



For Immediate Release

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## **November is National Adoption Month**

### **Family Resource Center of South Florida Helps Connect Parents with Children in Need of Loving Homes**

#### **Finalizing Public Adoptions on National Adoption Day in Miami**

Miami, Florida -- October 20, 2014 -- In anticipation of National Adoption Month this November, and Miami's National Adoption Day on November 21, Family Resource Center of South Florida (FRC), one of the state's leading child welfare organizations, is gearing up to help families navigate the public adoption system, finalize adoptions, and build loving families.

Specifically, in an effort to celebrate local adoptive parents, and help demystify public adoption, FRC is shining a spotlight on four remarkable adoption stories of love, compassion, and hope taking place in Miami Florida.

#### **Miami Single Father To Adopt Sibling Group On National Adoption Day**

A new Miami-resident and loving single father for many years, Anthony Burrows is overjoyed to be finalizing the adoption of a sibling group -- Mi'Luv, age 7, and Jaylen, age 8 -- on National Adoption Day at the Children's Museum, 980 MacArthur Causeway, Miami, FL 33132, November 21<sup>st</sup>, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Mr. Burrows is a seasoned adoptive single parent, having adopted his first child in Washington, D.C. while he was serving in the military. He has 3 adoptive sons, ranging from college to elementary school ages. Mr. Burrows continues his work in government service, currently working as a private contractor for the government. After moving down to South Florida for work, he reached out to the local foster care system in order to find out about adopting additional children in need. When he discovered that siblings Mi'Luv and Jaylen had been placed in separate foster homes, he decided to reunite them under one roof. They have been living full-time with him in what is known as a pre-adoptive placement, and the two are eagerly anticipating becoming his legal children. Mr. Burrows believes in an open-door

policy, having allowed his previous adoptive sons to maintain relationships with their biological relatives. He plans to do the same for Mi'Luv and Jaylen.

### **Same-Sex Couple Overcomes State Ban On Gay Adoption**

With assistance from the FRC, one loving couple was able to overcome Florida's ban on gay adoptions and start a family. Kristina and her partner Yanette went through the process of becoming licensed foster parents last year as a way to start their family. Within five days, a newborn named Kye was placed with the couple. Kye became available for adoption, and Kristina and Yanette were faced with the heart-wrenching decision as to who would apply to be Kye's legal parent. When the couple entered family court on December 31, 2013, Kristina was prepared to apply as the sole parent, due to Florida's strict laws against gay adoptions. However, to their surprise, the judge supported Yanette applying as a second adoptive parent. The couple was overjoyed. Yanette's paperwork was filed that same day, and the partners are now both legal parents to baby Kye, 18 months.

### **"DNA Doesn't Make a Family, Love Does"**

Maria and Alexis Santiago of South Florida were no strangers to the adoption system when they set out to adopt their three children. Aunt and uncle to an adopted niece, Maria and her husband Alexis had seen the process first hand when Maria's sister adopted her daughter. Inspired by their niece and all of the children to whom they had previously provided foster care, on June 26, 2014, the Santiagos adopted three children all on the same day. The three children have different biological parents, but as their adoptive mother Maria says, "DNA doesn't make a family, love does."

Love abounds in their new family. The couple is committed to raising the children openly, and encourages them to develop and maintain relationships with their biological siblings, some of whom have been adopted into other families. The Santiagos continue to maintain their foster care license, providing emergency overnights and respite care.

### **Couple Welcomes Inter-Racial Adoption**

Devoted South Florida couple Maria and George Clayton opted to enter the foster care and public adoption process after they learned they could not conceive naturally. Upon completing the thirteen-week MAAP (Model Approach to Parenting) training, the Claytons adopted a newborn of Cuban and Jamaican descent. The couple is Hispanic, and welcomed him into their family. Maria's sister even brought a traditional Cuban blanket made by their mother to the hospital to welcome the baby.

After adopting their first child, they continued to be foster parents. In August of 2012, a small Caucasian baby with fetal alcohol syndrome, Christopher, was placed in their home under foster care. Maria dedicated herself to getting Christopher the best medical treatments possible, finding him a pediatric neurologist and other medical specialists. When it became clear that Christopher could not return to his biological parents, the Claytons were delighted to adopt him and make him a permanent member of their family.

## **The Benefits of Public Adoption:**

In Florida, on any given day, there are approximately 750 children available for adoption from foster care without an identified family. Public adoption offers many benefits to those wishing to adopt and helps to provide a safe haven to the most vulnerable children in the foster care system. In addition to offering individuals and couples facing infertility or other roadblocks a path to creating a family, some of the benefits to public adoption include: state covered court costs, 100% paid tuition for children who attend a Florida public college or university, financial subsidies, and medical benefits for children who have special needs.

## **Why Public Adoption Is Important:**

FRC's core mission is to rehabilitate troubled families and keep these family members together, if appropriate. However, of the approximately 1,375 children served annually by FRC, one-third will become free for adoption. A "forever home" is one of the most important and rewarding gifts a person can give. Studies consistently show that the success rate of children who have been adopted increases dramatically compared to those who remain in foster care until they age out at 18. Reports continue to surface nationwide about the impact of the weak economy and the rise in child abuse and neglect cases. Florida is no exception to this trend. With one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, Florida's children are suffering. In September 2010, the Department of Children and Families conducted 1,140 abuse and neglect investigations in Miami-Dade. Today that number has increased by 13%, with a total of 1,306 investigations being conducted in September 2014.

## **How Family Resource Center Is Making An Impact:**

Throughout the month of November, FRC will be spearheading a public awareness campaign to help demystify public adoption, as well as highlighting some inspiring local families who recently turned to public adoption to build a loving family.

In 2014, FRC completed 90 adoptions, exceeding their goal of 77 set forth by the local Community Based Care organization, Our Kids. On November 21st at the Miami Children's Museum, FRC, Our Kids, and other area child welfare agencies will celebrate National Adoption Day by completing over 40 youth adoptions and bringing families together to mark this special day.

If you would like to learn more about public adoptions, request an interview with Dr. Wunderman of Family Resource Center, or spotlight some of the recent inspiring adoption stories, please contact Christina Daigneault at 917-207-4686.

## **About Family Resource Center**

Family Resource Center of South Florida, Inc., a non-profit organization, was founded in 1978 by a group of concerned community leaders. FRC's mission is the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect through the strengthening of families. The agency provides integrated care for children in the foster care system, parent education classes, mental health services, substance abuse counseling, and adoptions.

FRC has been recognized by *Florida Trend* magazine as one of the top 100 BEST PLACES TO WORK

in both 2010 and 2011. Business Leader Magazine also recognized the agency as one of the Top 20 Small Businesses in South Florida for both 2010 and 2011. Most recently, FRC was named 2014 Non-Profit of the Year by South Florida Business Journal.

### **About the Executive Director, Dr. Oren Wunderman**

Oren Wunderman, Ph.D., has worked in non-profit child welfare agencies or mental health centers for most of the last thirty years. He is licensed as a Psychologist, Marriage and Family Therapist, and Mental Health Counselor. He earned his Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees from the University of Miami. He has taken coursework in non-profit management from the Harvard University School of Business and Florida International University School of Business. For the past 15 years, he has been a yearly guest lecturer in the subjects of Child Abuse and Forensic Psychology at the University of Miami, Departments of Counseling and Clinical Psychology, Miami Children's Hospital and several local Community Mental Health Centers.

Dr. Wunderman has been with FRC for the past 19 years, 14 of which he has served as the Executive Director. During his tenure, Dr. Wunderman has enabled FRC to triple in size while expanding the complexity and scope of services. He extols to the staff the values of Transformational Leadership, whose cornerstone beliefs are: (1) Treat the clients respectfully, always caring for them as though they were loved members of your family, and (2) Always preserve a fundamental humility and awe about the vital services provided to troubled clients.

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