

**10 WAYS TO CONNECT
YOUR LOCAL CHURCH
TO LOCAL FOSTER CARE.**



1.27 NATIONAL NETWORK

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The local church often wants to connect with kids and families impacted by child welfare, but they don't know what to do or how to begin. This is where the work of bridge ministries can help position the local church to serve kids in their own backyards.

Here are ten ideas that bridge ministries in the 1.27 National Network do to help in their own local communities:

Support foster families

Whether coordinating wrap-around support to foster and adoptive families, like they do at Coalition of Care in Ohio, or creating a support group for these same families, churches can care for foster and adoptive families within their own walls. Having these support networks in place may also be a draw for other families who are called to foster and adopt to be part of their church community. A church that cares well for families cares well for the community.

Encourage child welfare caseworkers

Caseworker turnover directly impacts kids in care. When caseworkers change, the details of kids' cases get lost and often delay the processes meant to support them. Being a champion for caseworkers, like the Socialight program at Congregations for Kids in North Carolina, is a way churches can encourage the people on the frontlines responsible for carrying heavy details of families' stories and making decisions around safety. Caring for caseworkers translates to caring for children.

Mentor kids aging out of foster care

Imagine moving into young adulthood as a teenager with no family support system to fall back on. That happens to many foster care teenagers as they turn 18. Now imagine if you had a church community or even one supportive adult you could call when you needed adult guidance. Project Belong trains mentors through churches to be that supportive adult in a young person's life as they become completely independent. They are the bridge between mentors and young people.

Host a clothing and supply closet for foster families

Churches are great at practical help. They are generous in sharing what they have. But sometimes, they need that bridge to connect families in need with the resources they want to share. That's where you come in. Defend the Fatherless in South Carolina provides clothing, supplies, and freezer meals to foster and adoptive families through the generosity of local churches and the community. They are bridging needs with resources.

Provide meals to foster and kinship families

Speaking of meals, nothing says church life better than a warm meal delivered when someone is in need. Project 1.27's Neighbor Program matches volunteer "neighbors" with foster, kinship, and adoptive families for six months. The neighbor brings a meal to the family once a month and offers additional support. It's a structure that sets the local church up to feed the families in its community.

Train church volunteers on trauma's impacts on kids

What happens when a congregation says they want to be foster and adoptive-friendly and families show up on a Sunday? Often, Sunday School staff and volunteers aren't equipped to handle trauma-related behaviors. That's where bridge ministries like Crossroads NOLA in Louisiana step in. They provide training like TBRI for churches and community organizations that serve children so they can welcome all kids with the most appropriate tools possible.

Host fun events for families

You know what most foster families need more of? Fun. You know what else they need? Connection. Churches often have big buildings, parking lots, and lots of helping hands. Hosting a Christmas party or summer carnival for foster and adoptive families can be a way for a church to use many of its resources at once to offer families both fun and connection with other families or resources that can help them. A church may desire to help but needs the bridge ministry, like Spokane 1.27, to connect with families the event is intended for.

Create short-term housing for kids in care

In almost every community around the country, one thing is consistent: there aren't enough trained and open foster families ready to accept the kids in care. In other words, there are not enough homes for kids. BCS Together in Texas responded to the need creatively. With the support of local churches and businesses, they converted a trailer into a short-term emergency housing option for teen girls. They know this isn't a long-term solution, but they considered how to address the issue and jumped in.

Recruit families to offer foster care

One way churches can support foster care is to educate and inspire their congregations to consider opening their homes to be foster parents. Bridge ministries like Coalition of Care in Ohio can help churches talk from the front in the pulpit or the back at an information table about God's call to care for the vulnerable and how individuals can get involved in opening their homes.

Pray with intention

God wants to hear our hearts, and prayer opens our communication with him. Everything we do can be bathed in prayer. Bridge ministries can let churches know how to pray or even facilitate prayer trainings and sessions like Ignite Hope in Georgia does. Praying for children, families, government employees, and anyone who impacts a child's journey is a way for us to bring the needs of a community before God and intercede on children's behalf.