

EXPLORE ADOPTION

FINDING FAMILIES FOR FLORIDA'S KIDS

public adoption partnership

**Every child deserves a lifelong, supportive family.
That's why the State of Florida has created the Explore Adoption initiative,
with the goal of finding loving homes for Florida's children in care.**

Throughout Florida, more than 850 children from varied backgrounds, circumstances, races and ethnicities are looking for a forever family and a permanent place to call home. We need the help of many partners to match these children to the Floridians who can embrace them as their own. That's where your organization comes in.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

POST A LINK on your Web page to the **Explore Adoption** Web site, www.adoptflorida.org.

USE YOUR INTERNAL NEWSLETTERS, NEWS-PAPERS, MAGAZINES or other publications to promote awareness of public adoption by featuring a child or sibling group available for adoption, running an article about the **Explore Adoption** initiative and/or regularly featuring the **Explore Adoption** logo, 800-number and Web site.

IF YOUR ORGANIZATION PROVIDES a financial stipend or parental leave to employees who

adopt, promote awareness of these benefits and refer interested employees to **Explore Adoption**.

EMAIL YOUR EMPLOYEES to invite them to sign up to receive the monthly **Explore Adoption** e-newsletter.

MAKE EXPLORE ADOPTION brochures available to your employees.

HANG POSTERS featuring an adoptable child in your lobbies, cafeterias, lounges, and other areas visible to employees and the public.

SPONSOR or provide in-kind and/or monetary donations to extend the reach of the **Explore Adoption** initiative.

HOST a public adoption orientation meeting for your employees in cooperation with your local community-based care provider or Heart Gallery. For more information, please visit www.adoptflorida.org and click on the Heart Gallery link.

BENEFITS OF PUBLIC ADOPTION:

AFFORDABLE. While private forms of adoption can cost upwards of \$30,000, adopting one of Florida's children through the public adoption system costs little or nothing.

LEGALLY SECURE. Because Florida's children are not eligible for adoption until a court has already terminated the parental rights of their birth parents, this form of adoption is very secure.

MONTHLY FINANCIAL SUPPORT. Families adopting one of Florida's kids in care often receive a monthly subsidy to help offset ongoing costs.

HEALTH CARE. All of the children receiving a monthly subsidy are eligible for health care through the Medicaid program until age 18.

COLLEGE TUITION. Florida's children adopted from community-based care are eligible for free tuition at any state university, community college or vocational school in Florida.

A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT. Other parents who have adopted Florida's children offer a wealth of support and information for new adoptive parents, and even maintain a 24-hour helpline.



visit www.adoptflorida.org
1-800-96-adopt

about florida's children...

Throughout the state, about 850 children in care are waiting to find adoptive homes. These are children whose parental rights have been terminated due to abuse, neglect or abandonment.

The majority of these kids are:

- Over the age of 8, with many being teens
- Part of a sibling group
- A member of a minority group
- Physically or emotionally disabled

Visit www.adoptflorida.org and learn how you can become part of the **Explore Adoption** initiative and help our children find forever homes.

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our community's children

Every child deserves a permanent, loving family to care for them. Nearly half of the children who wait the longest to find a forever family are African American.

On any given day, approximately 850 Florida children in foster care are looking for a permanent home and a forever family. More than 40 percent of these children are African American. Matching the children in Florida's care with Floridians who will open their hearts and homes to them is the goal of the State of Florida's *Explore Adoption* initiative. Whether you are already a parent or grandparent or someone who wants to start a family, public adoption offers a way to create or grow a family.

BENEFITS OF PUBLIC ADOPTION:

LEGALLY SECURE. Because Florida's children are not eligible for adoption until a court has already terminated the parental rights of their birth parents, this form of adoption is very safe and secure.

COLLEGE TUITION. Florida's children adopted from community-based care are eligible for free tuition at any state university, community college or vocational school in Florida.

HEALTH CARE. All of the children receiving a

monthly subsidy are eligible for health care through the Medicaid program until age 18.

A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT. Other parents who have adopted Florida's children offer a wealth of support and information for new adoptive parents, and even maintain a 24-hour helpline.

AFFORDABLE. While private forms of adoption can cost upwards of \$30,000, adopting one of Florida's children through the public adoption system costs little or nothing.

MONTHLY FINANCIAL SUPPORT. Families adopting one of Florida's kids often receive a monthly subsidy to help offset ongoing costs.

OTHER WAYS YOU CAN HELP INCLUDE:

Are you involved with professional associations, community service organizations, or a church or ministry in your community? If so, consider ways you can spread the word about public adoption, such as:

ADVOCATE ADOPTION by making your members aware of the many children in Florida who need permanent homes.

PROMOTE ADOPTION in your communications with members, including newsletters, magazines, member alerts and by providing a link on your Web site to www.adoptflorida.org.

FEATURE A SPECIFIC CHILD who is seeking a home. Your local adoption provider can identify

a child and provide child-specific materials to share with your members.

IDENTIFY members who have adopted one or more of Florida's children; ask them to provide testimonials to your organization.

BUILD A VALUABLE RELATIONSHIP with your local community-based care organizations and display your *Explore Adoption* materials at meetings or other gatherings.

CONSIDER HOSTING SPECIAL EVENTS as an avenue for families to gather adoption information through orientations, picnics with available children and group viewings of the *Explore Adoption* video program.



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meet the west family:

Aundre and Connie West had six grown children and seven grandkids when Aundre, a pastor and former schoolteacher, was asked to mentor teenage brothers Freddie and Keenen. When Keenen was sent to live in a group home, the couple took action. They became foster parents to the two brothers and within months, saw improvements in the boys' behavior and schoolwork. The couple adopted Freddie and Keenen in May 2009 and are strong believers in active parenting. "We're on top of them daily - how they're doing in school, how they conduct themselves. It's about leading them on the right path," explains Aundre. The Wests say their experience has taught them a lot about love. "The biggest lesson I believe is that love has no boundaries," says Connie. "Having the ability to give someone something they lost - family and home - that's the greatest gift."

EXPLORE

ADOPTION

FINDING FAMILIES FOR FLORIDA'S KIDS

children with disabilities and medical conditions

Every child deserves a permanent, loving family to care for them. Some of the children who wait the longest to find a forever family are children with disabilities or medical conditions.

Matching Florida's children in care to Floridians who will open their hearts and homes to them is the aim of the **Explore Adoption** initiative. Throughout Florida, hundreds of children with disabilities or medical conditions are looking for families who will embrace them and experience the unique rewards of adopting a child with special needs.

BENEFITS OF PUBLIC ADOPTION:

Florida provides a variety of support to help families and the children they adopt succeed. Other parents who have adopted Florida's children offer a wealth of help and information for new adoptive parents. From the initial adoption inquiry to finalization and beyond, local community-based care agencies, local partners and existing adoptive families are available to provide advice, resources and physical and emotional support.

Among its unique benefits, public adoption is:

AFFORDABLE. While private forms of adoption can cost upward of \$30,000, adopting one of Florida's children through the public adoption system costs little or nothing.

LEGALLY SECURE. Before children are made available for adoption, a court has terminated their biological parents' rights, meaning they have no future legal claim to the children. This court-backed measure means public adoptions are secure and final.

MONTHLY FINANCIAL SUPPORT. Families adopting one of Florida's kids in care often receive a monthly subsidy to help offset ongoing costs.

HEALTH CARE. All children adopted from state care are eligible for health care through the Medicaid program until age 18.

COLLEGE TUITION. Florida's children adopted from community-based care are eligible for free

tuition at any state university, community college or vocational school in Florida.

A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT. Other parents who have adopted Florida's children offer a wealth of support and information for new adoptive parents, and even maintain a 24-hour helpline.

THE ROAD TO ADOPTION:

THE ROAD TO ADOPTION BEGINS by visiting www.adoptflorida.org to learn more about adopting a child from Florida's care with disabilities or medical conditions. Explore how adoption can make an impact in your life and the life of a deserving child.

THE EVALUATION PHASE gives you an opportunity to learn more about public adoption and whether it might be right for you, while

also confirming you are eligible to adopt. This process includes an orientation and subsequent training sessions, a home study and background checks. This process can usually be completed in about nine months.

AFTER QUALIFYING to be an adoptive parent, a prospective parent is able to meet and get to know the child who might become part of their family.



meet the konold family:

Cynthia and Charles Konold love children and wanted to make a difference. When their biological children grew up and moved away, the Konold family knew they wanted more. After becoming foster parents three years ago, their lives changed. The Konolds felt it was time to adopt because they were becoming attached to each child who walked through their door.

In 2009 and 2010, the Konold family adopted six children: David, Charley, Jasmine, Susan, Emiley and Jeremiah. Jasmine has cerebral palsy and Emiley is battling chronic lung disease. Although there are challenges that come with special needs children, there are also many joyful moments. Cynthia attributes improvements in both Jasmine's and Emiley's health to the care and love they have found in their new environment. "Opening up and giving more is what it's all about - in the end it will pay off," says Cynthia.

EXPLORE ADOPTION

FINDING FAMILIES FOR FLORIDA'S KIDS

brothers and sisters

The Explore Adoption initiative aims to match brothers and sisters with loving families able to open their homes to a sibling group.

In the past, brothers and sisters separated from their birth parents because of abuse or neglect were often adopted into different homes. This was partially because younger siblings found homes more readily, leaving older siblings in temporary care. Today, adoption recruiters work hard to keep siblings together, finding these children do better if they have a chance to grow up together with their brothers and sisters.

Through statewide and community-based partnerships, a branded initiative and media campaign, and Web-based tools, *Explore Adoption* invites Floridians to find out more about public adoption and explore this method of creating or growing a family.

BENEFITS OF PUBLIC ADOPTION:

SECURE. Before children are made available for adoption, a court has terminated their biological parents' rights, meaning they have no future legal claim to the children. This court-backed measure means public adoptions are secure and final.

AFFORDABLE. Public adoptions are inexpensive, costing a family less than \$500, which can typically be reimbursed by the state. Compared to private adoption, which can cost upward of \$30,000, public adoption is very affordable.

ONGOING SUPPORT. Most children adopted through the public adoption system qualify for ongoing assistance, including:

- Monthly subsidy payments (if funds are available)
- Health care coverage through age 18
- Free tuition to any state college, university or technical school in Florida

A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT. From the initial inquiry until the adoption's completion

and beyond, local community-based care agencies, local partners and existing adoptive families are available to provide practical and emotional advice and support.

THE ROAD TO ADOPTION:

THE EVALUATION PROCESS, including training, home study, and background checks, usually can be completed in about nine months.

AFTER QUALIFYING, each potential adoptive parent has the opportunity to meet and get to know the child who might become part of their family. This interaction allows for families and children to:

- Familiarize themselves with each others' interests and beliefs
- Find similarities in their lives

- Develop a relationship prior to finalizing the adoption

ADOPTIVE PARENTS ARE VERY DIVERSE

A wide variety of people may adopt, including those who are:

- Married or single
- Any age, as long as they are at least 18
- Homeowner or renter
- Of any faith or religion
- An experienced parent or an individual with no children

Find out more about public adoption and the children currently looking for families by visiting www.adoptflorida.org or calling 1-800-96-ADOPT (1-800-962-3678).



meet the pitts family:

Greg and Jan Pitts were successful business owners in their 40s when they decided to complete their family by adopting. An adoption recruiter introduced them to a sibling group of four girls, Toni, Izzie, Sarah, and Eva. After several weekend visits, the Pitts knew it was a done deal. They even started shopping for a new vehicle to accommodate their growing family. As Greg puts it, "The next Friday they moved for the last time. They've been with us for more than 6 years."

The Pitts were able to unite the four sisters who had been living apart in two separate foster homes. "For me, it's been a great experience," says Greg. "There have been some rough times, but I wouldn't go back or trade my life with anybody."



adopting a teenager

No child is too old to want and need a permanent family. Florida has many teenagers and older kids seeking a family to love and call their own.

Matching Florida's children in care to Floridians who will open their hearts and homes to them is the aim of the *Explore Adoption* initiative. Throughout Florida, hundreds of teenagers and older kids are looking for families who will embrace them and experience the unique rewards of adopting a teenager.

BENEFITS OF PUBLIC ADOPTION:

Florida provides a variety of support to help families and the teenagers they adopt succeed. Other parents who have adopted Florida's children offer a wealth of help and information for new adoptive parents. From the initial adoption inquiry to finalization and beyond, local community-based care agencies, local partners and existing adoptive families are available to provide advice, resources and physical and emotional support.

Among its many unique benefits, public adoption is:

AFFORDABLE. While private forms of adoption can cost upward of \$30,000, adopting one of

Florida's teens through the public adoption system costs little or nothing.

LEGALLY SECURE. Before children are made available for adoption, a court has terminated their biological parents' rights, meaning they have no future legal claim to the children. This court-backed measure means public adoptions are secure and final.

MONTHLY FINANCIAL SUPPORT. Families adopting one of Florida's teenagers in care often receive a monthly subsidy to help offset ongoing costs.

HEALTH CARE. All children adopted from state care are eligible for health care through the Medicaid program until age 18.

COLLEGE TUITION. Florida's teens adopted from community-based care are eligible for free tuition at any state university, community college or vocational school in Florida.

A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT. Other parents who have adopted Florida's children offer a wealth of support and information for new adoptive parents and even maintain a 24-hour helpline.

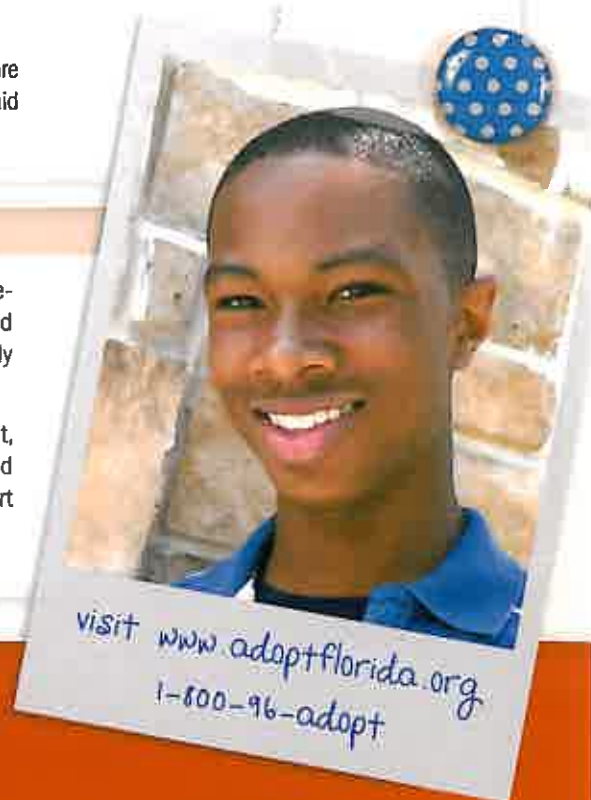
THE ROAD TO ADOPTION:

THE ROAD TO ADOPTION begins by visiting www.adoptflorida.org to learn more about adopting a teenager from Florida's care. Explore how adoption can make an impact in your life and the life of a deserving child.

THE EVALUATION PHASE gives you an opportunity to learn more about public adoption and whether it might be right for you, while also confirming you are eligible to adopt. This

process includes an orientation and subsequent training sessions, a home study and background checks. This process can usually be completed in about nine months.

AFTER QUALIFYING to be an adoptive parent, the prospective parent is able to meet and get to know the child who might become part of their family.



meet the duffee family:



Amber, 16, is a lively teenager with goals and aspirations. As a child who entered foster care at age 10, Amber frequently moved between homes before finally settling in with Theresa and Shawn Duffee for one full year. For the first time, she was able to attend the same school and maintain friendships. After graduating from therapeutic care, Amber was moved to another foster home though Theresa spoke with her every day and the family visited often. Three years later, Amber returned to the Duffee household for pre-adoptive placement. Amber was officially adopted by the Duffees in September 2009. Today, Amber is working hard in school and wants to be a pediatrician. "We're all stronger because of this experience," says Theresa. "It was all of our dreams to make Amber part of our family, and we couldn't ask for more."

EXPLORE ADOPTION

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faith-based partnership

Churches and other faith-based organizations are ideal places to spread awareness about the wonderful children in Florida looking for families to love and nurture them.

Communities of faith embrace beliefs and values that call on their members to provide for “the fatherless” and to “look after orphans.” It is through love that the faithful are motivated to take responsibility for one another and care about their neighbors.

You can become a vital and active partner in Florida’s statewide adoption initiative by encouraging your congregation to *Explore Adoption* and experience the joy of building a new family and improving the well-being of Florida’s children.

HERE IS HOW YOU CAN BECOME AN EXPLORE ADOPTION PARTNER:

ADVOCATE ADOPTION Make your congregation aware of the many children in Florida who need permanent homes. Speak about public adoption as an important ministry.

SUPPORT ADOPTIVE FAMILIES Provide a post-adoption support system for your members who adopt one of Florida’s children. Consider a welcome home reception and organize an extended spiritual family for encouragement and support.

PROMOTE ADOPTION in your communications with members, including bulletins and newsletters and by providing a link on your Web site to www.adoptflorida.org

FEATURE A SPECIFIC CHILD who is seeking a home. Your local adoption provider can identify a child and provide child-specific materials to present to your congregation members. Consider displaying a Heart Gallery at your place of worship.

HOST ADOPTION AWARENESS EVENTS in conjunction with your local adoption provider, community-based care organization or Heart Gallery. For more information, please visit www.adoptflorida.org and click on the Heart Gallery link.

PRAY FOR FLORIDA’S CHILDREN IN CARE that the right families may find them.

OTHER WAYS YOU CAN HELP INCLUDE:

IDENTIFY CONGREGATION members who have adopted one or more of Florida’s children; ask them to provide testimonials to your congregation.

HONOR MEMBERS of your congregation who have adopted or who themselves are adopted and support them through prayer.

IDENTIFY SOMEONE in your organization to serve as a spokesperson and contact for members seeking adoption information.

BUILD A RELATIONSHIP with a local community-based care organization and display *Explore Adoption* materials in common areas. Regularly feature children waiting for homes.

CONSIDER CONGREGATION events as avenues for families to gather adoption information through orientations, picnics with available children and group viewings of the *Explore Adoption* video program.

With the support of our faith-based organizations around the state, we can begin a healing mission for Florida’s children. Finding and supporting safe and loving families for these adoptive children will create a beautiful sense of belonging, not only for the adoptive families, but also for the entire spiritual community that takes part in the journey to bring a special child home.



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meet the weaver family:

Bradley and Tammy Weaver became foster parents after being inspired by some fellow members of First Christian Church in Cape Coral who were foster and adoptive parents.

When they received 10-month-old Katie in 2003, she instantly became a part of the family. Their older daughter, Miranda, loved having a younger sister and later that year, the Weavers decided they wanted to adopt Katie. The Weavers found support and strength in the families of their church congregation, who were able to mentor and guide them. Three years later, the Weavers became Katie’s forever family. Today, Katie is a typical 7-year-old who enjoys gymnastics, attends church with her parents, and participates in youth group and Bible camp.