

L.A. Office Helps to Finalize Foster Adoptions on National Adoption Day

More than 100,000 children in foster care in the United States are eligible for adoption, including more than 3,000 in Los Angeles County. But when foster parents make the decision to adopt children in their care, they typically have to navigate a highly complex and under-resourced system that can make the adoption process a multiyear endeavor. To help accelerate the process, the Los Angeles-based Alliance for Children's Rights established National Adoption Day, a day when judges, lawyers and court personnel donate their time so that hundreds of families can complete their adoption proceedings in a supportive and celebratory environment.

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Billy DeClercq



Billy DeClercq (right) with Commissioner Catherine Pratt and the Flores family

For the first time in its history, the 2006 National Adoption Day saw events taking place in all 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. In all, more than 250 communities participated on a day that saw more than 3,300 children adopted into permanent families. Lawyers from the Los Angeles office of Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw have participated in the event since 2001, and this year helped five families adopt nine children, including four siblings.

“Although the time-commitment in completing the adoption is minimal, the impact on the children and the adopting parents lasts a lifetime,” said associate Steven Rich, who acts as the firm’s liaison to the Alliance. Joining Rich on National Adoption Day were associates Matt Marmolejo, Billy DeClercq, Yale Kim and Andrew Kugler, along with Assistant Director of Pro Bono Activities Marcia Maack.

“National Adoption Day was a very moving experience for me,” commented Maack. “It was great to able to participate with the Los Angeles associates in an event that raises awareness of all the foster care children waiting to be adopted.”

One highlight of the firm’s participation in the event came when DeClercq read aloud into the record from letters in praise of the firm, the Alliance for Children’s Rights and the Court

that were written by the four sisters whose adoptions he facilitated. “[The couple I worked with] and their four great-granddaughters who are now their adoptive daughters are a very sweet family, and it was truly an honor to be a part of their lives,” he commented. “Participating in National Adoption Day was among the most rewarding experiences I have had as a lawyer.”

Lawyers are generally employed toward the end of the foster adoption process, after the home study work has been completed, to finalize and file the paperwork with the court. The typical case requires approximately 15 hours of a lawyer’s time, though more complicated cases can take longer.

“Adoption work offers a terrific training opportunity for young associates, as it often is their first time setting foot in a courtroom,” Rich added, noting that more than 20 of the Los Angeles office’s lawyers have done work with the Alliance for Children’s Rights over the years. “Working with the Alliance to help create a stable environment for so many foster children, and to give them hope for a bright future, has been tremendously rewarding both professionally and personally.”

For more information on National Adoption Day, visit the web site at www.nationaladoptionday.org.



Steven Rich (left) with Judge Mary Lou Villar and the Castillo family

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