



For Immediate Release

Media Contact
Christina Daigneault
Orchard Strategies, Inc.
917-207-4686

Local Family LOVE Stories on Valentine's Day

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

Launches "Open Your Heart to Public Adoption" Public Awareness Campaign

Miami, Florida – January 2015 -- Valentine's Day is a time for love – not only romantic love but also family love. With this special holiday in mind, we are delighted to be sharing three inspiring local stories of family love where foster children were adopted by beautiful families who opened their hearts and homes to children in need.

Family Resource Center of South Florida (FRC) facilitated these public adoptions and is eager to meet more local families who wish to share their love with Miami's most vulnerable children. In light of this, FRC is launching the "Open Your Heart to Public Adoption" public awareness during the entire month of February.

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, 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's concurrent application 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 for other foster families.

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, Zachary. 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, health insurance for the children, 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 all 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. In Miami-Dade County, the number of children living out of home (in foster care) rose dramatically during 2014, which will mean a significant increase in the number of children becoming free for adoption in 2015. At the close of November 2014, there were 2,316 infants, youth and teenagers living in out of home placements, a jump of 20% over the last 11 months.

How Family Resource Center Is Making An Impact

Throughout the month of February, FRC will be spearheading a public awareness campaign -- Open Your Heart to Public Adoption -- to help demystify public adoption, as well as highlight some inspiring local families who recently turned to public adoption to build a loving family. During fiscal year 2014, FRC completed 90 adoptions, exceeding their goal of 77 set forth by the local Community Based Care organization, Our Kids.

If you would like to learn more about public adoptions, request an interview with Dr. Wunderman, Executive Director 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 quadruple 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.

###