

► **SAVE THE DATE**

It all may be happening at the zoo. The FSS annual children's Christmas party is Saturday, Dec. 15 and is tentatively planned to be held at the Jacksonville Zoo. More details coming soon.

► **INTERESTED IN ADOPTING?**

Call (904) 421-5839 to inquire about adopting. To learn more and see children waiting to be adopted, visit www.heartgalleryjax.org

A monthly publication for Foster Parents

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Family Support Services
OF NORTH FLORIDA INC.

SERVING DUVAL AND NASSAU COUNTIES

Important Reminder:

If your child turned 4 years old before September 1, don't forget to sign him or her up for free Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK). Children having VPK are more successful in elementary school. For more information or to find out what you need to bring to register your child, call the Early Learning Coalition at (904) 208-2044.

What foster parents need to know

Maneuvering through special education

Birth and foster parents need to become more aware of terms like "No Child Left Behind" act (NCLB), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), English as a Second Language (ESL) and Individual Education Plans.

The NCLB, passed in 2002 by Congress, specializes in finding and remediating those who are most vulnerable, including foster children who don't fare as well academically as others who live in a stable home. Unfortunately, states and local school district say that along with the federal mandate came no funds.

The Foster Care and Support Network explains that special education and ESL students require more flexibility in testing and evaluations, more tutoring and more

remediation. It cautions though, that since many school districts, including Duval County, requires an additional hour of reading for those students who are low achieving, which typically include foster children.

Individual Education Plans, required by the federal law, are plans created by parents, foster parents, school psychologists, special education teachers and guidance counselors.

The school is legally required to notify the birth parent and, in most cases, the foster parent whenever an IEP meeting is scheduled. If both show up, it can be difficult, but the network points out that it's important for the child's sake to maintain a calm demeanor. *(cont. on reverse)*

Daniel is looking for a Dad that plays sports

Meet Daniel. He's friendly, bright, outgoing and looking forward to meeting a family that will welcome him into their hearts and home.

Daniel gets good grades in school, enjoys playing basketball and can juggle just about anything.

He has been in foster care for two years and he says it's "hard feeling unloved." He is looking forward to having a Dad for the first time in his life. He says he wants a Dad that can play sports and that would take him places. As for his new mom, he says she wouldn't have to cook because he likes to cook.

If you'd like to try Daniel's cooking, his favorites are spaghetti, and macaroni and cheese. Call (904) 421-5839.



NEWS BRIEFS

Are you ready to picnic?

The annual Foster Parents Association Children's Picnic will start at 11 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 15 at Lonnie Miller Park, 4689 Price Lane, near Moncrief Rd. and Soutel Dr. There'll be plenty to do—from the Moonwalk to gigantic slides—and plenty to eat and drink.

Oh, happy day

Last month, Judge David Gooding presided over the adoption of 17 children, including Jermane, who became FSS' own Van Henderson's daughter officially that day. Family First Fridays is always a happy day in the courtroom, with balloons, cameras and news coverage of children being adopted into homes they truly can call their own.

Please help

To become a foster parent to children with special medical needs in Duval and Nassau counties, contact Debra Mead-Turner, Medical Foster Care Social Worker, at Children's Medical Services. Email Debra_MeadTurner@doh.state.fl.us or call (904) 360-7070, Ext. 308.

Resources available

The ADD/ADDHD support group meets at 5:15 p.m. Wednesdays in the 10th floor conference room at Nemours Children's Clinic. To register, call (904) 348-2811.

Mothers of Obsessive Compulsive Children and Adolescents meet at 7 p.m. each second and fourth Thursdays at Ronald MacDonald House, 824 Children's Way. Call (904) 739-4700 for information.

There to help

The Guardian ad Litem program helps foster children through the court system and legal process. If there is information that needs to be presented in a court hearing, staffing or to a case worker, a Guardian ad Litem is trained to help. Call (904) 630-1200 or www.guardianadlitem.org.

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.

Mentoring now available

Family Support Services of North Florida (FSS) in partnership with Communities In Schools, and Big Brothers and Big Sisters, is beginning an in-school mentoring program for our foster care children.

Residents from the community will be matched with a student to meet one hour each week at their school. They will talk together, play games, read or study, as the volunteer becomes a friend, tutor and role model for our children during the school year.

If your children are in 4th - 8th grade and are interested in having a mentor, please contact: Gail Cook, project specialist for education at FSS at (904) 421-5822.

Case workers honored by FSS

Three case workers were honored August 13, by Family Support Services of North Florida (FSS), for their work in child welfare services in Duval County.

Kara Williams, of the Mental Health Resource Center, earned both the 2007 Family Service Counselor of the Year and Counselor of the Year for Missing Children. She continues to locate missing foster children and manages to keep many of them from running again.

Mental Health Resource Center’s Esther Dayhoff was awarded the 2007 Family Service Counselor for Education. She goes out of her way to assure children in her supervision get to see parents and get to school.

Charles Daniel Hedrick with Daniel earned the 2007 Family Counselor for Visitation for working hard to make sure visitations are done properly.

This was the awards inaugural year, sponsored by FSS, Duval County’s Community Based Care agency for child welfare services.

Each were presented with a certificate and a gift card for their dedication to their work with foster and adopted children and their parents.

“We will make this an annual event to recognize those case workers whose primary goal is to keep the most vulnerable of our children safe,” said Jim Adams, CEO of FSS. “They are dedicated, often work nights and weekends and should be rewarded for their efforts.”

Widman elected FSS board president

Michael Widman, Vistakon’s principal, has been elected president of the Family Support Services of North Florida (FSS) Board of Directors. He presided over his first meeting August 14.

“The future of the area’s most vulnerable children is very important,” Widman said. “We will be working hard to encourage adoption as a way of giving these foster children a permanent home and sense of well-being. We are pleased that FSS is ranked first statewide among 22 Community-Based Care lead agencies caring for the welfare of foster care and adoption.”

“We are grateful for Michael Widman’s leadership of this board,” says Jim Adams, CEO of FSS. “His expertise in working of projects with large budgets and structured, time-sensitive deadlines is going to be a huge asset for us.”

Maneuvering (cont.)

The IEP will determine educational and behavioral goals for each student determined to have a disability, and govern what, if any, special curriculum will be used to help a student learn and how the student will be disciplined.

Numerous studies have shown that if foster children’s educational needs are not met, they stand a higher risk of

homelessness, poverty and public assistance, and juvenile or adult incarceration.

Confidentiality laws can make it hard for foster parents to access a child’s previous educational records.

To find out more, go to Families and Advocates Partnership for Education at www.fape.org, available at the PACER Center at www.pacer.org.

