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## **Foster Care Awards presented by First Lady and DCF Secretary**

(MADISON) – Foster families throughout Wisconsin play an important role in the lives of children who need a temporary home, providing care and guidance for them. In recognition of Gov. Scott Walker's proclamation declaring May as Foster Care Month in Wisconsin, First Lady Tonette Walker and Department of Children and Families (DCF) Secretary Eloise Anderson honored six outstanding foster families and a foster youth with the 2016 Governor's Foster Care Award.

"During Foster Care Month, we have the chance to express the gratitude we hold year-round for these special families who provide the care that foster children need and deserve," said Mrs. Walker. "Foster parents open their homes and hearts to vulnerable children in Wisconsin who enter out-of-home care, and help them overcome the trauma they face from being separated from their families for their own protection."

Six foster parent awards were presented during a ceremony today in the Assembly Chamber of the State Capitol, recognizing: Susan and Roger Elandt of Waupaca, Karla and Steve Jenson of Elk Mound, Alison Ritchie of Wausau, Lillian and Thomas Rivera of Milwaukee, Cheryl and Scott Simer of Portage, and Helena Symes of Stoughton.

"Foster families are some of our communities' most unsung heroes," said Secretary Anderson. "Foster families take in children during their darkest hour, shelter them and give them love. They do this knowing that in all likelihood they will one day say goodbye. Despite knowing how difficult that will be, they welcome birth families into their lives and support them on their journey towards reunification."

Other honorees included Daniel R. Young of Fort Atkinson who received a 2016 Foster Youth Award for overcoming challenges and making great improvements in his life, as well as helping to mentor other teens and state legislators Sen. Terry Moulton and Rep. Amy Loudenberg, who received “Stepping Up for Children” Awards for authoring the 2013 Wisconsin Act 334. Act 334, which was enacted last August, extends Out-Of-Home Care for Young Adults with an Individualized Education Program so they may continue in foster care until they get their high school diploma or GED, or until age 21 if they’re in high school or vocational school full-time.

The ceremony today also highlighted the need for additional kind, responsible adults to step forward and care for foster children. Currently in Wisconsin there are about 7,300 children living in out-of-home care. For more information on becoming a foster parent, visit [www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/foster](http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/children/foster).

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