

# Devereux

COMMUNITY BASED CARE OF OKEECHOBEE & THE TREASURE COAST

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## News & Media

### Local Family Rallies the Troops in Tallahassee

The halls of Florida's Capital were brimming with the excited chatter of children, young adults, caregivers and child-welfare professionals who gathered in Tallahassee this week for the second annual Rally in Tally.

Among them were the Fennell-Martin Family, a Martin County adoptive family who braved the post-Thanksgiving trip to make sure their issues are heard when legislators return to Tallahassee for the start of the 2016 Legislative Session in January.

"We wanted to put a face and a name to children in the foster care system here in Florida," said Glenn Fennell, who, along with husband Glen Martin, adopted three boys from Devereux CBC's child-welfare system last June. "If us going up there and taking a few hours out of our busy schedules helps just one child, then it was worth it."

Rally in Tally is an advocacy engagement event coordinated by the Florida Children's Coalition, the advocacy arm for Florida's 20 community based care organizations and related provider groups. The purpose of the event is to draw the focus of legislators to child-welfare issues during the final committee week before session begins.

Families and professionals from every part of the state headed to Tallahassee the Sunday after Thanksgiving in what was often stop-and-go traffic.

"It just gave us a stronger resolve to get there with our issues - and more time to work on them," said Christina Kaiser, community relations director for Devereux CBC.

Legislative priorities for Devereux CBC and its sister lead agencies include updating recent independent living legislation to address extended foster care, support of quality residential group care and additional resources to decrease caseloads and improve case-manager retention.

Office by office, legislator by legislator, foster and adoptive families from throughout the state pressed their issues and made their points.

"I don't think Tallahassee will soon forget the Fennell-Martin Family," Kaiser said. "Those boys were incredibly engaging, and they told a powerful story."

Alberto, 10, and Victor, 12, were separated from their older brother, Felix, until they day the younger boys arrived at the Fennell-Martin home nearly three years ago. Fennell and Martin were unaware of a third brother until the boys mentioned him.

"We said, 'Oh no, that won't do,'" Fennell said, and Felix was reunited with his brothers within the next 24 hours.

That's one of the reasons the boys wanted to make the trip to Tallahassee, he said.

"They've been through the system. They have a family now, but they know there are so many children who don't - and they want to make sure they do everything they can."



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**Contact:** Christina Kaiser  
(772) 528-0362



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Devereux CBC • 10570 S. Federal Hwy. Port St. Lucie, FL 34952 • (772)873-7800

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