



Family Support Services OF NORTH FLORIDA INC.

Especially for Adoptive Parents
and Relative Caregivers



SERVING DUVAL AND NASSAU COUNTIES

JANUARY | 2008

Wish comes true for 13-year-old

When LaQuan, 13, went to the Jacksonville Municipal Stadium December 5, 2007, he was excited.

Not only was he going to be interviewed for CBS 47's *Jacksonville's Children*, he was going to do it where the Jacksonville Jaguars play football – a place he's always loved but had never been.



Making a dream come true, Jacksonville Jaguars Offensive Tackle Maurice Williams presented LaQuan, 13, tickets to the Jaguars' game against the Carolina Panthers and a signed game ball.

Thanks to the efforts of many though, LaQuan was able to go inside the stadium for the first time to see the Jaguars' home game against the Carolina Panthers.

Winn-Dixie donated two game tickets and presented him with a goodie bag which included \$100 in Winn-Dixie gift cards, a t-shirt and a Jags mouse pad.

Offensive tackle Maurice Williams presented him with the tickets, which went right in LaQuan's pocket-hoodie sweatshirt pocket.

"Oh no," Williams said. "They need to go in your pants pocket."

LaQuan held the tickets toward the sun—wanting to make sure they were real.

Peter Racine, executive director of the Jaguars Foundation, donated a game ball, which Williams then signed and gave to LaQuan.

Still smiling, LaQuan didn't let go of the ball after that. The foster child's dream had come true.

"He never stopped smiling," Shirley Leggio said. Leggio is Family Support Services of North Florida (FSS) foster parent liaison, whose idea it was to try to get LaQuan the Jaguars game tickets. "Imagine what he's going to tell his friends at school."

Williams learned that LaQuan played a little football himself, but had a ways to go to reach

Williams' size and success as a professional football player. Williams stood side-by-side, with his arm around LaQuan's shoulder.

"Eat your Wheaties," Williams said. "And spinach. And work hard at everything you do."

After all of that, LaQuan settled in for what he came to do: Interview with CBS Channel 47 News Anchor Dawn Lopez, who arranged for Williams to meet LaQuan.

Each week, Lopez hosts *Jacksonville's Children*, which are live interviews with foster children hoping to be adopted.

LaQuan talked with her, sitting beneath the bronze Jaguar statue at the west end of the stadium.

"Can I take my older brother to the game?" he asked. His brother, 17, lives in Jacksonville and he hasn't seen him in a long time.

"This is a day he'll remember for the rest of his life," Leggio said.

Jim Adams, FSS chief executive officer, thanked all those that helped with LaQuan's lifelong dream of going to a Jaguars' game.

"Opportunities like this for our children come few and far between and it means so much to them," Adams said. "We are just happy that we could make LaQuan's dream really come true. And we'll be giving him a computer to go with the mouse pad."



Orieal is a creative and inquisitive 9-year-old. While she likes to play with her dolls and toys, she especially enjoys watching over and playing outdoors with her younger brother Duan. She loves the company of friends, which is part of her desire to keep active.



Photo by Peggy McAteer

When she grows up, Orieal wants to be a teacher where she can share her story telling and drawing abilities with others.

Duan is an adventurous 5-year-old who also gets along well with people and likes to make others smile. He is a happy little boy and enjoys playing with his sister—so it's important that the siblings be adopted together to help maintain their loving bond.

These adorable siblings would thrive in a family that will dedicate time to developing their educational needs. Both deserve the stability, security and love that comes with having a permanent family. If you would like to welcome Orieal and Duan into your heart, contact Melinda Delgado at FSS (904) 421-5800.

If you would like to submit a story idea, calendar item or ask Jim Adams, FSS CEO, a question, please email mary.hurst@fssnf.org.



Ask Judge Gooding

As we look back at the year passed and look ahead to the New Year, I am hopeful for the direction we are going and am reminded how thankful I am to have partners in foster care and adoption in Family Support Services, the Department of Children and Families and, most of all, our foster parents, adoptive parents and their families. Thank you all.



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As you think about your New Year's resolutions for 2008, please consider a few of these ways for you to continue to help our kids:

- Introduce Rev. Al Williams of One Church One Child to your pastor and help him get an opportunity to talk to your church about recruiting adoptive homes for the 120 African American children in Duval County in need of permanent homes.
- Speak to your Pastor, Rabbi or civic club program committee about having Erin Stuckey (see Erin's Corner this page), a judge, or both, come speak to the group about foster care and adoption.
- Help the judges do a better job by coming to court regularly and keeping us advised about the needs of our children.
- Become a volunteer Guardian ad litem.
- Become a mentor for a child or a newly licensed foster parent or adoptive parent.
- Let us know what questions you have or issues you would like to see discussed so that we may address those in this column in 2008.

On behalf of all of us in the courts who work with you for our children, I wish you and your families a new year full of joy, hope and peace.

If you have general questions about adoption or would like to suggest a topic you'd like to read about regarding adoption, please contact Judge Gooding's case manager, Michelle Weisheit at weisheit@coj.net.

Agencies collaborate on prevention effort

Nassau County Sheriff Tommy Seagraves announced a major prevention effort this month at a kindergarten class at Yulee Primary School—the "Sheriff Seagraves Reading Club." He passed out backpacks filled with goodies to the 4- and 5-year-olds.

Joined by Jim Adams, chief executive officer of Family Support Services of North Florida (FSS), and Nassau County Library Director Dawn Bostwick, Seagraves said that as a sheriff's department, we all want our children to learn to love the library and reading, partly so they won't get into trouble.

Adams said foster children, because they are not in their own homes, are more likely to have problems in school. "We not only want at-risk children to learn to love reading, we want all children to love reading," Adams said. "Parents who read with their children provide quality time, and that can mean a whole change in family dynamics that removes the risk of a child having to be taken out of the home."

Bostwick said the public library wants to keep children safe, well-rounded and enthused about reading. "If we don't take care of them now, we'll have to take care of them later. We have children's programs in all our branch libraries from Fernandina Beach to Bryceville," she said. "When children learn to read and love books, it gives their imaginations great journeys—often away from challenges in their lives."

Besides beginner-level books, the backpacks contained some information for parents, a toothbrush, an application for a free library card and a Pound Puppy. Once children receive their own library card, the library will provide them with a "Charlotte's Web" library card holder.

Bowling Enterprises donated the Pound Puppies with the condition that children adopt the puppy as a "reading buddy." "I have always been a big proponent of reading programs and an excited to be involved in this opportunity to promote this with children," Mike Bowling, Pound Puppy inventor. "I would like each child to take the puppy home, give it a name, take care of it and read to it."

The backpacks will be available to the early readers at all the Nassau County branch libraries. Parents are to bring their 4- or 5 year-olds to the library to receive the backpack. Periodically, other free books will be available for pick-up at the library.

The backpacks will be available after the first of the year at all library branches. Anyone wishing to donate money or books for this effort should contact Celeste Turain at FSS (904) 889-9671 or Candace Monroe (904) 421-5860.



Family Support Services will be hosting its third *Let's Talk Adoption* event Jan. 24, 2008.

This informational event will be held at 6 p.m. at the Evangel Temple Church, 5755 Ramona Blvd.

Attendees will receive a general overview of the adoption process presented by guest speakers, as well as testimonies from either someone who has been adopted, or someone who has adopted. This will be a fun and informational event!

The main focus of the night will be visitor booths, set up and staffed by individuals who are involved in the adoption process, who will be available to answer questions.

If you have not yet completed Model Approach to Positive Parenting (MAPP) classes to become a licensed foster home or have an adoption home study, please visit the MAPP registration table to register and get you set up and on the road to adoption.

Erin Stuckey is an FSS Adoption Specialist. If you would like her to speak to your church or group about adoption, please call (904) 200-7745.

ERIN'S CORNER

