

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## DHHS Sees Near-Record Number of Adoptions in 2017; More than 500 Children Placed in Forever Homes

**Lincoln** – DHHS announced today that the number of adoptions for the State hit a near-record high in 2017. 538 adoptions were finalized last year – a number exceeded only in 2008, when adoptions reached a high of 572.

The data points to a pattern of continued increase. From 1995 to 2005, an average of 283 adoptions were finalized and, from 2006 to 2016, that average increased significantly, to 532 annual adoptions.

The increase in adoptions can be attributed to several factors, said Nanette Simmons, Administrator of the Division of Children and Family Services (CFS), including an increase in the number of children in the State's care. And, while the numbers are not stand-alone indicators of success, they are certainly a sign of efficiency in the adoption process.

150 of the adoptions occurred on November 18 -- recognized as Adoption Day by the areas DHHS serves. Adoption Day is a Saturday when courts open specifically to finalize adoptions. "It's an exciting event," shared Simmons. "Sometimes, previously adopted children participate in the ceremonies. Some events are held in theaters, or include activities like face-painting. There are always lots of people in the courthouse, including various professionals and family members." The presence of family members is particularly significant, explained Simmons, because the State's first priority is to reunify children with their biological parents, prior to any discussion of adoption.

"Kinship" placement is a close second to reunification. "Kinship placement means the child had a significant relationship with the individual, such as a neighbor or teacher, prior to placement-- or the foster home was a licensed foster home," Simmons said. "If the individuals are not known to the child prior to placement they must be licensed as a foster parent first."

All prospective families complete background checks, including Child Central Registry, Adult Central Registry, sex offender, state patrol and FBI checks. A home study is completed to determine whether placement is appropriate, safe, and meets the needs of the child. A walk through of the home is also completed prior to placement.

"Permanency, our primary goal, includes reunification, adoption, guardianship, or independent living," said Simmons. "It means collaborating with biological parents, judges, attorneys, guardians ad litem, foster parents, adoptive parents and service providers, to ensure the placement is in the best interests of the child." It's also work that wouldn't happen without the efforts of DHHS's permanency teams throughout the State. The groups carefully evaluate the fit for children and their prospective families.

"We have a lot of great workers here (at the department)," Simmons enthused, adding that the adoptive and fostering families who take in the children are also invaluable.

Simmons has served in the department for five years and worked in child welfare for a little over 20 years.

The age of adopted children ranges from one to 18 years-old, and case length varies.

Those interested in learning more about adopting a child may call 1-800-7PARENT (1-800-772-7368).

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