



Family Support Services OF NORTH FLORIDA INC.



*Especially for
Adoptive Parents &
Relative Caregivers*

SERVING DUVAL AND NASSAU COUNTIES

SEPTEMBER | 2007



Call 421-5839 to inquire about adopting Mathew
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www.heartgalleryjax.org

Meet Mathew. He's full of adventure, friendly and outgoing. He wants to become an animal explorer when he grows up. But first, he's in search of the perfect family. Will you welcome Mathew into your heart and your home?



Adoption event draws hundreds

Michelle Bell-Badger, a speech pathologist with Duval Public Schools, said she and her husband had been trying to have a baby for some time but the news of Baby Grace, a newborn infant found recently in a dumpster and soon adopted, was the catalyst for her and her husband to explore adoption.

She was one of more than 200 people Aug. 2, who attended "Let's Talk Adoption," at Christ Church in Mandarin. The event was sponsored by Family Support Services of North Florida (FSS).

Rhonda Mansfield, FSS chief development officer, encouraged Bell-Badger to take a course that would license her and her husband as foster parents.

"If you are licensed foster parents, you can take in foster children but if you want to adopt and you are matched with a child, we do our best to place the child with you so that you can bond," Mansfield said. "The adoption process takes some additional time, but you will have the child already with you."

Bell-Badger said she'd love to give a child a permanent home. "A child is truly a blessing," she said. "Here we are, wanting to have a child of our own so badly and we haven't been blessed. But I

think adopting a child would be wonderful."

She and her husband live in Orange Park, so they can go through Clay Baker Kids' Net, Mansfield told her. But the foster home licensing and adoptions procedures through the State of Florida is the same.

FSS is one of 22 community-based care organizations that were spun out of the Florida Department of Children and Families. The nonprofit agencies handle foster care placement and adoptions after a child is removed from a home for neglect or abuse.

William Patrick O'Brien, a vocal student and senior at Douglas Anderson School for the Arts, is a believer. He gave up a church youth group trip to North Carolina to speak at the event.

"My mother gave me up because I was a boy," he said. "I was adopted in 1990, after my (adopted) parents had lost a second child. My mom says I was not born from her. I was chosen for her."



FSS's Van Henderson (far left) adopted daughter Jermane (second from left), in August. Judge David Gooding finalized the court proceedings.



Adoption is a blessing for all

The greatest thing about being a Circuit Court Judge is that I am reminded daily of how blessed I am. Your involvement as foster and adoptive parents, volunteers and leaders is a tremendous blessing to me personally, and to our children. We need you.



I am honored to write this column to share my views about one of my favorite subjects—adoption.

Children thrive when part of a loving and permanent family. Ever since Adam and Eve had their first child, we have known the best way to raise children is in a family.

Families were God's unique idea. There is no greater institution, no better group of people to affect positive change in the world than the family. Nowhere can the truth of God's love be more effectively taught and modeled than inside a family.

Conversely, there is no institution, no group of people with more power and ability to destroy a person than the family. We must never forget that the first murder occurred in the home, when Cain slew Abel. It was the original incidence of domestic violence. The failure of parents to teach spiritual truths to their children directly impacts their

relationship with God and how they treat others. A family is legally established when I enter a Final Judgment of Adoption, none of which are more significant. Children deserve permanent, loving families and safe homes, as in adoption.

It has been said that an adopted child grows in the heart of his or her mother, not beneath it. When I finalize an adoption, I am merely affirming legally that which is true already in the hearts of those before me - that these children and these parents are family. They belong to each other.

The Psalmist David, that great King of Israel long ago said "God sets the lonely in families." It is an honor for me to take part in an adoption because families are ordained of God.

Adoption is grafting a branch onto a family tree. By that grafting, certainly, the grafted branch is affected, but so is the limb to which it is attached. The whole tree changes and, as trees change one by one the whole forest is different. Adoptions create families, and the effect is nothing less than eternal, affecting families, our community, and our world, for generations. We need you as adoptive parents.

General Maximus Decimus Meridius, the main fictional character in the movie *The Gladiator* stated "What we do in life, echoes in eternity."

What we do in life—for children and through adoption—will echo in eternity. You do make a difference. Thank you and keep on.

ERIN'S CORNER



Making adoption easier

Did you know there are more than 300 children available for adoption on the First Coast? Sometimes, adoptive families are specifically looking to adopt an infant or young child. Finding a baby who is free for adoption can be a daunting task for a newly licensed adoptive family, but there is a solution.

Become a foster parent. Often, if you are on a list to adopt, an infant or young child can be placed immediately in your home so you'll have a chance to bond as the adoption process proceeds.

Many families shy away from being a foster parent because they fear the loss if a child returns home to the biological family; however, with any relationship there is a risk of potential heartbreak and loss. Life is a risk.

The exciting thing about fostering a child is that there is always a reward. There are no accidental placements, whether a child remains in a home for a week, a month, a year, or a lifetime, families makes a difference in the life of each child that comes into their home. Standing before the Judge, when you adopt the child that was picked up from the hospital, or who was dropped off at your home at six months old, all of the "labor pains" of the adoption process are forgotten.

To become a foster parent, complete the 30-hour Model Approach to Positive Parenting (MAPP) class in foster parenting that begins the licensing process, which includes fingerprints and background checks, a radon test, a home sanitation inspection, references from your friends and neighbors, a pool safety class (if applicable), and a home study. Your home must be set up for the number of children you wish to be licensed for, meaning you will need to have beds for each child, or a crib and car seat for an infant.

Erin Stuckey is an FSS Adoption Specialist. If you would like her to speak to your church or group about adoption, please call 200-7745.

FSS expands into Nassau County

The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) has given Family Support Services of North Florida (FSS) the go-ahead to provide child welfare services to the children of Nassau County beginning Sept. 1 through June 30, 2008, when DCF will determine who gets the long-term three-to five-year contract.



Nassau County Commissioner Marianne Marshall and Jim Adams, CEO of FSS, loading backpacks for Nassau foster children.

"The staffs of both Family Matters in Nassau County and FSS have worked very hard to make this transition as seamless as possible," said FSS Chief Executive Officer Jim Adams, who is a Nassau County resident. "We welcome our new employees into the FSS family."

So that the transition can be as smooth as possible, welcoming the Nassau employees into FSS, Chief Operating Officer Joanne Robertson and her assistant, Kitty Loor, will work out of the Nassau office for the next three months.

And just in time for school to start Aug. 20, Nassau County Commissioner, Marianne Marshall, made a trip to FSS headquarters in Jacksonville to take more than 200 backpacks, filled with grade-appropriate supplies, back to Nassau County for distribution to the county's foster children.

The backpacks, supplied by donations from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, JEA and Henry Schein Medical, were scooped up by case workers in Nassau County, who took them to the foster children in Fernandina Beach, Yulee, Hilliard, Callahan and Bryceville.