle,'" David said. "And I now know the theme song to 'Bob the Builder' and sometimes even end up humming it to myself."

The Andersons are just one example of the four families in Ottawa County that will have their adoptions finalized at the first-ever National Adoption Day celebration at the county's Fillmore Street Complex, 12120 Fillmore St. in West Olive, this coming Tuesday morning. The ceremony will take place at the Ottawa County Circuit Court Family Division, Juvenile Services Department, from 10 a.m. to noon.

Since the event will take place two days before Thanksgiving, the theme for the day will be "Giving Thanks for Families."

"We think it's a great way to bring some public attention to the positive side that the courts can be involved with adoptions," said Kevin Bowling, Ottawa County Friend of the Court. "And we're looking forward to bringing in some of the agencies that we collaborate with on a regular basis."

Family Independence Agency personnel, along with several private agencies -- including Bethany Christian Services, Child & Family Services, Catholic Social Services and The Adoptive Family Support Network -- will be available to answer questions and provide information. The public is also invited to attend adoption confirmation hearings.

According to statistics from the Family Independence Agency, 4,615 children were available for adoption in Michigan at the end of the 2002 fiscal year. During that same year, 2,833 adoptions were finalized.

Last year, five adults were adopted by Ottawa County parents, according to the county clerk's office. So far this year, four

have been adopted.

Bowling said that although that type of adoption is rare, it does occur. He added that reasons for this type of adoption can range from the adoptee having limited mental capacity to someone wishing to carry on a family name.

"It's not a common occurrence, but it does happen," he said.

Statistics show an increase in foreign adoptions from five in 2002 to 18 this year.

The amount of private agency adoptions dipped slightly from 72 in 2002 to 71 this year.

"We hope that this event will help educate the public about the adoption process and the number of children who need permanent loving homes," said Pat VerDuin, Adoption Day coordinator.

Although Ottawa County will celebrate National Adoption Day on Nov. 25, other places in the country will celebrate it today.

"During National Adoption Month, we recognize America's adoptive and foster families," said President George Bush in a prepared statement. "We also commit to helping all of our children, including those waiting in foster care, find safe permanent, and loving homes."

And a permanent home is what the Andersons are providing Alex, Christopher and Frankie.

Although the children are well adjusted to their new home now, Mandy said it was still a difficult process for the boys.

"It was (hardest) on Alex," she said.

Then-three-year-old Alex was still attached to his foster mother at the time the boys moved in with the Andersons. Christopher was 22 months old and Frankie was just seven months.

"To him, she was mommy," Mandy said of Alex and his foster mother.

The boys moved in exactly nine months after Mandy gave birth to a son, Jaden.

However, Mandy said that Alex has now adjusted to life at the Anderson house.

"He's done very well," she said. "We've been lucky that they've been able to adjust so well. (Alex) is the absolute best big brother."

While some may choose to adopt from foreign countries, Mandy said they preferred to provide a home for youngsters right in their area.

"I just think there are so many kids out there locally," she said. "I'm not about to solve China's problems."

The Andersons said they would encourage anyone to adopt.

"I think adoption is often seen as an option of last resort for people who have exhausted all chances of having a biological child -- sort of a second-best option," Mandy said. "I believe that adopted children can be a wonderful addition to any family, if biological children are present or not."

Although raising four children does not leave a lot of time for other things, the Andersons say it is worth it.

"(I) couldn't ask for a better bunch of kids," Mandy said.

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