
Support

Across the country, caring people are helping children in foster care build brighter futures by serving as their foster parents, relative caregivers, mentors, advocates, social workers and volunteers. *But more help is needed.* Most communities are urgently seeking more individuals and organizations to come forward and support our nation's most vulnerable children.

As you plan for recruitment efforts, we encourage you to think about how you might use National Foster Care Month as a way of connecting with different people and organizations in your community. No matter what type of support or resources you may be looking for, it is wise to tailor messages and the approach for each target audience. The following ideas were developed specifically to inspire and encourage faith-based groups, teachers/educators, librarians and businesses to be more informed and become more involved in foster care.

For Faith-based Groups

- > **Spotlight foster care during one day of worship in May.** Feature information about the needs of youth in foster care during sermons. Ask members of the congregation to share their personal experiences as a foster parent, relative caregiver or foster care alumni as part of the service. As part of the children's ministry or other community outreach programs, invite representatives from local foster care agencies to answer questions and provide informational materials after services. Hand out a foster parent recruitment flyer or feature key facts about foster care in your church bulletin. Distribute the "*Change a Lifetime*" menu of ways to get involved (if possible, customized to feature local agencies) to all members.
- > **"Adopt" a foster youth (as a congregation).** This is particularly important for older youth who have "aged out" of foster care, typically at 18 years of age, yet still require significant support to live independently. Provide college care packages, a place at the table for holiday celebrations and, most importantly, strong ties to caring adults whom they can count on in both good and bad times. Some churches have adopted a group home for the holiday season, thereby building a community-based partnership of fellowship and gifts during what might be a lonely time of the year for children in foster care.
- > **Hold a donation drive** to collect clothing, books, toys, computers, sports equipment, musical instruments and school supplies for distribution to children in foster care via local agencies. Contribute monetary donations to scholarship funds that help youth in foster care cover the costs of higher education or cultural enrichment classes.
- > **Help a foster youth maintain ties to his/her house of worship.** Because they are temporarily living away from home, youth in foster care often are displaced from their neighborhood, school or regular house of worship. Reach out to foster families in the community and encourage them to participate in services as a way of providing spiritual support and continuity to the child. Recruit congregation members to escort youth in care to weekly services if their foster parents are unable to do so.

Support *(continued)*

- > **Provide a support system or resources for foster parents (including relative caregivers) in the congregation.** Most congregations include foster parents and many of them may not have access to or know of the resources that are available to them. This is especially important for grandparents who are raising grandchildren and often are on very fixed incomes. Faith-based institutions are great places for these families to receive this information. Consider featuring lists of resources with contact information in your communication vehicles, such as church bulletins.
- > **Read more about innovative models and collaborative programs that are uniting the faith-based and child welfare communities.** From foster and adoptive parent recruitment and family preservation services, to mentoring partnerships and tutoring programs, there are several promising practices emerging from faith-based/child welfare collaborations. Check out [Tools](#) for a special report: *Faith-based Adoptive/Foster Services: Faith Communities' Roles in Child Welfare* and for more ideas for involving faith-based groups in the issue of foster care.

For Teachers/Educators

- > **Understand the reasons why children are placed in out-of-home care.** Foster children often fear that educators assume they are in foster care because they have done something wrong. In fact, children are typically placed in foster care because of circumstances beyond their control, often due to parental abuse or neglect.
- > **Get the Facts.** Young people in foster care are in an educational crisis. Issues such as compromised academic outcomes, school placement instability, social/behavioral factors, poor high school completion and low post-secondary entrance rates are adversely affecting the futures of America's next generation. Check out [Tools](#) for important background information compiled by the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education.
- > **Connect with child welfare staff.** Find out which students are living with foster or adoptive families, kinship caregivers or within group living arrangements. Take the initiative to learn and share information with administrators and school counselors about out-of-home care in general and the agency associated with your school district. Stay focused on what you need to know to help the child in school and get what information you can within the limits of confidentiality. Build your relationships with child welfare staff over time; learn from them about the system that they work in and how it can mesh with the one you work in.
- > **Help students gain access to appropriate academic supports** such as tutoring, counseling and test preparation. Invite the child's resource parents (foster parents, kinship caregivers, adoptive parents) to work with you in assessing the student's current level of achievement and setting reasonable goals for the academic year.
- > **Read "What Teachers and Educators Can Do to Help Youth in Foster Care"** in [Tools](#) for more extensive information on supporting good educational outcomes for students in out-of-home care including: classroom tips, how to explore the student's academic history, preparation for post-secondary education, career planning and more.

Support *(continued)*

For Librarians

- > **Understand the reasons why children are placed in out-of-home care.** Children and youth are typically in foster care because of circumstances beyond their control, often due to parental abuse or neglect – not because they have done something wrong.
- > **Get the Facts.** We encourage librarians to provide the same supports to children in foster care that you do for all youngsters: a safe learning environment, a connection to a positive adult willing to help them pursue their educational aspirations, and free Internet access. Because children in out-of-home care are an especially vulnerable population, your role in their lives may be much more important than you imagine. Find out how many youth in your library's service area are residing with foster or adoptive parents, kinship caregivers or within group living arrangements. Visit www.fostercaremonth.org to view foster care facts from your state.
- > **Connect with school system administrators and teachers.** Find out what schools in your district are doing to improve educational outcomes for children and youth in out-of-home care. What are their specific learning needs? Brainstorm ways you can work together to provide books and other learning materials that are sensitive to the needs of children living apart from their families.
- > **Provide information and resources to local foster families.** Attend parent support group meetings to educate families about the library's available resources for children in their care. Offer creative suggestions for encouraging young people to read, such as providing age-appropriate summer reading lists. These types of resources can be printed on postcards and easily slipped into information packets distributed by local foster parent associations, county foster care coordinators and foster care agencies. Find your state's foster parent association by visiting www.nfpainc.org.
- > **Make your library foster care-friendly!** Broaden the diversity of families depicted in the books and materials in your library to include foster, adoptive and kinship families. Host special readings or film screenings featuring the works of accomplished foster care alumni such as Regina Louise, Josh Shipp, Victoria Rowell, Chris Eyre, Bob Danzig and others. Create a special foster care display during May using the promotional materials available through the National Foster Care Month web site www.fostercaremonth.org. Check out [Tools](#) for a list of books about foster care and adoption.

For Businesses

- > **Donate or offer special discounts on products and services for foster families** such as dental care, health screenings, admission to entertainment and recreational facilities, gym memberships, family photographs, restaurant gift certificates and more.
- > **Establish a scholarship fund for a young person who is making the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency.** Match employee and customer donations (or allocate a percentage of proceeds from sales) during the month of May. Visit the Orphan Foundation of America at www.orphan.org/donateonline.html to make a contribution to an existing scholarship fund for youth in foster care.

Support *(continued)*

- > **Become a career mentor to a foster youth.** Research shows that young people with a foster care experience are vulnerable to unemployment and underemployment when they age out of care. Business can make a positive difference by offering vocational skills training, résumé writing and interviewing workshops, job coaching, internships and part-time or full-time employment opportunities to foster youth who are entering the workplace.
- > **Encourage employees to get involved in the lives of youth in foster care.** Feature a recruitment message in the company newsletter along with a profile of an inspirational foster child or an employee already making a difference as a foster parent, mentor or court appointed special advocate. Invite representatives from local foster care agencies to make a presentation at your workplace during May. Distribute the “*Change a Lifetime*” menu of ways to get involved (if possible, customized to feature local agencies) to all employees.

Tools:

- > *Change a Lifetime* Menu of Ways to Get Involved
- > Sample Church Bulletin
- > *Faith-based Adoptive/Foster Services: Faith Communities’ Roles in Child Welfare.* Prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation by the Center for Religion and Civic Culture, University of Southern California
- > What Teachers and Educators Can Do to Help Youth in Foster Care
- > *Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth in Foster and Out-of-Home Care* - National Working Group on Foster Care and Education
- > Tools and Resources - National Working Group on Foster Care and Education
- > Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program
- > Books about foster care and adoption:
 - *The Women Who Raised Me*, by Victoria Rowell (HarperCollins/William Morrow Imprint)
 - *Somebody’s Someone*, by Regina Louise reginalouise.com/somebodyssomeone.htm
 - *Every Child Deserves a Champion*, by Bob Danzig www.bobdanzig.com/products.html
 - Other titles of interest may be found at: www.cwla.org/pubs/subj.asp and www.childadvocacy.com/books
- > Sample Letter to Local Businesses