

# **NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services** **600 East Boulevard Avenue, Bismarck ND 58505**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: LuWanna Lawrence, Public Information Officer, 701-328-1892

## **Families and Individuals Honored with Adoption Awards**

*Governor Dalrymple Proclaims November as Adoption Awareness Month*

BISMARCK, N.D. – The N.D. Department of Human Services and licensed child placement agencies have recognized individuals who have strengthened their families through adoption as well as advocates and other professionals whose work supports adoptions.

The *North Dakota Foster Care Adoptive Family Award* was presented to **Peter and Anne Oppegaard of Ray**. The Oppegaard family adopted three children from foster care in the last four years including siblings in 2011. The children have received tremendous encouragement and support from their adoptive parents and have learned the importance of a family bond.

**Gabrielle (Gabby) Traen-Pines of Fargo** received the *Youth Excellence Award*, which is presented to young adults formerly in foster care who have excelled and are contributing to their communities. Before being placed in foster care, Traen-Pines had a limited formal education. Today, she is a high school senior balancing both success in the classroom as an honor student and a leader in extracurricular activities as a varsity cheerleading captain. She plans on pursuing a career in nursing or social work. Traen-Pines was adopted in September 2012 by her foster care family.

**Bryan and Jennifer Winterberg of Bismarck**, and birth mother **Angeline O'Connor of Bismarck** shared the *2012 Adoption Triad Award* for maintaining an ongoing, open relationship following their daughter's adoption as an infant. The Winterbergs felt an open adoption was right for them because they had a lot of love to give a child as well as stability and happiness. O'Connor selected them to raise her child. The individuals stay in touch through personal visits and e-mail.

The *Adoption Advocate Award* was given to individuals and organizations for their continued work on behalf of children and families.

**Leanne Johnson of Fargo** is the director of the Adults Adopting Special Kids (AASK) program through Catholic Charities of North Dakota. She has nearly 24 years of experience in child welfare and adoption. She was instrumental in assisting with the creation of the N.D. Heart Gallery, which features portraits of children in foster care who are seeking adoption.

**Kathy Quaife of Fargo** began her work in adoptions with the AASK program in 1998 and recently retired from her position in September 2012. She was directly involved in facilitating the adoption of 163 children during her 14-year career as an adoption worker. Her strengths of building connections and advocating for children and their families was evident in her daily work.

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The **Grand Forks County Social Services Foster Care Unit** and **regional representatives** from the **Northeast Human Service Center** in **Grand Forks** were also honored with the *Adoption Advocate Award*. Individuals from the county include Kim Anderson, Traci Van Beek, Sandy Brandt, Amy Fisher, Kress Germundson, Susan Hartz, Jacki Lund, Sonya Lundstrom, Amy Oehlke, Wayne Piche, Julie Reichert, Shelly Scholand, and Michelle Zenk. The regional representatives from the human service center include Scot Hoeper, Jessie Forness, and Lisa Piche. These professionals are compassionate and committed to strengthening children and families through adoption.

In addition to the state awards, **Linda Jaegar** of **Argusville**, **Emmanuel** and **Amy Nojang** of **Fargo**, and **Berta Soper** of **Webster** were also recognized for the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's *2012 Angels in Adoption Award*. Jaegar was nominated by Senator Kent Conrad, Soper was nominated by Senator John Hoeven, and the Nojangs were nominated by Congressman Rick Berg.

Last year, 325 adoptions took place in North Dakota. Of the adopted children, 133 had been in foster care prior to adoption; 11 were from foreign countries; 44 were placed for adoption with a private licensed child placing agency; and 137 children were adopted by their stepparents.

Families and individuals interested in exploring adoption can contact one of the following licensed child placing agencies in North Dakota: Adults Adopting Special Kids (AASK), All About U Adoptions, Catholic Charities ND, Lutheran Social Services of ND, The Village Family Service Center, Christian Family Life Services, God's Children Adoption Agency, Inc., LDS Family Services, and PATH ND. These agencies provide services including family recruitment, preparation and assessment, placement, and post-placement support. Agency contact information is online at [www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/adoption/agencies.html](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/adoption/agencies.html).

The Department of Human Services is the lead agency that oversees adoptions and licensing of all private adoption agencies in the state. Individuals interested in adoption and foster care information, should contact the department's Children and Family Services Division at 701-328-2316, toll-free 1-800-245-3736, ND Relay TTY 1-800-366-6888, e-mail [dhscfs@nd.gov](mailto:dhscfs@nd.gov) or visit [www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/adoption](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/adoption).

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