

Special family unwelcome in new neighborhood

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BOCA RATON — The hurricane blew the Gerald family into a neighborhood where some people apparently don't want them.

Michael and Camille Gerald are the adoptive or foster parents of 24 severely disabled children, most with Down syndrome. After Hurricane Andrew damaged their three homes, a bank loaned them new houses.

But, according to Mrs. Gerald, some neighbors in this upscale community of tennis courts, golf courses and polo grounds have objected to living near the big family and its paid staff and dozens of volunteers.

"A lot of people have come to me and said we didn't choose this and they asked us how long are you planning to stay," she said Friday, standing in her new \$190,000 home with vaulted ceilings.

For now, though, the Gerald family aren't budging.

"I like it when I'm really backed up against the wall," Mrs. Gerald said. "So it's no problem."

Actually, the Gerald family themselves don't know how long they'll be in the professionally landscaped, gated community called the Newport Bay Club. That's up to the construction crews repairing their old homes.

The Gerald family — Michael is a pediatrician and Camille is a full-time foster parent — had a complicated enough life raising their adopted brood and two children of their own until Hurricane Andrew ripped through their Kendall neighborhood Aug. 24.

The walls of all three homes were damaged. The roof blew off one home, and the garage door



Camille Gerald, adoptive or foster parent of 24 severely disabled children, most of them with Down's Syndrome, plays with some of the children Friday in the family's new neighborhood in Boca Raton. After Hurricane Andrew damaged their three homes, a bank loaned them new houses in upscale Boca Raton, where many people don't want them as neighbors.

was taken off another.

After news reports of the family's plight, American Savings of Florida — which holds the mortgage on one home — arranged to have the family move into three homes the bank acquired through foreclosure and other reasons.

"We did it for the kids. They'll open your heart," said Carlos Fernandez-Guzman, the bank's senior vice president of marketing development.

After temporarily living in housing in Immokalee, the family moved into the stucco and Span-

ish tile-roof homes in Boca Raton on Friday afternoon.

The children took to one of the houses immediately. Little girls with ribbons in their hair sat shoulder to shoulder on a couch watching "Quincy" on TV. A young boy zipped around the living room putting scribbles on reporters' note pads.

In a corner were the Gerald family's newest members, two foster babies each 3 weeks old lying in carriers. One suffers from Down syndrome and will need extensive medical care, the other was born

with only a brain stem.

"He won't live long," Mrs. Gerald said.

Before the family arrived, the neighbors were prepared. They had been warned by a letter. But the Gerald family and their workers say they'll press on. They have no choice.

"I can't judge the neighbors yet. I haven't met them," said Penny Brezniak, who lives with the family and helps with the children. "Some people don't like us and some people do. That will happen forever, wherever we go."