

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services

600 East Boulevard Avenue, Bismarck ND 58505

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Families and Individuals Honored with Adoption Awards

National Adoption Day is Sat., Nov. 22, 2014

BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Dalrymple has proclaimed November as Adoption Awareness Month. To celebrate, the North Dakota Department of Human Services and licensed child placing agencies have recognized individuals who have strengthened their families through adoption as well as advocates and other professionals whose work supports adoptions.

John and Melissa Porter of Fargo received the *Multicultural Award* for their efforts to nurture the cultural heritage of a child they adopted from China in May 2014. The Porters made the adoption process a family affair and found ways to be creative to help raise funds for the adoption by holding a garage sale and creating hand-crafted items to sell at craft fairs. The family has blended their daughter's culture into their lives by learning and playing Chinese songs and meeting regularly with other families who have adopted children from China to celebrate Chinese holidays and other events.

Ray and Angela Schepp of Stanley, and birth mother **Erika Hoganson of Fargo** shared the *2014 Adoption Triad Award* for maintaining an ongoing, open relationship following their son's adoption as an infant. The Schepps were able to name their adoptive son, an honor that involved creativity and a strong desire to recognize their son's heritage and the importance of Hoganson in their lives. They all participated in an entrustment ceremony shortly after the birth and remain in weekly contact with Hoganson and the birth father.

The **North Dakota Heart Gallery of Fargo** was presented with the *Adoption Advocate Award* for its work in encouraging the adoption of children waiting for forever homes. The North Dakota Heart Gallery is a non-profit organization that works with professional photographers to capture a child's personality and spirit through the use of creative photography. The photographs are featured as part of a traveling display that shows potential families children seeking adoption. Learn more about the North Dakota Heart Gallery at www.ndheartgallery.org.

In addition to the state awards, **Tracey and Rod Belzer of Minot** and **Ina Olson of Belcourt** were also recognized for the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's *2014 Angels in Adoption Award™*. The Belzers were nominated by Senator John Hoeven and Olson was nominated by Senator Heidi Heitkamp.

Last year, 293 adoptions took place in North Dakota. Of the adopted children, 97 were adoptions of children with special needs; six were from foreign countries; 22 were placed for adoption by a private licensed child placing agency; and 168 children were adopted by their stepparents.

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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., 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.

The Adoption Awareness Proclamation is online at www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/adoption/.

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 or visit www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/adoption.

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