

Director's Cut

Happy New Year to one and all!

Here at Cornerstone HQ we hope that everybody had a Happy Holiday and we wish each and every one of you the very best in the upcoming year! We are also looking forward to the challenges that this new year will bring us. As many of you know, last month we at YFA celebrated our one year anniversary as the adoptions agency under KCI in Circuit 5. During our first year, we experienced some growing pains as we wrapped our arms around the complex issues of adoption case management and went through quite a learning experience. We also had many, many successes in our first year. Between December 1st, 2009, and November 30th, 2010, we completed a total of 246 adoptions and reduced the overall number of children awaiting adoption from 247 in December of 2009 to less than 170 at the end of November 2010. We also reduced the average amount of time that it took for a child to be adopted once arriving at the adoptions unit by several months. Currently, we are at 78% of our goal for the 2010-2011 year.

As I am sure you've noticed, I said "we" and not "YFA" in the paragraph above. I wish to point this out because it was "we" who did all of the amazing accomplishments that are listed above and that "we" that I am referring to is not only YFA, but all of you wonderful families that came forward and opened your homes to our children. That "we" is our children that had the courage to take that first step to try out a new family. That "we" is KCI, DCF, CHS and the Centers personnel that assisted us in moving children through the system. That "we" is the Guardian ad Litem staff that worked along side of us to find forever families for our children. And finally, that "we" is the wonderful people that make up the YFA Adoptions Unit for Circuit 5, who have done a remarkable job in their first year. A job that sometimes goes unrewarded. They are truly magnificent.

As amazing and remarkable as our first year has been, our work is not done for there are still many children that need that new family to love and cherish and to know that they are loved and safe. Each week, as one child finds that forever family, another child comes to us needing permanency. Again, "we" need to do everything we can to find that child his or her forever family, to show that child that he or she is an important member of our society. I challenge you to talk to your friends, relatives and co-workers about our children and their needs. Ask them to commit to changing a child's life forever, to make a positive impact. Even if they are currently unable to adopt due to whatever reason, they can still help by donating a birthday gift, money or time (mentor a child) to show him or her that "we" care.

Glenn Henson

SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS

Ashley is a beautiful 17 year old girl who was just adopted by her foster parents, David and Lauren, on National Adoption Day on November 19, 2010. The Department initially became involved with Ashley's biological family in 1996 as her parents were unable to care for her and her three siblings due to their battle with their addictions. In their home, she was exposed to drugs and relationship instability. From there she was placed with several relatives and even back with her parents but was

Written By: Vanessa Ward

never stable until she was finally placed in foster care thirteen years later in 2009. Once in David and Lauren's home she made an almost immediate connection with her foster parents and soon they were talking about adopting her. David and Lauren had adopted before, but never an older child but Ashley won their hearts. She is a bubbly teen who enjoys modeling, boating, dancing, and singing. In order to be successful in these pursuits David and Lau-

ren knew that Ashley would need stability and their nurturing. They knew that they could help her and so they opened their hearts to fully love her. Coming from a chaotic past, though, Ashley had to learn how to be part of a family. She has grown so much in their home and now sees herself as a part of that family. Ashley told her Adoption Case Coordinator, Alyssa Morreale, that David and Lauren "are my forever family and I know that I can always count on them." David and Lauren have fully sup-

Shining Stars

Breanna is a wonderful child who has a lot of life and love to share. She is almost always in high spirits and is very easy going. While Breanna needs a lot of one-on-one attention and assistance with her daily needs, she continues to make steady and consistent progress. Breanna has a smile that brightens a room and she is able to make friends wherever she goes. Like most girls her age, Breanna enjoys watching television, especially the Hannah

Montana show, and her favorite cartoon is SpongeBob SquarePants. Breanna's favorite color is purple and her favorite activity is listening to music. She enjoys listening to and singing along with Taylor Swift for hours on end. Breanna will need a family who is willing to support her development and care for her through adulthood and wants to make her feel loved and special. For more information on Breanna, please contact Elizabeth Torres at 352-253-5625, extension 4107.



Breanna

THOMAS



Thomas is a joyful 13 year old young man. He is social and engaging and you can't help smiling by just being around him. He enjoys being around people and gets excited to see someone he knows. Thomas loves to explore the world around him. He enjoys going to the zoo, the mall, and running outdoors. Music puts a smile on Thomas's face. Thomas is mostly non-verbal but he is learning simple

words. He is also learning sign language. He thrives on routine and going to school. He has the ability to learn but experiences difficulty retaining what is taught. Thomas is in need of a family who will commit to his long term care and in return he will bring much joy to their lives. For more information on Thomas, please contact Kathy Dentato at 352-277-5860, extension 4204.

TRAININGS AND RESOURCES

Families that adopt children through Florida's Child Welfare System (removed from their families due to abuse, abandonment and/or neglect) are eligible for Florida's Adoption Assistance Program if they adopt a child that meets one of the criteria listed below:

1. Eight years of age or older
2. Developmentally disabled
3. Physically or emotionally handicapped
4. Siblings being placed together
5. Black or Bi-Racial

The Adoption Assistance Program offers the following:

A maintenance Subsidy of \$5,000 per year paid monthly (\$417), which may be adjusted based on the needs of the child and circumstances of the family, depending on availability of funds. Note: Adoption Case Managers are required to make a reasonable effort to place the child(ren) without a maintenance subsidy and are expected to inquire with foster parents and relatives if they will adopt without a subsidy.

A Medical Subsidy that is designed to cover the costs of treating physical, mental or emotional conditions that existed prior to the adoption. The need for a medical subsidy must be established before the adoption finalizes even though the service may not be needed until a later date. However, it is expected that the family use their primary health insurance first and/or the child's Medicaid if the child continues to be Medicaid Eligible before any Medical Subsidy.

Last but not least, those families that adopt children from foster care are eligible for a tax credit on their federal income taxes.

In addition to the above, children adopted through DCF may be eligible to receive up to four (4) years of college tuition waiver at Florida public universities, colleges and vocational training schools. Children adopted at 16 or 17 are eligible for Florida's Road to Independence Program and are given special consideration when applying for student financial loans or grants.

For more information on this subject, please go to www.adoptflorida.com



EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER

Congratulations to Devi Lutchminaraine, YFA Adoption's employee of the quarter. Devi is the Office Specialist for Lake and Sumter Counties and was instrumental in the planning, coordination and execution of the Adoption Appreciation Day events for Lake and Sumter Counties, which were both terrific successes. Devi also spent countless hours soliciting donations both on the phone and in person, resulting in the donation of over \$4,300 in food, gift cards, games, photographing and currency that all went directly to the events in November in order to celebrate National Adoption Month. Devi can always be counted on to complete each and every task to perfection and she always maintains a positive attitude even during the most trying times. You can always count on Devi to brighten your darkest day with a big smile and a friendly Hello. She is a vital asset to the Lake and Sumter Office as well as YFA as a whole and is truly deserving of YFA's Employee of the Month Award. Thank you Devi!



Congratulations to **Devi** and all of the YFA adoption employees for all of their hard work and dedication.

Post Adoption

By LoriAnn Floramo, MSW

Raising a child in the 21st century can be difficult. Raising a child with a mysterious past can be heartbreaking and frustrating. Many of our children who come into care are victims of abuse and neglect in different degrees. Often times the workers don't know the extent of the abuse a child endured because of the lack of reporting.

The biggest question we get at Youth and Family Alternatives Inc. is "was this child sexually abused?" Sometimes the case managers have evidence of this abuse and sometimes it's never reported. Some children disclose sexual abuse many years after they have been adopted, after they feel safe and away from any harm. It is important to understand what behaviors may constitute possible sexual abuse and what behaviors are natural.

Most importantly, parents should understand that sexual exploration is a natural part of life and begins as early as infancy. The following are developmentally appropriate behaviors:

- Infants stroke their genitals and boys can get erections.
- Toddlers enjoy being naked and may self stimulate. They want to be in control of touching, kissing and hugging.
- Preschoolers (age 3-5) are interested in gender differences and will ask about sex. They begin to have an increased interest in stimulation as well as sexual exploration with peers.
- School-Age Children (Ages 6-9) may compare "private parts" with same-sex peers, begin to assert the need for privacy and have probably heard peers talk about sex.
- Pre-adolescents (Ages 10-12) – begin to develop sexually. Preteens can develop intense admiration for same-sex adults and be distressed if their physical development is more or less advanced than their peers.
- Adolescents (Ages 13-18) will strive for autonomy, desire parental approval and act as if parents know nothing.

These are natural behaviors that all children engage in some degree or another. If your child, either biological or adopted, exhibit behaviors that are worrisome or outside the typical development, you should seek advice from their counselor. Always keep in mind your child's developmental age and not their chronological age.





Spotlight on Success

Continued from page 1

ported Ashley's interests and even have her involved in modeling.

Several months ago Ashley and her foster mother found out that Ashley was pregnant. David and Lauren's adoption aspirations were undaunted when they found out and they have embraced their roles as grandparents. Their love for Ashley is very special and unconditional. Ashley graduated from high school in December 2010. She would like to continue her education and attend a local community college in the spring of next year. Currently, she is undecided in her course of study as she has many interests. Her new parents encourage her relationships with her sib-

lings and under their guidance she is growing in to a wonderful young lady.

David and Lauren love Ashley very much and have high hopes for her future. Ashley, though exposed to dysfunction and addictions in the past, now has stability and a life full of love and support from her new parents. She will be able to learn from them as a new mother and have their support in making decisions that will impact her and her new baby's life. Ashley had to overcome a lot for her short life and is amazingly resilient. Ashley can certainly go far and Youth and Family Alternatives is excited about Ashley's future and what magazine we might see her modeling on soon.



Photo is of Ashley and the Honorable Judge Sue Robbins who presided over the adoption hearing.

Peer to Peer Adoption Support Groups

Groups in Sumter County and teen groups are on an as needed basis. Please call the number below for assistance.*

**** Group is subject to participants RSVP's****

Lake County:

Location:

First United Methodist Church of Tavares
600 W. Ianthe St
Tavares, FL 32778

When:

Fourth Monday of each Month

Hernando County:

Location:

First United Methodist Church of Spring Hill
9344 Spring Hill Drive
Spring Hill, FL 34608

When:

Second Monday of each Month

Marion County:

Location:

Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church
10670 S.E. Maricamp Road
Ocala, FL 34472

When:

Second Thursday of each Month

Citrus County:

Location:

First United Methodist Church of Inverness
3896 S Pleasant Grove Rd
Inverness, FL 34452

When:

First Monday of each Month

To RSVP:

LoriAnn Floramo
352-547-3750



Youth and Family Alternatives, Inc. Locations

Corporate Office:

7524 Plathe Road
New Port Richey, FL 34653
(727) 835-4166

Marion County Office:

1017 NE 14th Street
Ocala, FL 34470
(352) 547-3750

Hernando/Citrus Office:

19245 Cortez Blvd
Brooksville, FL 34601
(352) 277-5860

Lake/Sumter County Office:

880 Duncan Drive
Tavares, FL 32778
(352) 253-5625