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From 'foster' to family: 20 local children find lasting homes during National Adoption Month

Littleton, Colo. – As families gather around the table to give thanks this holiday season, dozens of parents are counting a new blessing in their lives—the adoption of a foster child.

Twenty Arapahoe County foster children were welcomed into their 'forever families' during Arapahoe County's Nov. 5 special court proceedings for National Adoption Month. Families, friends, caseworkers and supporters filled the courtroom and cheered with teary eyes as Chief Judge William Sylvester of the 18th Judicial District signed final adoption papers for each child.

Arapahoe County's Department of Human Services sought permanent homes for the children, who had been victims of abuse or neglect. While the County makes every effort to reunify children with their parents or relatives, sometimes concerns for the child's well-being and safety go unresolved, and a small percentage become legally free for adoption.

"These 16 families have been patiently waiting to complete the dream of adoption and say 'yes' to supporting a child for a lifetime," said Commissioner Frank Weddig. "We thank them from the bottom of our hearts for giving a loving, stable home to foster children who have experienced trauma and hurt."

In total, 136 youth have been adopted in 2010 through the County's foster care program. In many cases, kids are adopted by the foster family opened its home to them for temporary care. Foster parents Christopher and Noel M. of Aurora celebrated the adoption of Lexi, a two-year-old toddler who had been in their care for more than a year. Lexi joins brother, Jeremiah, age 5, who also was adopted from Jefferson County's foster care system during National Adoption Month last year.

"After discovering that I am unable to have children, we felt that our life experience would make us a good fit for children in foster care," said Noel. "The best part of completing our adoptions during National Adoption Month is that my kids have the opportunity to see that other families are created this way and it does not make them weird or strange, but that it is special and a little magical too. And every November, we can celebrate the anniversary of becoming a family."

During her foster placement, Lexi was diagnosed with a genetic condition that has left her mostly blind, although she can see bright lights and dark contrasts. That means she can reach out for her new family pets, a black cat named Guinness and a dachshund named Benson. Noel and Christopher have embraced their daughter's special needs, and accompany her to preschool at the Anchor Center for the Blind, where she will learn to read Braille, use a cane and succeed in life with her disability.

Many kids are still awaiting their forever families. There currently are 34 children in Arapahoe County who are waiting to be adopted. In addition, there are approximately 600 foster children at any given time who need a temporary home until they can return home, be adopted or live independently. The County also needs mentors and volunteers who can help the foster care program succeed at encouraging families and youth.

If you would like to learn more about foster care, adoption or volunteering for Arapahoe County, please call 303-636-1KID, or attend a monthly information session. The next session will be held at 6 p.m., Jan. 4, 2011 at Arapahoe County CentrePoint Plaza (14980 E. Alameda Dr. Aurora). For more information, please visit www.collaborativefostercare.com.

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To download photos, please click on the following link: <ftp://www.co.arapahoe.co.us/Pub/CM/Photos/Adoption>

LexiandFamily.jpg: Christopher and Noel of Aurora enjoy a moment with their adoptive children during the National Adoption Month celebration at the Arapahoe County District Courthouse.

NoelandLexi.jpg: Lexi, age 2, can't see details due to genetic blindness, but she can make out the brightness of the sun and find comfort in the embrace of her adoptive mother, Noel.

Adoption.jpg: Christopher and Noel of Aurora adopted Lexi, a two-year old foster child, during Arapahoe County's National Adoption Month celebration in November.