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Governor's Outstanding Adoptive Parent Awards presented

(MADISON) — The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) honored six special adoptive families today by presenting them with the 2022 Governor's Outstanding Adoptive Parent Award. The awards were presented during a celebration at the State Capitol as part of Wisconsin's month-long recognition of [Adoption Month](#).

Nominations for the awards were received from adoption workers, children's advocates, and citizens from all corners of Wisconsin who wanted to recognize the incredible families who have opened their hearts to provide safe and loving homes to children in need of a forever family. The recipients were chosen based upon their stories of exceptional dedication, commitment and sacrifice made to ensure their adopted children received the important family bonds that only a "forever" family can provide.

"All adoptive families deserve to be celebrated," said DCF Secretary Emilie Amundson. "These families often make a significant sacrifice to provide children with a stable, loving environment that helps them build on their strengths and thrive. We appreciate the dedication and commitment of adoptive parents, as well as those who work with families in the adoption process. The future for these children is much brighter because of these folks."

Six adoptive families were nominated by their caseworkers' and received awards.

Monica and Travis Begley of Tomah were recognized for adopting a sibling set of four and keeping their heart and home open to additional placements. The Begley's understand and support the LGBTQ+ community and work hard to reach across cultures to ensure connectedness between birth families and children. The Begley's have shown unwavering support and dedication to all their children.

Carl and Marcella BlomWillis of Sheboygan were honored for their 20 years of service dedicated to helping Wisconsin children have a home-like setting. The BlomWillis' are foster and adoptive parents with seven adopted children. This trauma-informed family knows the value of family bonds and work hard to maintain connectedness and tradition.

Michelle and Travis Clausen of Wisconsin Dells began fostering with the goal to provide a home for children while working with their biological families toward reunification. When reunification efforts did not succeed, the Clausen's adopted five children in five years. With a quickly growing family, the Clausen's made many changes to help these children have a loving home and thriving future.

Heidi Kontny of Ashland swiftly adopted a two-year-old girl from West Africa after learning of her urgent medical needs. With prior adoption experience in Liberia, Ms. Kontny was able to quickly navigate the adoption and immigration process to get the specialized medical care needed to save the child's life. Fifteen years later, the child is thriving and still connected to the biological family.

Adrian Spencer-Good and Tressie Sneed of Milwaukee adopted her grandchild to create a harmonious and familiar family environment for the child to grow up in. Ms. Spencer-Good and Ms. Sneed worked together to create a loving home, a network of helpful family and in-home tutoring to help this child thrive. Through virtual and planned visits, the child maintains a connection with the biological parents.

Denise and John Zachman of Amherst adopted seven children and are in the process of adopting two more. With foster children also in their care, the Zachman's feel strongly about keeping their home and hearts open to children that need it. They are strong advocates for family connections and work to keep siblings together. To keep holiday traditions strong, the Zachman's have been known to reach out to family members for family traditions, recipes, and special treats to make it feel even more like home.

Since 2018, the Department of Children and Families has been working to transition the child welfare system to serve more children and families in-home with wrap around services that support their needs. When this is not possible, adoptive families play an important role in providing children and youth with a stable and loving environment that allows them to thrive.

For more information about adoption, please visit <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/adoption/parent>.

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