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## State, foundation ramp up adoptions

*Program gives hope to older, harder-to-place foster children*

By Laura A. Bischoff

COLUMBUS — The state of Ohio has joined forces with The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption to expand a program that finds homes for older foster children.

On any given day, Ohio has about 12,000 children in foster care, including about 1,900 who fall into the hard-to-place category — those who are older than 8 and have been in foster care for two or more years.

Akiya Carter of West Carrollton had nearly given up hope that she would ever be adopted. At 17 she was coming close to “aging out” of the foster care system when she would be a legal adult with no family to turn to in good times and bad.

But three years ago, a recruiter from The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption took up Akiya’s case and connected her with Natasha Carter, a newly trained foster parent who decided God wanted her to consider adopting kids as well. Natasha began fostering Akiya and then permanently adopted her two years ago, the same week Akiya turned 18.

“It really changed my life a lot. It gave me hope. When I was in foster care, I didn’t have any hope about what I can achieve. Now that I’m adopted I have a family who is behind me in life,” said Akiya, who is now 20 and works at Goodwill Industries and is studying hospitality at the Miami Valley Career Technology Center.

Last year, The Dave Thomas Foundation put up \$1.2 million and the state Department of Job and Family Services committed \$1.1 million to expand the Wendy’s Wonderful Kids program in Ohio. Thomas, the founder of Wendy’s, never knew his birth mother and was adopted when he was 6 weeks old. He died in 2002.

The Wendy’s Wonderful Kids program in Ohio hired 24 professional recruiters covering 51 counties to focus on finding adoptive families for the hardest-to-place kids.

The state money allowed the foundation to expand its existing program in Ohio, adding 32 sites across the state. (Akiya was adopted under the earlier version of the program.) Recently, under the expanded effort a permanent home for three siblings was found in Allen County.

Article continued here: <http://www.daytondailynews.com/news/news/local/state-teams-up-with-dave-thomas-foundation-to-ramp/nWmCH/>

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