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A Permanent Home

Two Families Adopt Two Sisters And Help Them To Stay Close

By COLIN POITRAS, Courant Staff Writer



Genesis Flores gets a hug from her adoptive mother, Gloria Flores of Hartford, as they look at her adoption certificate. Stephanie Perez, adopted Friday by Maria Elena Perez of Bloomfield, looks on.

(SHANA SURECK /November 16, 2007)

Wearing a gold and black party dress, her feet in tiny black shoes dangling off the edge of a too-big wooden chair, 7-year-old Stephanie Michelle Perez sat in Hartford Probate Court Friday listening to adults say words she could barely understand.

Occasionally, Stephanie would peer over her shoulder to peek at her older sister, Genesis Flores, 8, who sat slightly to the side and behind her, her big brown eyes fixed on Judge Robert Killian Jr., her small hands clasped loosely in her lap.

It was a big day for the two little girls, who after four years in foster care were finally being placed in permanent, loving homes.

Their new parents and sisters sat proudly around them. As Killian handed out their state adoption certificates during a brief ceremony in the court's Constitution Plaza hearing room, tears started to flow.

"I just wanted to hug her," said Gloria Flores of Hartford, Genesis' adoptive mom, wiping back tears after the ceremony. Flores said she and her husband, William, barely slept Thursday night, they were so full of swirling emotions.

"This is like my dream day," said Gloria, who has a 16-year-old daughter, Jazmine, and two older boys, William Flores Jr., 28, and Marvin Flores, 25.

For Stephanie's adoptive mom, Maria Elena Perez of Bloomfield, there was never a question that Stephanie wouldn't be part of the family, if possible.

Perez, who has been a foster parent for several years, admits she was smitten by Stephanie's adorable

nature from the start.

Stephanie is Perez's first adoption, but probably not her last.

"Every one we take in, we would adopt if we could," said Perez, a single parent whose 23-year-old daughter, Areli, helps tend to the children. Areli is pursuing a master's degree with the hope of someday working for the state Department of Children and Families to help foster children reunite with their parents or find new permanent homes.

Both sets of foster parents agreed to let reporters witness Friday's adoptions, which usually take place behind closed doors. DCF organized the event in recognition of November as National Adoption Month.

There are 57 state foster children currently eligible for adoption in Connecticut and 169 families currently waiting to adopt. Many adoptions are finalized within two years. Stephanie's and Genesis' adoptions took four years because DCF social workers tried repeatedly to help their mother rehabilitate. In the end, the girls' birth mother agreed with DCF that the children would be better served by their foster families. Each family will receive between \$8,000 and \$9,000 a year in subsidies from DCF to help pay for the girls' living costs. The girls also will receive state medical benefits and will be eligible for free post-secondary education if they choose to go to college.

The girls were placed with different families because the adoptive parents felt the two together would be too much. But the new parents said they are in touch frequently and the girls visit each other regularly.

"This kind of event brings to fruition all the work we do," said DCF Commissioner Susan Hamilton, who attended Friday's ceremony. "This is an emotional day not only for the girls but for the parents, too, because with the adoption, they are now legally part of their families."

Killian said he removes about 400 children a year from their parents because of concerns about abuse and neglect. Some are reunited with their parents after the problems abate and services are rendered. Some remain in foster care for years. Others, about 100 a year, are adopted.

With all the stressful or sad cases that come through Hartford's probate court on a daily basis, days when adoptions are finalized are always special, Killian told the new families.

"It's not easy being a kid right now," said Killian, who was raised in Hartford. "When I was growing up in Hartford, it was a lot easier to be a young person. I knew nothing about drugs, terror and terrorism. That was something that just didn't happen. These kids have to deal with that every day of their lives."

"If that's true, it's all the more important that they have a sanctuary, a place where they can avoid these horrors, a place where they can be comfortable," Killian said. "That's why families are so vitally important."

For Stephanie, Friday meant learning to spell her new last name. For Genesis, it meant going to sleep knowing, finally, that she and her sister have a permanent home.

"I'm glad that my sister is here," Genesis said softly later as she fidgeted with a Dora The Explorer watch on her wrist. "Because if she wasn't here, I would be thinking about her."

For information about adoption, call the state DCF information line: 1-888-543-4376.

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