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SRS offers \$300,000 to spur adoption

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By Tim Carpenter

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Jonathan and Allison Schumm's family is big enough to conduct a regulation basketball game. That wouldn't be possible without five siblings adopted by the Topeka couple to complement their three biological children.

The team was present at the Kansas Children's Discovery Center for the announcement Monday of the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services' offer of \$300,000 from a federal grant to the company proposing the most imaginative one-year marketing campaign to recruit adoptive families.

"This is a heartfelt cause," said SRS Secretary Robert Siedlecki. "This campaign is directed towards our children who are typically hardest to place in adoptive families — the kids of sibling groups, with mental or physical disabilities or teenagers."

He said the state had 5,200 children in foster care. Five hundred of 900 in the adoption queue are awaiting completion of the adoption process, but 420 haven't yet been linked with a prospective adoptive family.

"Those 400 children really are alone," Siedlecki said.

Jonathan Schumm said he could attest to the compelling force for good generated by adoption of children. His roster: Nicole, 16, Alisa, 13, Emmanuel, 11, Jaquale, 6, Angel, 5, Mercy, 5, Isaiah, 3, and Kyrsten, 1.

"I'm not here to tell you foster care and adoption are easy," he said while the children played in the center's kid-friendly facility. "It's been worth every smile and every tear."

He said information on children available for adoption in Kansas could be found at www.adoptkskids.org. Some children still on the list were there six years ago when Schumm and his wife initially became involved in foster care and adoption.

"So many kids are still waiting," he said.

Gov. Sam Brownback decreed November as Kansas Adoption Month. On Nov. 19, several court jurisdictions in Kansas will finalize at least 100 adoptions to mark the declaration.

Brownback and his wife, Mary, adopted two children from overseas. A son, Mark, celebrated his 14th birthday Monday.

"Adoption is fabulous," the governor said at the Statehouse. "It just brings a smile to my face every time I think about it. My hope is more families will step up."

He said his family's decision to not adopt in Kansas reflected his trips while in Congress to orphanages in other countries, many of which didn't have a strong cultural tradition of adoption.

In addition, the governor said he was aware of a U.S. family that struggled for six years to complete an adoption.

Siedlecki, the top administrator at SRS, said adoptions through the state of Kansas were completed at little or no cost and were legally secure because parental rights had been severed.

Kansas families who adopt children may be eligible for state or federal financial subsidies, he said. Funding is available for health care of adopted children through Medicaid and for college tuition for children adopted from state care after age 16.

Siedlecki said the goal of SRS was to complete more than 800 adoptions in the current fiscal year ending in July. In the last fiscal year, the state finalized 761 adoptions. In the first three months of the year, 178 children have been adopted from state care in Kansas.

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Testimony by Wendell Turner
SB-262

My name is Wendell Turner. I live in Wichita and I am Speaker of the Kansas Silver Haired Legislature.

Today I want to talk about my Grandsons, Barry and Troy and how they have been treated the last four years because Grandparents don't have rights.

But first I want to talk about the budget which I know is a real challenge for all of you so I want to help you with that. The best way to put it is Grandparents work cheaper than foster parents. In fact I have known Grandparents to pay for the privilege of taking care of their Grandchildren if they can afford it, some if they can't afford it. It cost over \$26,000 a year to keep a child in foster care. You do the math.

While the budget is important what I really care about is Grandchildren and how they are being torn away from their families for no reason other than Grandparents don't have rights to their Grandchildren in the State of Kansas.

On the evening of May 4, 2007 the same evening Greensburg was destroyed by a tornado SRS and the Wichita Police took Barry and Troy into protective custody. The protective part didn't work out to well.

We were fortunate that a neighbor called and told us they had been taken. If she hadn't we wouldn't have known what happened to those little boys.

Let me thank you now for passing the Bill last session making Grandparents interested parties without having to ask. We can never thank you enough for that. Now that you have us in the court room we would like to be recognized as important persons in those children's lives.

Since Barry and Troy had spent about as much time at our house as they did at their dad's house – in fact they had their on room at our house – we assumed they would be coming to us. What they did was take them to the Wichita Children's Home. I called the next day and they gave me a number to call on Monday at SRS.

The lady I talked to at SRS ask me a lot of questions and told me they would be in touch.

We were ordered to appear in court the next Wednesday. Why I don't know. We were always treated as if we didn't count. We were to learn later we didn't.

In our ignorance we thought we would be bringing the boys home with us because we thought everyone would do what was best for the children. I have never been so wrong about anything in my rather long life at a time I needed to be right. We dusted their room, stocked up on groceries and Grandma prepared their favorite foods. Grandmas know these things.

When we got to court we took a seat in the waiting room and after a while the boys came in with their keeper - officially known as a Family Support Worker - and he worked for Youthville and he would be with the boys anytime they were in Wichita.

He later told me his previous experience was fence builder and now he was in charge of 2 of our Grandkids. The boys broke away from their keeper and ran over to us and after the hugs little Troy said, "How did you know where we were". That poor little boy thought he was lost forever. The keeper said we have to go see the judge and that was the last time we saw them for a month.

Keep in mind they had never spent a night any where except at their dad's house or ours.

We were finally called into the court room and the judge looked up and said, "is this the Grandparents"? Some lady who seemed to be a little smarter than the rest said, "yes" and that was the last time we were recognized as living in the same world as the rest of that bunch. After the judge left the smart lady that could say, "yes" gave us a Youthville case managers business card with another number on the back and said someone would contact us about the boys coming to live with us. Our contact person would be the keeper although he never returned our calls. Youthville was now in control of our grandkids and they were in trouble.

The next day I called the children's home and ask if we could come see the boys. I was told they were no longer there. They had been moved to a foster home in Lyons. Everyone in that court room knew that but us the day before and no one told us. We were stunned to say the least.

We finally received letter in the mail informing us of a case plan meeting at Youthville in a couple of weeks.

When we got to the meeting it had been going on for an hour and a half but we hadn't been invited to that part. That by the way is against the law.

During the meeting I noticed that one of Barry's 6th grade teachers was there. I thought that strange because when he was Barry's teacher he would call the house in the summer and ask if Barry could go swimming. We wouldn't let him go. He would drive by their house real slow and watch the kids if they were outside.

When the meeting was over we were told to stay. The keeper and some girl we hadn't seen before or since wanted to talk to us. We thought they were going to tell us when the boys would be coming to us. We learn slow. After everyone else left we were told we wouldn't get the boys. My wife said, "I think it's time to get a lawyer". The girl said, "It won't do you any good because Grandparents don't have rights". We thought she was lying. She wasn't.

I ask the keeper who was taking them and he said, "That teacher". I explained to him they would not be going to that teacher and when he found out we were objecting he withdrew.

I have placed a paper in front of each of you and at the top it says KAKEland and in the top right is a picture of that teacher. He currently resides in the Cowley County jail awaiting trial for child molestation.

That is the person Youthville picked to take care of our Grandchildren over us.

Finally after spending \$ 2,000 of our retirement fund on a lawyer the boys came to live with us for 10 months. Youthville recommended they be sent back to the place they were taken from in conditions just as bad as they were removed from.

We have never been allowed to speak in court and our lawyer was never allowed to attend the back room meetings where they decided what to do with the boys.

Over 18,000 Grandparents in Kansas are taking care of their Grandchildren but they can be taken away without cause on the whim of a case manager.

I could go on and on about what happened to those little boys, In fact I have written a book about it but time is limited.

We aren't asking for much, just the right to protect our Grandchildren.