

# The Miami Herald

Posted on Wed, Nov. 24, 2010

## Adoptive families celebrate good fortune

BY EILEEN SOLER

Special to The Miami Herald

Rosa Gordon of Pembroke Pines knows that bloodlines are sometimes not enough to tie families together. But heartstrings work just fine.

Gordon is the mother of two biological children she calls "bios" and three adopted sons, brothers for whom she wrangled "the system" for five years to keep as her own.

From that experience, Gordon founded nonprofit Foster Care and Adoption Community Solutions, which provides parent-led support groups up-to-date news about legislative changes as well as friendly guidance through the oft-daunting maze of case workers, therapists, guardians, child advocates and lawyers.

"As a foster and adopted parent, I saw the good and the bad in the system and I promised myself that when the adoption of my sons was finalized, I would dedicate myself to making the process better," Gordon said.

Her group was among the many that celebrated the union of new families during National Adoption Month events and ceremonies in November.

With 463,000 children in foster homes throughout the United States and more than 114,000 available for adoption, the activities were also intended to drive home a message that more help is needed.

ChildNet, Broward's state-appointed lead child welfare agency, kicked off the month by honoring adoptive families Nov. 6 at the Family Festival in Pompano Beach.

CEO Emilio Benitez said the agency's 2009-10 fiscal year "ended on a high note."

The agency cheered 202 adoptions completed during the year but raised awareness for 219 of the 1,900 children in Broward foster homes still waiting to become permanent sons and daughters to loving parents.

On Nov. 13, at Delevoe Park in Fort Lauderdale, Children's Home Society of Florida's Intercoastal Division hosted the fourth annual Family Empowerment Day.

The organization, founded in 1902, provides services including parenting education, child abuse prevention workshops, foster placement and adoption assistance to families of 2,500 Broward children every year.

Children end up in foster care when they are separated from biological parents by court

order because of abuse or neglect. Children up for adoption have been permanently removed from their homes.

Gordon's organization marked its first-year anniversary at a picnic Nov. 13 for about 40 kids and parents at John Williams Park in Hollywood.

David Rozental of Pembroke Pines, a member of the group, said that he and his wife Lisa decided to become foster parents nearly two years ago and went through the required 30-hour training program, numerous background checks and frequent home studies to become licensed.

Then came the couple's "once-in-a-million" chance to not only become parents of a baby but two babies at the same time.

"We were licensed in the morning and had twins in the afternoon," Rozental said.

Emmalie and Zoie, born premature at about 3 pounds each, were then 5 pounds and needed to be placed in foster care first. Six months later, the Rozentals adopted their daughters.

"We went into this with no expectations and open hearts just as we would with biological children. There is no place for selfish motives," Rozental said.

But other veterans of the system said the Rozentals' relatively smooth transition from foster parents to full-fledged mom and dad is unique.

Karen, an adoptive mom from Coral Springs who did not want her last name used, said she and her husband endured months of "complicated, arduous and nerve-wracking steps" before they were approved to adopt Josh, 7, and Elizabeth, 11, who are biological brother and sister.

The couple even moved into a new house to meet adoption home requirements.

"The bottom line is that they are finally our kids -- they are our children," Karen said.

On Nov. 19, the adoption became official during a ceremony at the Miami Children's Museum where Miami-Dade juvenile court judges finalized 50 adoptions to mark National Adoption Day.

Eighteen adoptions were finalized during a morning of ceremonies by Broward judges at the county courthouse Nov. 20.

Among the children whose lives were legally sealed in new families was 14-year-old Jessica Roppo of Pembroke Pines. Her new mother and father, Nina and Joseph Roppo, were as proud as any new parents could be.

"We knew from the first day, from the very first meeting that Jessica would be our daughter," Joseph Roppo said.

More than 345 jurisdictions held similar Adoption Day ceremonies. More than 25,000 children have been adopted on the commemorative day since 2000 when the Alliance for

Children's Rights created the event.

Broward Circuit Judge John Bowman called the day the happiest work day of the year. He has officiated at about 200 adoptions since Broward began marking National Adoption Day in 2003.

“After dealing in the courts with all the tragedy that leads up to adoption,” Bowman said, “this is the reward.”

---

© 2010 Miami Herald Media Company. All Rights Reserved.  
<http://www.miamiherald.com>