

Director's Cut

Hello Everyone,

First and foremost I would like to congratulate the three recipients of Kids Central's Above and Beyond Awards. This award is given to those staff members that go above and beyond in their duties, responsibilities and customer service. It is an all encompassing award. Although most go above and beyond in executing their duties, there are those that have set themselves above and have gone beyond. They are, in no particular order, Alyssa Morreale, Kim Wiese and Keri Seroski. I would also like to congratulate the YFA staff that received the YFA Adoptions Employee of the Year Award for their particular office location. These staff members have also stood out among their peers. They are: Ashley Young, Marion County; Elizabeth Torres, Lake/Sumter Counties; and Betty Lou Gervais, Hernando/Citrus Counties. Again, congratulations to all!

This is the first full fiscal year that we, YFA, have been with KCI and what a year it's been! Over the past 12 months we have found forever families for 242 children (credited for 212) and, since we began this contract in December of 2009, we have completed a total of 362 adoptions (credit for 314). Although staff have worked diligently and have accomplished amazing things, none of this would be possible without you, our families. Thank you for all that you do!

Even though so many of you have opened your hearts and homes to our children and 362 children now have forever families, our work is nowhere near done. We still have children in care that have been in care far too long!! We ask that each and every one of you either speak to somebody that you think would make a good forever family and have them call us, or give us their phone number and we will contact them to talk about possibly becoming an adoptive parent. Together we can get these children out of care.

I hope everyone had a happy and safe Fourth of July and "Happy 235th Birthday America!"

Glenn Henson
Director of Adoptions for Circuit 5
Youth and Family Alternatives

SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS

Journal Entry;

Today will be the matching for Sarah. As I sit here at work, my thoughts go back to so many events of the past twenty two years. While waiting on God to bless us with our own family, we finished raising my teenage brother after the early death of our mother. We helped raise a niece and nephew for several years while their parents regained control of their own lives. We were part of many families as they faced their own trials. Many times we questioned where this path was leading us.

In 2008, we geared up for a third time for the adoption process. After completing the required classes, home studies, and background checks, we set out to find our family. In the

Written By: The Bentons

beginning, we set the age parameters at age five to ten. One night, my 15 year old niece and I were looking at adoption websites. For some reason, she had it in her mind that children on websites were orphans. When I explained that most of these children were abused or neglected by their parents, she asked why someone else in the family didn't step up to take care of them. It was hard for her to understand that not every child has an aunt and uncle to take care of them.

After about thirty minutes of silence, she pops out a question. She asked... "You wouldn't adopt me if I was on one of these sites?" I told her I

would adopt her in a heartbeat". What she said next absolutely changed our life. Keep in mind the age parameters we had set, she replied "you would never find me... I am older than ten." Wow! Thinking of how much joy my niece brings to our lives, why were we limiting God to certain ages? We started looking at all ages and that is when we found Sarah's photo on the Heart Gallery.

For so many years, I was bad about stepping out in front of God and expecting Him to follow me instead of following His lead. This was one time I was determined not to do that. I had told God early on, I need Him to "knock my socks off" to assure

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Shining Stars

Joshua is a 16 year old young man looking for a forever family to be there for him as he enters adulthood. He has a contagious smile and a wonderful sense of humor. He is personable and outgoing. He enjoys the outdoors and riding his bike. Joshua loves animals and is responsible in caring for them. He likes to play video games, watch the History Channel and Comedy Channel on televi-

sion. He is reading at a college level and takes every opportunity he gets to pick up a good book. Joshua likes to eat out at the Golden Corral, KFC, and McDonald's. His favorite foods are macaroni and cheese and fried chicken. If you are interested in learning more about Joshua and how he might fit into your family please contact: Jennifer Simmons at 352-277-5860



JOSHUA



JOHN

John is an adventurous 17 year old young man looking for a family that would be able to care for his needs into adulthood. John is currently in the 9th grade and thrives in a structured environment that allows for continuous redirection. John prefers to use sign language to express his needs and wants however he is physically capable of using spoken language. He enjoys hiking, swimming,

horseback riding, and signing. He can often be heard signing at church or in his room alone. John excels in an environment with a high level of routine and is good with other children. John has a healthy teenage appetite and eats anything you put in front of him. If you are interested in having this very special young man join your family please contact Jamillah Jenkins at 352-253-5625.

A LETTER FROM AN ADOPTIVE PARENT

Dear Kimberly,

Hoping everything is going well for you down in Florida. We are doing really well up here. We arrived safely and happily. Elizabeth has had a great time being reunited with the aunts and uncles and cousins she met in Florida and really is enjoying her new little nephews. We bought our farm, complete with a little donkey that we are getting to know, and she has actually combed and groomed it. We are getting ready to paint the walls of her bedroom princess pink.

Since she got out of school early, we have a THIRD grade math workbook and the goal is to have that completed as well as her multiplication tables before school starts this fall. We finish a page or two together every day or two.

I am so happy and hopeful for the possibility of a well rounded, well balanced, happy person that we have the privilege of calling our daughter and want to thank you and everyone involved AGAIN for everything you did, and everything you do to make this possible. We are not the traditional parent type and thank you for the opportunity to parent this little child. Yes, she has bad times, temper tantrums and at times acts an age level much below her 8 years but every challenging day is more than equaled by time and hours of proud progress, funny moments and basic love connectedness.

This weekend is father's day and Elizabeth and I are having fun and giggles over what we will do for his first fathers day.....the other day she told him in private that he is the best dad she ever had!!!! THANK YOU from all of us! No matter what, for the rest of your life, please know that this is a life (lives) that your hard work, love and caring have made a dramatic and wonderful difference in. Your effort is not for naught. Love from us all.....

EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR

Congratulations to **Ashley Young, Elizabeth Torres** and **Betty Lou Gervais**, employees of the year for their respective site

Ashley Young, Employee of the Year for the Ocala Office, always has a great attitude when approaching her children and families. She is loved by the children on her caseload, completes adoptions timely and is always respectful and polite to anybody she meets. She is eager to engage family members, especially with her harder to place teenagers. She often thinks outside of the box in order to either safely place a child or preserve placement. She inherited a case in which the child was in care for over 4 years and had multiple placements and was let down innumerable times. Ashley worked diligently to locate a possible family connection and finally located one that was interested in adopting the child but backed out at the last moment. Naturally this was very hard on both the child and Ashley. However she quickly rebounded and became even more determined to find this child a forever home. The child was adopted this month by a wonderful family due to her persistence and determination. Ashley is a true asset to YFA.

Betty Lou Gervais, Employee of the Year for Hernando/Citrus Office, is excellent at recognizing others strengths and encouraging them to utilize their strengths to the fullest capacity. She puts the children's need first without forgetting about the family. She is a real people person and it shows in her concern and care for the clients. Betty Lou is always respectful and considerate while getting the job at hand accomplished. Betty Lou has a great "can do" attitude that affects all of those around her in a positive manner. She consistently strives to put in the time and effort that is needed in order to exceed the 90 day targeted timeframe for finalization, while simultaneously ensuring that all needed services and supports are in place in order to ensure a successful adoption. She not only looks out for her children and families, she also organizes fun activities for her co-workers. She truly demonstrates motivation, compassion and a positive attitude as she strives to affect change for the better in the lives of the children and families we serve.

Elizabeth Torres, Employee of the Year for the Lake/Sumter Office, takes great time and care in matching children with potential adoptive families. She will ensure that she knows everything about the child and ensures that the child's wants and desires in a family are at the forefront of her decision. She treats each child on her caseload as her own. She makes sure they have school supplies, she attends their school meetings and after school activities, takes them to special events and makes sure they can be children, not foster care kids. She is open and willing to adapt to changes and is always willing to lend a hand to her teammates. Elizabeth always ends a conversation on a positive note. She has a great sense of urgency and works until the job is done. She will work evenings and weekends without blinking an eye. Elizabeth's skill and knowledge is only superseded by her diligence. Our children and families are truly fortunate to have her as their advocate.

We salute you three for all that you have accomplished in the last year! Thanks from the bottom of our hearts!



Post Adoption

By LoriAnn Floramo, MSW

Children who have a history of abuse, neglect, chaotic home environments and multiple placements often suffer from low self-esteem. Many families come to me asking "why is my child a follower among their peer group?" Sometimes the answer can be convoluted and other times it can simply be a matter of a low self-esteem. Children who feel good about themselves are not as easily swayed by negative peer influences. Parents play a key role in building their child's self-esteem.

The following are ways to help you build your child's self-esteem

- Appreciating your child
- Telling your child that you love them
- Spending time with your child
- Encouraging your child to make choices
- Fostering independence in your children
- Giving genuine importance to your child's opinion and listening
- Taking the time to explain reasons
- Feeding your child with positive encouragement
- Encouraging your child to try new and challenging activities

If you do find that your child engaged in an inappropriate activity with friends, do your best to set aside your initial anger and frustration. Instead, using a curiosity tone, process with them why they made the choices they made. Help guide your child through the choices they made as well as other choices they could have made. It is important to allow your child to realize on their own that they made the wrong decision instead of being told what they did wrong. In this scenario you will be building their self-esteem as well as their problem solving skills.





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me I wasn't jumping out on my own. As my wife Diane told me the story Sarah's case-worker told her, I had to close my office door. At that moment, I knew we had found our daughter. I hadn't cried so hard in years.

That brings us back to July 2009. Today we begin one incredible journey. Diane says don't get my hopes too high because the other family could be chosen. I knew in my heart that Sarah was indeed going to be our daughter. We were matched, and after all of the visits, we were able to bring our daughter home.

Sarah had spent eleven years in foster care. She had been removed from her birth family at the age of four. She had no memory of the abuse or neglect that caused her to be placed into foster care. Eleven years, many placements, and two failed adoptions, along with a lot more abuse and neglect while in foster care, this child was very angry. During our initial visits, we were

told by workers at her group home things like... "Run for your lives", "You have no idea what you are getting into", "Do you have homeowners insurance?" We heard about tantrums and threats of harm. She never displayed these behaviors to us during the visits. But we did see the daily reports and heard some of the tantrums over the phone as we talked to her caregivers.

When I spoke to Sarah's therapist, I told her that therapy and medication could play a positive role, but for Sarah to heal, she had to learn forgiveness. Forgiveness works if you are a person of faith or even if you are not. Today Sarah is as normal a teenager as any other. Now our problems are the "coolest styles", the newest cutest boy at school, and why at "17" she still has to follow our rules. You know... normal stuff. (A father's promise kept)

Three years ago we asked God to fill our supper table. What a job He has done. We set

out to change the life of a child. Looking back I can say that our lives have been changed. Diane and I are very blessed. We have been led by God. We have had the full support of a wonderful family and some very special friends. And the fine efforts of the people at Kids Central have played an important role in forming our family. Our growing family wants to thank all of you for the work you have done on our behalf.

Our adoption experience has been a wonderful journey. There have been bumps as well as great rewards. Our kids play second fiddle to nobody. They are wanted, loved, and ours. They have carved out their own special place within our large family. They are learning to set goals to achieve their dreams. And we will celebrate together as they achieve their dreams. What does that make us? A family, and that is a wonderful thing.
The Bentons

Peer to Peer Adoption Support

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