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Feds give Florida \$9.75 million for foster-child adoptions

By Kate Santich - Sentinel Staff Writer

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Florida's efforts to increase adoption rates for foster children has earned the state a \$9.75 million incentive bonus from the federal government -- more than a quarter of the money awarded nationwide.

"Florida has embraced a never-give-up attitude about finding families to adopt children in foster care," George Sheldon, secretary of the Florida Department of Children and Families, said Thursday. "Even in tough economic times, people want to adopt the children most in need of safe, loving homes."

For two years in a row, record numbers of foster children have been adopted in Florida -- 3,777 kids during the past fiscal year and 3,674 the year before. There are roughly 1,000 foster children now available for adoption.

The effort has been a priority of Gov. Charlie Crist, who helped launch an "Explore Adoption" public-awareness campaign spotlighting the importance of finding "forever families" for foster kids. That effort includes a Web site -- adoptflorida.org -- where prospective parents can read profiles and view photos of children available for adoption.

In addition, the department earlier this year initiated a "Longest Waiting Teens" project to help find permanent homes for older kids who had languished for years as wards of the state. Already, 25 of the 103 foster kids identified for that program have been adopted -- including 16-year-old Dalton Rosenberg, who now lives in Ocoee. His adoption was final July 1.

"We're supposed to be together. It's probably the greatest thing I've ever done," said Theresa Rosenberg, who had adopted another teen from foster care before Dalton and has two biological children. "They're just as needy and loving as other kids."

In all, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded \$35 million in adoption-incentive bonuses to 38 states and Puerto Rico. In Florida, the money will go primarily to support adoption subsidies, which help ease the financial responsibilities of adoptive families.

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