

Campaign aims to unite youth, families

State promotes nontraditional adoptions

BY MARIA CHERCOLES
STAFF WRITER

PLANTATION • When his football coach asked him what he'd want if he could have anything in the world, Malcolm Dupree, then 16, answered: parents.

Within days, Stranahan High School coach Jason Jackson and wife Alicia filed the adoption papers. A few months later, Dupree moved in with them.

Florida's Office of Adoption and Child Protection unveiled an advertising campaign Wednesday to help more children like Dupree find a home. Called "Explore Adoption," it'll highlight the benefits of nontraditional adoptions.

The goal is to raise the number of annual adoptions in the state from 3,700 to 4,000.

"It's a very child-specific marketing campaign. You are not going to see the little kids on the brochure or on the Web site. You are going to see the older kids, the minority kids, you are going to see the physically-disabled children. They need to be adopted," said Jim



NEVER TOO LATE: Malcolm Dupree, left, and his adoptive parents Alicia and Jason Jackson, of Fort Lauderdale, talk about becoming a family at a meeting Wednesday with the Florida Office of Adoption and Child Protection. The Jacksons adopted Dupree when he was 16. **Staff photo/Rebecca Barnett**

Kallinger, the agency's chief child advocate, who is leading the campaign.

Kallinger and the Jacksons discussed the initiative at the Plantation office of ChildNet, the nonprofit agency responsible for managing Broward County's foster care system.

Dupree was one of the more than 1,000 children who are available for adoption in Florida at any given time. Some of them have no choice but to

spend their entire childhood in foster homes or other temporary arrangements.

The older the child, the more difficult it is to find them a new home, Kallinger said.

Before moving in with the Jacksons, Dupree spent eight years in foster care homes and other places.

The Jacksons had been considering adoption when they recognized Dupree in a presentation of children who were

available.

"Oh my God, what is he doing on here?" Alicia Jackson recalls her husband asking.

As his coach, Jason Jackson, 31, thought he knew Dupree well, but he had no idea the teen was in foster care.

Without mentioning their adoption plans, Jackson asked Dupree at the next football practice what he wanted most in the world.

Dupree's answer "got me

STEPS TO ADOPTION

Florida's adoption process usually takes nine months. These are the steps:

Call 1-800-962-3678 to find a local adoption center.

Attend an orientation and meet the counselors.

Take a free, 10-week preparation course to evaluate your readiness.

A counselor will visit your home to assess your financial

situation and parenting style. The backgrounds of all adults in the house will be checked.

The case is sent to an adoption specialist for approval.

Parents find a child available for adoption. The child is placed at the adoptive family's home under supervision.

After six months of living together, a judge hears the case and legalizes the adoption.

FAMILY TIME: Watch Malcolm Dupree's adoptive parents talk about their experience at Sun-Sentinel.com/adopt

choked up a little bit," Jackson recalls.

The Jacksons soon made up their minds and wanted a counselor to break the news to Dupree.

The counselor spoke with Dupree and arranged for the Jacksons and Dupree to spend an evening bowling.

"I had to be patient. It was all about Jason. He was his coach, so they already had a relationship," said Alicia Jackson, 31, a professor at Nova Southeastern University. On the drive back home, she recalls saying, "I don't think he likes me."

But with time, she said she won Dupree's heart.

"He is now a momma's boy," she said. "He's enhanced us more than we've been able to enhance him."

Dupree, 21, is now majoring in computer science at Grambling State University in Louisiana, the same school his new parents attended.

For information on Explore Adoption, visit adoptflorida.org

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South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com

Campaign seeks homes for older, minority, special needs children

State promotes nontraditional adoptions

BY MARIA CHERCOLES

South Florida Sun-Sentinel

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