

## The District



BY BILL O'LEARY — THE WASHINGTON POST

Thirty-four children were adopted yesterday during D.C. Adoption Day. Anthony Wheeler, 4, and his sister Diarha, 5, walk the stage at the ceremony.

### NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY

# Falling in Love, Giving Children a Home

*Foster Parents Commit to Kids, and This Time It's for Good*

By DELPHINE SCHRANK  
Washington Post Staff Writer

For 34 newly adopted children, the prospect of unconditional love was born in a courthouse yesterday.

Angel, 2, loves vanilla pudding. Tayvon, 2, has a penchant for chasing his dogs around the dinner table. And Paul, 4, helps build model planes and dreams of being a pilot.

Clutching teddy bears and clambering over seats at the balloon-festooned third floor of the Moultrie Courthouse, the three were among dozens to walk away from the 21st-annual D.C. Adoption Day with a permanent home and proud new parents, all of whom had fallen for the children and earned their trust during months and years of foster care.

The event, timed to coincide with National Adoption Day on the Saturday before Thanksgiving, aims to encourage area residents to adopt or foster a child.

Last fiscal year there were 234 adoptions in the District. This year, an additional 200 children in foster care await adoption, according to the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency. Most of them come from neglectful homes, with parents with a history of substance abuse, mental health problems or who exercise inappropriate or excessive discipline, said Anita M. Josey-Herring, presiding judge of family court, a division

within D.C. Superior Court. Currently, 2,600 cases of neglect are pending, she said.

Speakers repeated the same message, almost like an incantation: Could you be a prospective foster parent? Call 202-671-LOVE, the Child and Family Services Agency adoption hotline.

The smallest speaker of all, D'Juantez Brown, 9, barely peeped over the lectern as he read a poem dedicated to his grandmother, who had just adopted him:

*You are the one by my side  
when nobody else is there  
You are the one I can always  
count on  
You are always there to care  
You help me through the  
times, in foster care, and  
when I lost my hope . . .  
You have a special place in  
my heart  
That's why you are like a  
mother.*

D'Juantez and his brother, Aaron, 2, had been floating in foster care limbo since Aaron suffered a broken arm and head injuries at 2 months. D'Juantez went to live with his paternal grandmother, Anita Hall, who had cared for him intermittently since infancy. James and Cindy Taylor made a home for Aaron, who suffers from seizures.

"He's catching up," James Taylor

said of his new son, who can't talk much and has a learning delay of about six months. So that the brothers never grow apart, the Taylors and Hall arrange visits to each other's homes every weekend.

Angelica Cepero, 15, had been in 10 or 11 foster homes — she has lost count — since she was removed from her mother at age 9. She ran away from each, then found love and a permanent home with Catherine Johnson in 2005.

She tried to run from Johnson, too — once for three days, then for two weeks. But, Angelica said, unlike previous foster parents, Johnson was willing to take her back.

"I was lost," said Angelica, reaching for Johnson's hand at a reception after the ceremony. "But she really cared about me. . . I'm very happy because I know she's always

going to be there for me, and I know she loves me unconditionally."

Thanks to Johnson, Angelica said, she has stopped smoking and drinking, and her grades have shot up from D's and F's to A's and B's.

"I want to be a lawyer," she said, bounding down the corridor of the courthouse with a balloon tied around her waist.

Some new parents acknowledged having a case of nerves.

"It's been a long haul, and I've been a nervous wreck," Janice Powell said of the adoption process. Powell and her husband, Charles Powell, found sisters Jara, 3, and Destiny, 2, at St. Ann's Infant and Maternity Home, a refuge in Hyattsville for children seeking foster care.

The couple didn't initially plan to adopt, she said, but a day later Jara ran toward her and called her "Mommy."

With that, Powell said, "I fell in love."