
Recognize

May is National Foster Care Month – the perfect time for honoring the many people who are making a difference in the lives of children and youth in foster care. Take a moment to recognize a foster parent, relative caregiver, mentor, volunteer or social worker for their efforts throughout the year. Remember, a simple “thank you” is a powerful reward as it helps build retention and encourages recruitment, too.

Five Ideas to Get You Started:

- > **Send thank-you cards or personalized appreciation letters** to foster parents, kinship families and other volunteers. Card shops often discard single greeting cards as they restock inventory at the end of the month. Reach out to local merchants to donate flowers, candy or gift certificates, too.
- > **Organize a social gathering** that encourages foster families to come together for a relaxing day of family fun and networking. Invite families to picnic at a local park. Provide free passes/tickets to special venues such as: the zoo, a movie theater, children’s museum or sporting event. Family outings are great opportunities for siblings living in different foster homes to reconnect and spend quality time together.
- > **Feature a foster parent or volunteer of the year** (or select one for each month!) on your organization’s website or in a newsletter. Include photos of the honorees and testimonial quotes from the children they serve describing how they have made a positive difference in their lives. Share your gratitude with a wider audience by repackaging this information into a press release for distribution to local media outlets.
- > **Hold a Blue Ribbon event** in celebration of National Foster Care Month. Invite foster families, social workers, volunteers, the media and other community leaders to attend. Create a visual display of blue ribbons representing each of the children in foster care in your state or community. Ask your local elected official for a proclamation recognizing the many people serving youth in foster care. For more tips on how to plan a Blue Ribbon ceremony, please visit the National Foster Parent Association’s web site at www.nfpainc.org. To order your ribbons for May, please visit the National Foster Care Month Online Store at www.fostercaremonth.org.
- > **Host a foster care awards banquet** to celebrate your community’s outstanding foster parents, volunteers, social workers and inspirational foster care alumni. Solicit local businesses to help sponsor different event elements such as food/beverages (restaurants, caterers, grocery stores), venue rental (banquet halls, churches, hotels or restaurants), entertainment (DJ or live performers), awards or plaques for honorees (trophy shops), gift bag items for guests (cosmetic stores, gift shops, party supply stores or shopping centers) and invitations (graphic designers and printers). Recruit a local news anchor to serve as the event emcee. Consider offering free or discounted childcare options to make it easier for attending foster parents to enjoy a well-deserved night out.

Tools:

- > Sample Appreciation Letter
- > Sample Proclamation
- > Sample Letter to Elected Official