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Hundreds of supportive family members, children, volunteers, social workers and others filled the Jury Assembly room of the courthouse before walking to their assigned courtrooms to complete the adoption process.

Adoption ceremony brings smiles, hugs

More than 50 abused, abandoned or neglected children find families

STORY AND PHOTOS BY WAYNE K. ROUSTAN
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The Walters family almost doubled in size on Saturday when their adoptions of three children were finalized at the Broward County Courthouse in a ceremony marking National Adoption Month.

The trio of biological siblings were among more than 50 abused, abandoned or neglected children who found their forever families on Saturday morning. Another 22 children were adopted

in a ceremony at the Palm Beach County Courthouse on Friday.

"These children came into our home and we just fell in love with them," said Hopal Walters, 59, of Lauderhill, who has been a foster parent for five years. "We're just glad that we were offered the opportunity to become the parents of them."

She and husband Cecil, 55, who works two jobs, are also caring for four foster siblings.

"I have to start taking



The Walters family grew by three adopted siblings to go with four foster children and their own adult children who gathered at the Broward County Courthouse on Saturday to mark National Adoption Day.

my little energy pills to keep up with them," he said, with a laugh.

Hundreds of supportive family members, chil-

dren, volunteers, social workers and others filled the Jury Assembly room

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ADOPTION

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of the courthouse before walking the red-balloon-lined corridors to their assigned courtrooms to complete the adoption process.

Nationwide, nearly 118,000 children were in foster care waiting to be adopted in fiscal year 2016, the latest statistics available, and more than 57,000 were placed in permanent homes, according to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System.

In Broward, there are about 2,600 children in the foster care system and another 1,600 in Palm Beach County, said ChildNet CEO

Larry Rein. He said that the number fluctuates frequently.

"The nature of the business is that there are peaks and valleys," he said. "We have an opioid epidemic and that impacts things."

About half the children in foster care are from homes where drug abuse is a factor, Rein said, but there are signs of success.

"Last [fiscal] year we had a record 348 Broward adoptions," he said. "We're going to try to break that record [and] we're about halfway there."

Judging from the smiles on the faces of the Walters' adopted children Jaylen, 6, Jaleel, 5, and Renayah, 3, and their foster children Kamyah, 9, Earnest 5,

Kemora, 4, and Eddie, 3, Broward's adoption record is in danger of being broken.

"It's the greatest thing to see and it's what makes the work worthwhile for everybody," Rein said. "Sometimes you say there's so much ugliness and it's so gruesome and so negative, but this is what keeps people going."

For more information on becoming a foster or adoptive parent, and the help that's available, go online to ChildNet.us or call the information hotlines in Broward at 954-414-6001 or Palm Beach County at 561-352-2501.

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