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ChildNet celebrates National Adoption Day with picnic

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Alma and Carlos Pantoja watched their newly adopted sons play in a bounce house, pick out new toys and enjoy some food at a picnic lunch to celebrate National Adoption Day earlier this month.

Carlos Pantoja Jr., 8, and Emmanuel Pantoja, 6, had a great time in the Pompano Beach park.

The picnic was organized by ChildNet — a private, not-for-profit organization responsible for managing child welfare programs designed to protect abused, neglected and abandoned children — and sponsored by Omega Psi Phi fraternity's Eta Nu graduate chapter.

"I always had a dream of adopting, even as a teenager," said Alma Pantoja, 46, who has no other children. "I was an only child and always wanted a lot of children when I married."

The couple recently went through the finalization process to adopt the biological brothers.

"Now our house is full," she said.

"It's a new experience for me," said Carlos Pantoja, 56, who also has two children in their 30s. "I have the patience now, and the time to spend with the kids. They make me feel young."

Carlos Jr. and his brother are thrilled with the new arrangement.

"She makes me happy," he said of his new mom.

"She buys me toys," added Emmanuel.

Now that they have a permanent place to live, the boys' favorite weekend activity is being with their new parents. They like to help their dad with handyman chores.

The boys had plenty of children to play with at the picnic, where newly formed families mingled with each other.



"It's an annual event that we have around the time of National Adoption Day," said *Sasheika Tomlinson*, of Plantation, the public relations specialist for ChildNet. On Nov. 17, the agency finalized about 40 adoptions at the Broward County Courthouse.

"We had about 160 finalized adoptions in Broward County between July 2006 and June 2007," said *Theresa Kennedy*, of Tamarac, director of permanency for ChildNet. "While that's a good number, we still have another 140 children who don't have homes."

The breakdown of those most in need of adoption include children ages 9-17, sibling groups, children of African-American or Caribbean-American heritage and children with special needs.

ChildNet has facilitated 764 adoptions since it started in Broward County in 2003.

To find out more about adopting in Broward County, call the Adoption Hotline at 954-414-6001 or go to www.browardadopt.com to see photos and read profiles of the children.

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