

Director's Cut

Hello Everyone and Welcome back to the Cornerstone,

I would like to officially congratulate Rick Manuel, who was recently promoted to the Operations and Training Specialist. He was formerly the Adoption Supervisor for Hernando and Citrus Counties. I would also like to welcome Claudine Brown-Garrow, now the Adoption Supervisor for the Hernando/Citrus office. Then we have Kelly Taylor, a new adoption case manager for Citrus County and Krystal Maldonado, a new adoption case manager for Marion County. Other "fairly new" staff members are Jamillah Jenkins, Sumter County, and SaBella Rodriguez, Hernando County. Congratulations and welcome to the YFA Adoptions Family.

We just kicked off our 2011/2012 Fiscal Year with 37 adoptions (credit for 32) so I think we are off to a great start. We also began targeted recruitment efforts in all five counties. More often than not, many families come to us seeking younger children, however our true need is forever families for our more challenging teenagers, many in the foster care system for years. Each recruiter is assigned a particular child (in addition to their regular workload of recruitment) and is given 45 days to actively seek out a loving, understanding home specifically for that child based on his or her needs, hobbies and likes.

We are also starting a Mentor program in Lake, Sumter, Hernando and Citrus Counties for families just completing MAPP. It is a volunteer program where we are asking families to mentor a child in care for a minimum of 6 months. Please contact our Lake or Hernando County office for more information. We also began a Mentor program in Hernando in which a fantastic young lady with a great outlook on life who aged out of foster care will begin mentoring our older foster children. We are hoping that she can reach some of those children that we can't.

On another note, I wish to recognize and thank Belynda Pinto for organizing the Starfish Fund for Lake County. We often have children in care that wish to join afterschool programs such as football, basketball, track or band, but the foster board rate doesn't cover such costs. How many of you remember going to your High School Homecoming or Prom? Who purchased/rented that gown or tux for you? Who helped with the flowers and/or the ride to and from? How about that special Halloween costume? Belynda created the Starfish Fund and gathered donations in order to fill those needs that many of our parents assisted us with. Thank you so much, Belynda. Thank you and all those that have donated to the Starfish Fund.

I just wanted to bring everybody up to speed on all of the wonderful programs that the Adoption Staff and the community are implementing in your area. If you wish to help or have an idea of a particular program that you would like to organize, don't hesitate to call!

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

Dreams Can Come True

Written By: Vanessa Ward

Life for Autumn had been chaotic. When she was only 5 years old the court had determined that her mother was unable to meet her needs and her father was given sole custody. Unfortunately, her father became wrapped up in his own addictions and Autumn was removed from him in February 2004.

When the investigator first went to the home he found that it had been without electricity and water for three months. There was no furniture in the home and Autumn didn't have appropriate clothes. She was bruised from

abuse and filthy from neglect. She was only 10 years old and was used to living with the chaos - it was normal for her. Autumn didn't do well in foster care. A combination of mental health issues and overwhelming grief led her down a path through several residential treatment facilities. She took her emotional pain out on herself and would bang her head on walls and floors. She was volatile. But under that exterior was a little girl crying out to be loved.

In 2006 her father's rights were terminated and she came to the adoption unit. She had many needs but the great-

est was one that her adoption worker desperately wanted to fill. She needed to feel that she belonged somewhere. She needed unconditional love. She needed parents. Autumn had a few more stays in therapeutic facilities over the next four years. None of these treatment facilities dealt with the root of Autumn's issues though, and really only dealt with the symptoms.

Then this past year when Fall came to Autumn it brought not

Continued on page 4





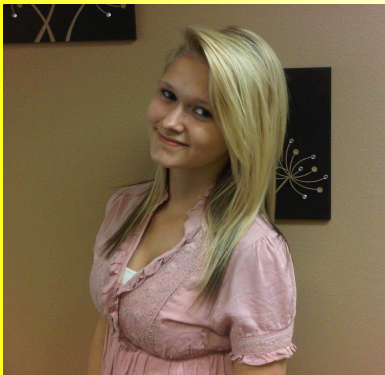
Shining Stars

Meet Jamesha, a 7 year old adorable little girl who is talkative and engaging. She enjoys playing, drawing, and riding her bike. She loves to be the center of attention. She enjoys engaging in conversation with adults. She also enjoys singing, dancing, and cheering. Jamesha is very active and would benefit from being with an active family that doesn't have a lot of children. She needs a family who is patient and willing to work with her. Jamesha is very

mature for her age and needs to be with a family who would allow her to be a child even though she may think she is a teenager. Jamesha would need to have a family who has the ability to supervise peer to peer play. Jamesha is the middle child of a sibling group of three. However she will be adopted as a single adoption as her siblings are not in the Department's care. For more information contact Ashley at 352-547-3750, extension 4005.



Jamesha



Harley

Harley, aka "Holly," is a typical teenage girl. She appears older than her age of 15. She enjoys shopping, talking on the phone to her friends, and being on the computer. She is a girly girl who loves to get her nails and hair done. Holly does well in school, and wants to be a cosmetologist or lawyer. She has a good sense of humor and a quick wit. Holly is smart and likes to debate everything. Holly

likes to have the attention on her and would benefit from a family that will give her the positive attention that she seeks. Holly would like to stay in contact with a few of her biological family members and friends and therefore wishes to remain in Central Florida. For more information contact Krystal Maldonado at 352-547-3750, extension 4003 or Kristin Folts at extension 4011

November is National Adoption month!!

YFA is hosting adoption appreciation events in Marion, Lake, Citrus, and Hernando Counties. Sumter County will be hosting an invitation only event sponsored by Carrabba's in the Villages. These events are possible only through the gracious support of our community through monetary and/or merchandise donations or volunteering to operate activities. Each county's activity is individualized according to the contributions of the local community.

Contact your local YFA office for the date and times of events in your area.

30 Days of Amazing Children: Explore Adoption!

You can do something today to change the life of a child forever! *30 Days of Amazing Children: Explore Adoption!* will feature a different video or picture every day of children in foster care sharing their dreams of being adopted. Floridians are encouraged to visit www.adoptflorida.org during National Adoption Month in November to meet teens, siblings and children with medical needs who are available for adoption.

Trainings and Resources

The Florida Center for the Advancement of Child Welfare Practice website provides an abundance of information for both professionals and adoptive parents, as well as those families seeking to adopt, pertaining to adoption resources and the adoption process in general. Several links are included on the site, which address topics such as adoption benefits, the adoption matching and approval process, the adoption home-study process, the impact of adoption on adoptive parents, adoption statutes and policies, as well as information regarding adoption support groups throughout Florida, in addition to numerous other topics of interest. I would recommend that anybody seeking adoption resources or answers to adoption questions check out this webpage. The link to the adoption resource page is <http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/adoptions/default.aspx>.



EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER

Congratulations to **Sabella “Bella” Rodriguez**, Adoptions Employee of the Quarter!



Bella came to the Adoptions Unit after being a Child Protective Investigator (CPI) for over 5 years. Even though

Child Protective Investigator and Adoption Case Manager are both classified as a Family Services Counselor, they are 2 completely different worlds. Bella was given a full adoptions caseload within the first week of starting with YFA.

Her first few months were very rough, not only because of getting to know her many cases, children, families and all of the new procedures, timeframes and ex-

pectations, but also due to the loss of her mother. Although the lost was great, because of Bella’s contagious positive attitude, perpetual smile and commitment to her children and her work, she has persevered and has become an excellent Adoptions Case Manager. Over the past several months Bella has finalized numerous adoptions and is on track to finalize many more in the 2011/12 timeframe.

Bella is a true asset to the Brooksville team, YFA Adoptions and Kids Cent-

ral, but mostly to her children and families. Thank you for going above and beyond. We love you Bella!



Post Adoption

By LoriAnn Floramo, MSW

At a recent home visit with a post adoption family, I was handed the following poem. The family shared with me how moving and poignant it was for them and so today I share it with all of you.....

Legacy of An Adopted Child

Author Unknown

Once there were two women,
Who barely knew each other.
One is in your heart forever,
The other you'll call mother.

Two different lives,
Shaped to make yours one.
One became your guiding star,
The other became your sun.

The first gave you life,
And the second taught you how to live it.
The first gave you a need for love,

And the second was there to give it.
One gave you a nationality,
The other gave you a name.
One gave you the seed of talent,
The other gave you an aim.

One gave you emotions,
The other calmed your fears.
One saw your first sweet smile,
The other dried your tears.

One gave you a family,
It was what God intended for her

to do.
The other prayed for a child,
And God led her straight to you.

And now you ask me
Through your tears,
The age old question through the years.
Heredity or environment...
Which are you a product of?
Neither, my darling... neither,
Just two different kinds of love.



Spotlight on Success Continued from page 1



only the color of changing leaves, it brought an adoptive family. Allan and Mary were everything that Autumn had needed and they even had lots in common. The three of them all loved exotic birds and horses. We were afraid to tell Autumn that someone wanted to adopt her because she had just reconnected with her mother and had high hopes of being reunited with her. We were afraid she would just reject them. The family didn't seem bothered by that and planned a trip from their home in North Carolina to Florida to meet their new daughter. At first Autumn was fearful but curious. By the end of their first visit Autumn was excited. She had hope. She had someone wanting to be her parents.

They visited over the next few months and then she moved into their home. Now she's adopted. At 16 Autumn has her own personality and values. She has things she already likes and things which she dislikes. And now she has the foundation of a family and on that foundation her parents will help her grow into a woman who enjoys life - one who lives, laughs and loves.



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