

Director's Cut

Hello Everyone,

I hope everybody had a great time over the holidays and I wish each and every one of you the happiest New Year! As many of you know, December 1st, 2011, the YFA Circuit 5 Adoptions Program celebrated our 2 anniversary. Over the last 2 years, with your, the dependency CMA's, KCI's, and the GaL's help, the Adoption staff have completed over 462 adoptions (credit for 390) since we began. Our staff, through a lot of hard work and even more dedication, has reduced the number of children in care that are eligible for adoption. Two years ago we had a total of 247 children available for adoption. Today we have 110.

Although the adoption staff themselves have worked tirelessly, we can't take all of the credit for reducing the numbers. Currently, KCI has been the trend setter in reducing the number of children coming into care through the prevention program and has streamlined the subsidy approval process in order to move them out quicker. Both The Centers and Children's Home Society staff have worked diligently to keep families together, even in these troubled times. The GaL's have been working side by side with us throughout the entire dependency and adoption process and the courts have been receptive, flexible and supportive. And last but not nowhere near least, the amazing foster and adoptive families that work with our children on a daily basis. All together, I would say that Circuit 5 has an outstanding Child Welfare system.

However, there is one more group that I really need to thank, and that's the many donors that donated for our Adoption Appreciation Events in the 5 counties and for those that donated Christmas gifts to our children in care. We can't thank you enough for your generosity and kindness. I do, however, need to say that we can always use donations of toys and gift cards throughout the year for our children's birthdays and other special events such as proms and homecomings and such.

With all of that said, our challenges for this coming year are many. As many of you heard, our budget through DCF was reduced but we still have many children in care, especially teenagers, that continue to need a permanent, loving forever family. Please, if you know of somebody that would be a good parent to a child in need, please have them contact us. Have a wonderful year!

Glenn Henson
Director of Adoptions for Circuit 5

No Sweeter Success

Written By: Rebecca Hager

Joe is a typical 17 year old teenage boy with a heart of gold and a contagious smile. He had decided when he was just a young teenager that he did not want to be adopted. Joe has been in the foster care system since 2003. He had a fabulous foster home that loved and cared for him and he felt that he did not need to have a "forever family." Joe refused to complete an adoption chronicle and reported to the court several times over the years that he had no interest in adoption. Although his foster family was amazing to him, his diligent case worker, Kimberly

Siple, did everything to convince him on the benefits of having the support of a forever family. Joe did not want to hear any of this.

In April of 2011, Joe was having some difficulty in his foster home. Although both the foster parents and Joe did their best to work out these issues, it was becoming clear that his time may be limited in this living arrangement. Although no one was to blame, Joe was becoming acutely aware that his future may look very different than he expected.

Kimberly hit the ground running. She contacted the licensing specialist, Shelia Mulcahy, to help locate a possible adoptive family for Joe. In May of 2011, Chris and Alicia, the youth pastor and his wife at the church Joe attends, met with Kimberly and Shelia. They shared that through preparing for an upcoming sermon series on the Biblical Family, and through several other avenues, God began to lay on their heart the importance of reaching out to young men. God specifically laid Joe on their hearts. They knew

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Shining Stars

Alexandria is a kind hearted and soft spoken 12 year old African American female. Alexandria enjoys listening to R&B, Hip Hop, and Pop music. Alexandria can stay content for hours at Books A Million or the local library enjoying many different types of books. Alexandria used to participated in soccer, girl scouts, and musical theatre. She loves to write and is currently working on a book.

As a typical preteen Alexandria has some moments of “defiance and atti-

tude” but overall is a “delightful” young lady.

In looking into the future, Alexandria sees herself as a mechanic working on all types of cars. Alexandria hopes to find a family who enjoys horseback riding as much as she does. Alexandria states that she wants a family who “won’t hurt my heart and will like me for me”.

If you are interested in learning more about Alexandria please contact Elizabeth Torres at 352-253-5625



Q u a d i r

Quadir or “Q” is a 16 year old that is part of a sibling group with his brother Rodney, age 15. Quadir and his brother Rodney have an unmistakable bond. Together they share so many amazing stories and their conversations are filled with jokes and laughter. This bright, outgoing young man exudes charisma and it's a good bet his superstar dreams will come true. He hopes someday to be on stage in front of a microphone. Quadir likes to keep active and enjoys

being with friends, playing video games, and playing basketball. In school, Quadir does well when he concentrates and puts in the work.

A prospective adoptive family that can provide a nurturing and secure environment for Quadir and his brother Rodney, as well as patience, will be best suited for them. If you are that person or know of somebody that is, please contact Kimberly Siple at 352-253-5625 for more information. Quadir and Rodney are waiting for you to call.

Highland Memorial Park, is hosting a **Charity Picnic** on

Friday, January 27, 2011 from 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

100% of the donations received will benefit

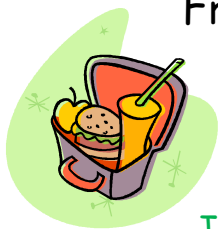
Youth & Family Alternatives, Inc.

Highland Memorial Park is located at

1515 NE Third St-Ocala (2 blocks behind the Cascades Office Complex)

Tickets can be purchased in advance or the day of the picnic for a \$10 donation.

For more information and to purchase tickets please contact Zoraida Alvarado at 352-547-3750



Congratulations to YFA for being accepted to the 2012 American Adoption Conference. As part of our Balanced Scorecard goals, YFA submitted presentation proposals to various conferences within the country, and thankfully, we were accepted to this particular conference, which will be held April 26th-29th in Denver, Colorado.

Trainings and Resources

By: Rick Manuel

As part of our presentation, we will be presenting information regarding the Family Finding process, with a focus on initiating Family Finding activities at the onset of a case, building positive support systems around our children, maintaining appropriate biological family contacts with children, and supporting recruitment strategies that foster maintaining these positive family connections after adoption finalization.

Although on a national level, 54% of children were adopted by foster parents during a recent review period that occurred in July 2010, YFA and Kids Central have reversed this trend in Circuit 5, with 62% of adoptions in our circuit having resulted from relative adoptions during the fiscal year that ended on June 30th, 2011.

EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER

Congratulations to **Vanessa Ward**, Adoptions Employee of the Quarter!



YFA congratulates **Vanessa Ward**, Adoption Case Management Supervisor for Marion County, for her selection as the Adoption Programs Employee of the Quarter. According to her staff, "Vanessa

works day and night to make better lives for the children we serve and deserves to be recognized. She has compassion for all of the children that is endless. She is an excellent supervisor who is always there for us whenever we need her. She is so very patient and understanding and always willing to listen or lend a hand."

Truth be told, Vanessa has been a huge support to not just to her staff, but her peers and director alike. Vanessa has a firm grip on the adoption process as well as regulations, statutes, policies and procedures and she is often turned to for information. She is quick to assist anybody in need and needs little to no direction. She truly has the children's best interest when making decisions or when advo-

cating for them.

However, it doesn't stop there. Vanessa continuously strives to make her team the best in all aspects. She takes pride in her work but even more so with her team. She pushes her staff to excel and be the best that they can be. She also has a calming, caring way to her in which she can defuse any difficult situation quickly.

She is extremely well-rounded and is an asset to her team, the Adoptions Program and YFA as a whole. It has been a true pleasure working side by side with you,

Vanessa. Your caring, professionalism and knowledge are a huge factor in the success of the Adoptions Program.



Bullying

By LoriAnn Floramo, MSW

Bullying has become all too common in our society today and often reaches far beyond the school yard. Recently, two young children from New York took their own lives because of the constant bullying they received at school. This is not a rare event and it doesn't just happen in New York, this is a nation wide problem. Surveys have indicated that as many as half of all children have been a victim of bullying at some point in their young lives. Children should never be made to feel alone or worthless because of bullying.

Acts of bullying can take on a number of different forms. These forms can include the follow-

ing:

- Verbal: name-calling, teasing
- Social: spreading rumors, leaving people out on purpose, breaking up friendships
- Physical: hitting, punching, shoving
- Cyberbullying: using the Internet, mobile phones or other digital technologies to harm others

Children, teens, and young adults who are particularly vulnerable to bullying present with the following characteristics; They do not get along well with others, are less popular than others, have few to no friends, do not conform to gender

norms, have a low self esteem, and are depressed or anxious. Bullies often choose children who are passive and easily intimidated because they thrive on controlling and dominating others.

Parents play an important role in preventing and stopping bullying. The most important advice that can be given is, stay involved so that your child doesn't have to suffer in silence.

For more information on how to help your child please visit www.stopbullying.gov. This website provides recourses for parents, children, teens, and young adults on preventing and stopping bullying.



No Sweeter Success

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Joe as a fine young man in their church and who has been in foster care for most of his life and was residing with foster parents that they knew. Previously, Chris had been a personal mentor to Joe and their whole family had become close to Joe. Chris shares that while sharing his burden for Joe with Alicia, the Lord, almost immediately, spoke to their hearts about their desire to see if Joe would be interested in becoming a part of their "forever family" through adoption. The family explained that this honestly hit them "out of the blue." Chris and Alicia state that their next step was to commit to each other and to the Lord and make this a matter of prayer together. The family feels it was amaz-

ing how God began to give them peace, a strong love for Joe, and a desire to have him as part of their family.

Shortly after meeting with Chris and Alicia, Kimberly arranged a meeting with Joe, the Johnsons, and the involved parties to discuss Joe moving in with the home with the goal of adoption.

Although nervous, Joe quickly opened to the idea. Since this decision was made, Joe moved into the family's home on May 28th, 2011 as a foster child.

Joe was adopted on September 13th, 2011. This occasion was both an emotional and joyous time for everyone, including Joe. Joe had finally been blessed with the family



Joe and his "Forever Family"

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

To RSVP:

LoriAnn Floramo
352-547-3750

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



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