

# **BRADENTON HERALD**

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## **State of Florida Launches Initiative to Promote Benefits of Public Adoption, Unveils New Brand**

### **- 'Explore Adoption' initiative aims to link families to 1,000 Florida children waiting for homes -**

The State of Florida Explore Adoption Campaign

The State of Florida has launched a new campaign, "Explore Adoption," aimed at promoting the benefits of public adoption and urging families to consider creating or expanding their families by adopting a child who is older, disabled or part of a sibling group. The initiative will "put a new face on public adoption" by telling the many stories of families who have enriched their lives by adopting Florida's children.

"One of my top priorities is to make certain Florida's children find loving, safe and permanent homes," said Governor Charlie Crist.

Every year, about 3,000 Florida children become available for adoption when a court permanently severs ties to their birth parents due to abuse, neglect or abandonment. Of those, 40 percent are adopted by relatives and another 40 percent are adopted by their foster parents. The remaining children must be matched to a family previously unknown to them, which is the goal of the "Explore Adoption" initiative. Most of the children who wait the longest are older than age 8, are African American, are part of a sibling group or have a physical or emotional disability.

#### Poll Findings

The "Explore Adoption" initiative is fueled by the findings of a new poll which outlines Floridians' perception of public adoption. The results hold out hope that families willing to adopt can be found if the state does a better job of educating potential parents about the benefits of public adoption and correcting misperceptions, such as these:

- Of those considering adoption, 37 percent say they are concerned the state's rules would be too stringent to let them adopt, while one in five believes the state would deem them too old to adopt. In fact, people can adopt whether they are older or younger, married or single, wealthy or of modest means, homeowners or renters.
- 45 percent worry about biological parents taking a child back and believe private adoptions are more secure. Yet, public adoptions are very secure, since the parental rights of the children's birth parents are permanently terminated before the children are made available for adoption.
- Nearly half, 47 percent, believe most children who are available for adoption from foster care have special needs and may be more difficult to care for than other children. The term "special needs" may create confusion, leading people to think all of these children have physical or emotional disabilities. In reality, "special needs" is a legal term used to define children who may qualify for a subsidy - and it applies to children who are age 8 or older, African American or part of a sibling group - even if they have no disability.

#### Benefits of Public Adoption

The poll also revealed most people are unaware of the significant benefits of public adoption and are more likely to consider adoption when they hear about them.

Among the benefits, public adoption:

Costs little or nothing. Virtually all costs to adopt a child from the public system - the home study, attorneys' fees, court costs and training - are borne by the state. Many private adoptions can cost the adoptive family \$20,000 or more.

Is very secure. Children are not made available for public adoption until a judge has terminated their birth parents' rights. This is a key education point, because 83 percent of Floridians polled said they would be more likely to adopt if they knew there was no chance the child would be returned to the birth parent.

Provides financial supports. Children adopted through the public system qualify for free health care until they turn 18, free college tuition at any state university, community college or trade school, and may qualify for monthly financial assistance. More than 70 percent of those polled said they were more likely to adopt when they learned about the health care and tuition benefits, and 63 percent said they would be more likely to adopt if they knew there was monthly financial assistance.

Provides an opportunity to get to know a child. Prospective parents can search for a child through a searchable database on [www.adoptflorida.org](http://www.adoptflorida.org) and can meet and get to know a child to make sure it's a good match for all.

Can be speedy. The entire process - from orientation, training, background checks, and home study, to getting matched with a child or children - often can be accomplished in about nine months.

To learn more about the Governor's adoption initiative or view the complete survey findings, please visit [www.adoptflorida.org](http://www.adoptflorida.org). For more information on public adoption call 1-800-96-ADOPT.

SOURCE The State of Florida Explore Adoption Campaign