

**Helping a Child in Need -
Foster Care & Adoption**

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Thank you for inviting us here this evening to talk about foster care and adoption in our community. Beginning in 2005, Our Kids began transferring the responsibility for foster care and adoption from DCF. This was the result of privatization, an initiative and belief on the part of Governor Bush that private agencies could do a better job in provide safety and permanency for children.

In response to this initiative, a group of community leaders came together to represent Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties in the creation, development and oversight of a privatized, local child welfare system. This resulted in the creation of Our Kids, with the goal of creating safe havens for children and families through foster care & adoption.

Over two years later, I am proud to say that Governor Bush was right.

Here in Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties, our children are safer, our case managers spend more time with their families and provide better service, fewer children wait to be adopted, more children and families are at home together, children in foster care will be there for a shorter time with better caregivers, and young adults leaving foster care have more opportunities for success. This is a direct result of the work of Our Kids as the lead agency for child welfare, and our full case management agencies, Charlee, Center

for Family and Child Enrichment, Children's Home Society, Family Resource Center, His House Children's Home, Kids Hope United, Neighbor to Family. We have representatives of each of these agencies that are based in Miami-Dade County with us this evening, and they will be available to answer questions and participate in our discussion.

Currently there are 465 children available for adoption in Miami-Dade County, and 23 children in Monroe. The process begins by contacting one of the full case management agencies in your geographical area. In your folders, I have included maps of the regions by zip code, and contact information for each agency. These agencies will walk you through the process of becoming a foster or adoptive parent.

I am the adoptive parent of two children, and would like to briefly share with you how the process worked for me.

Why - married, unable to become pregnant, missed out by not being a mom, over the years became more acceptable to be a single parent

How - met someone who had adopted her son through the resource parent program with DCF, got me started, MAPP program, fingerprinting, licensure, referral

Results - first child referred, second sibling 4 years later

Advice - consider involving members of the birth family in your child's life, don't be afraid if your child has some medical issues.

Hospice / legacy - what did I do with my life - make the world a better place, one child at a time.

Our Kids directly provides adoption benefits which include: monthly adoption subsidy, (varies according to need and age of child) college tuition, (private institutions are exempt) adoption Medicaid (until child reaches 18 yrs of age), medical subsidy (full or partial reimbursement for pre-existing condition that Medicaid does not cover), non-recurring expense (\$1000 per child), if adopted at 16 or 17 years of age (eligible for IL services).

Our Kids also provides aftercare services, which include financial assistance with tutoring, child care (depending on availability of funds), therapeutic referrals and an adoption support group which is soon to be developed.

Now I would like to open up the meeting for questions and discussion.