

## May: National Foster Care Month

Written by Ginny Grimsley  
Friday, 03 May 2013 13:39

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### Former State Ward Observes National Foster Care Month in May

*She's Helping Launch a Program to Replace Trash Bags with New Duffel Bags*

We have some positive changes to applaud as the nation observes National Foster Care Month in May, says former foster child Margaret Luculano.

“In Ohio, \$3 million from a mortgage settlement the state won will help foster kids pursue higher education and expand court-appointed advocates. And in Florida, a new law is going to make it much easier for foster kids to do normal things like sleepovers with their friends and school field trips,” she says.

“In Nebraska, they’re close to boosting the pay for foster parents, which will mean the state can retain and attract more and better foster parents.”

But Luculano, spokeswoman for Duffels for Kids ( [www.floridafapa.org/duffelsforkids](http://www.floridafapa.org/duffelsforkids) ), and founder of Angels for Foster Kids, says that sometimes, it’s the smallest things foster children remember most.

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“I was in foster care from age 11 to 16, when I aged out, and I was moved to 15 different homes in that time,” she says. “Every time I moved, I had to pack my few belongings in a black trash bag.

“When you’re already feeling abandoned, wondering whether anyone will ever want you or care about you, that trash bag seals it: No, they won’t. You’re a throwaway.”

While workplace groups and communities have banded together and charities have sprung up across the country to address this problem, more foster care children than not continue to cart their belongings in trash bags.

“There just hasn’t been enough,” luculano says. “And often, the organizations gather used luggage. I know the intention is good, but we’d like to give these children something brand new; something all their own.”

To that end, another positive to celebrate will be the first Duffels for Kids Walk, sponsored by the Florida State Foster/Adoptive Parent Association on May 18 in Miami.

It’s the kickoff to the association’s drive to provide new duffel bags to every child in that state’s foster care system. As the program grows, its leaders hope to have new duffel bags for each child entering the system, luculano says.

Duffels for Kids will initially focus on Florida, but organizer LaShaun Wallace, who’s on the board of the National Foster Parents Association, hopes it will eventually go nationwide.

It’s in everyone’s best interests to protect the most vulnerable in our society, children without the protection of loving, caring families, luculano says.

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“When you look at the numbers, you quickly see why we desperately need more positive changes to applaud,” she says.

These were compiled from various sources:

- In recent years, there have been more than 500,000 children in foster care nationally; per one annual count, 22 percent were available for adoption.
- In that year, 18 percent of children were adopted after waiting an average 42 months in foster care.
- More than half of the children who age out of foster care will be unemployed adults.
- Almost a third will be homeless.
- One in five will be incarcerated within two years.

To support Duffels for Kids by attending the walk or making a donation, visit the website.

Some of the supporters scheduled to participate in the May 18 walk include Esther Jacobo, regional director for Miami–Dade and Monroe counties for the Florida Department of Children and Families and Children's Trust board member; Dr. Kalyani Gopal, licensed clinical psychologist and author of "Foster Parenting Step-by-Step," to be released in May, which tackles the day-to-day issues in raising foster children; and Sidarth Singh and Shifali Singh, siblings who founded the former Duffels for Angels – renamed Duffels for Kids -- and Aid for Change to provide duffel bags for foster children in Indiana.

### **About Duffels for Kids**

Duffels for Kids is a new program coordinated by the Florida State Foster/Adoptive Parent Association, which will coordinate distribution of new duffel bags with the help of the Department of Children and Families, private investigators, guardian ad litem and local foster parent groups. Caregivers will be able to request a duffel bag for a child by calling the state foster parent associations 800 line or request an online form.