



OPINION-EDITORIAL

Celebrating B.C. families brought together by adoption All children deserve a family

**By Mary McNeil, Minister of Minister of Children and Family Development
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(792 words)

VICTORIA – We are so pleased that Adoption Awareness Month in November gives us all the opportunity to recognize and thank the many families in B.C. who have opened their hearts and adopted a child into their homes.

It is also a time to renew our commitment to find permanent homes for the many children and youth in our province who still need the love and security family can bring.

B.C.'s waiting children are as unique as the families they one day hope to find. They have individual personalities and each has a special story to tell. The one thing they all share, however, is the need for a family – to give them the gifts of affection and of stability, the joy of a family that cares for and about them, that helps them heal and be happy, and puts them on a path to success. All children deserve someone to turn to and somewhere to call home. All children deserve a family.

More than 1,200 children in B.C. need the care of a permanent family, including teenagers, those with designated special needs and sibling groups. Many are Aboriginal children who need adoptive parents to help maintain their identity and connections to their First Nation community, culture, traditions and values. Last year, 68 per cent of Aboriginal children waiting for adoption were placed with Aboriginal families.

This is an encouraging trend and we need to keep working hard to improve all aspects of adoption. To this end, the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth is leading a review of B.C.'s adoption system and working collaboratively with the ministry to search out new and innovative ways to help more kids find the stability and the love within a family that they deserve.

An unfortunate and heartbreaking misconception is that some kids are unadoptable. No child or youth is unadoptable. Some, like teens, are over-represented among children waiting for adoption in B.C. Teens make up more than 30 per cent of children registered for adoption, but less than 10 per cent of adoptions every year.

In reality, a youth might have just entered the foster system, or have been waiting a long time for adoption due to people's misconceptions. As well, many teens are maturing and searching for independence and want to become better informed before choosing to make themselves available for adoption.

Being welcomed into the arms of a family through adoption can change the life path of an older youth by creating real connections with responsible adults and social and family networks. For a teen waiting for adoption and facing the daunting prospect of being all on his or her own when turning 19, the comfort of a family that cares can mean the difference between despair or eagerness in heading into their future.

Some might take for granted what it means to a young person to have a family – to have someone help with homework, attend school plays or sports games, celebrate birthdays, successes and milestones. The hug and words of encouragement to a boy or a girl feeling down, or the helping hand that allows a teen to learn from failures and about overcoming obstacles – to a waiting child or youth in B.C., having a family to share all these things will change their lives.

Adoption is not about being the perfect parent or possessing special traits. A potential adoptive parent's marital status or sexual orientation does not matter. Adoption is about families and love. It's about deep, lifelong commitments where difficulties are overcome and achievements are shared, together.

Adoption Awareness Month presents an opportunity for us to extend our gratitude to all of the agencies and adoption workers in B.C. who tirelessly act to find loving homes for children. These caring individuals make it their mission to find the best family match for every child needing a permanent home. They deserve a heartfelt thank you for the commitment and dedication to changing children's lives for the better.

Understandably, the change adoption brings can be an emotional time for adoptive families and the children and youth involved. If adopting a child is not an option for you, please help as much as you can by lending an ear and offering encouraging words and support to those who are adopting.

We encourage those seeking more information on adoption in B.C., including how to adopt, to call 1 877 ADOPT-07, or visit the Ministry of Children and Family Development website at: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/adoption.

On behalf of the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth, we send our deepest appreciation to adoptive families across B.C., our congratulations to the children and youth who have joined them, and a warm thank you to all for showing us how much families matter.

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