

Florida for Second Year Sets Record for Adoption of Foster Children

By Charlie Crist

Governor, State of Florida

What does it take to fall in love with a child who is not your biological son or daughter? An open heart and the willingness to be a parent to a child who has experienced abuse or neglect and needs a safe, loving home.

In Florida during the last year, more than 3,700 children were adopted by families who found room in their hearts for a foster child or group of foster siblings. For the second year in a row, Florida set a record for the number of adoptions of foster children, even as the state dramatically reduced its overall number of children in foster care by nearly 10,000. In the previous year, there were 3,674 adoptions.

I am declaring July 22 as **Explore Adoption Day** in Florida to celebrate the many wonderful families who have adopted foster children and to encourage other families to consider adoption. Ever since becoming Governor, I made adoption a priority to make sure the children who are most in need of safety and permanency are matched with families willing to adopt.

We created the **Explore Adoption** Web site www.AdoptFlorida.org where it is easy to meet foster children currently eligible for adoption. We established the Office of Adoption and Child Protection led by Florida's Chief Child Advocate Jim Kallinger to rally our efforts to achieve more adoptions and decrease the amount of time that children spend in foster care.

We work with the Florida Department of Children and Families and its community-based partner agencies that provide services to foster children, to promote adopting children who are harder to place: teenagers, siblings who want to remain together, and children with major medical needs. Heart Galleries, beautiful photographs of children waiting to be adopted, have been organized and exhibited around the state.

To support adoptive parents, the Legislature this year provided \$1.8 million for the one-time adoption benefit of up to \$10,000 available to employees of the state of Florida, including those who work for public schools and colleges. The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption recently recognized Florida as the "2009 Best Adoption-Friendly Workplace" in government.

Listen to Daralyn Lacagnina of West Palm Beach, who adopted seven children from foster care, "You fall in love with all of them. It's a wonderful experience. If you have the time and heart for it, go for it. So many children need a home." I couldn't say it any better.

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