

ENGAGING CHURCHES IN FOSTER CARE MINISTRY





SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Bridge ministries serve the church by supporting them as they serve in foster care. We connect with churches to support and sometimes augment foster ministry in local churches. Bridge ministries provide tools and staff support to inform and connect churches to local and state child welfare needs, inspire involvement, as well as train and support families.

What's are a few ways you are prepared to serve the church?

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RELATIONSHIPS

As in most areas of life, relationships are everything. That's why one of the best ways to engage a pastor is less about beautifully designed tools for starting a foster care ministry and more about seeing it lived out in real life.

When a pastor or other church leader sees a family open their home to children in foster care, it puts a name and a face to foster care. That's powerful. One of the best ways to connect with pastors or church leaders is to connect through a foster family in the church, inviting the congregation to come alongside that family, creating a 'village' of support.

The world of child abuse is foreign to many people. It can be intimidating, scary, pain-filled and messy. But we must go back to the belief that everyone can do something. Watching a church family as they open their home to children in foster care, watching the church support that family in fostering can open up a discussion about foster care ministry.”



FINDING CONNECTIONS

- Start with churches where you know the pastor or someone in a leadership role.
- Whether you are approaching a pastor you know, approaching a foster family about their church or getting referrals from other pastors, understanding the culture is critical.
- Identify Christian foster families in your community. Find out which churches they attend and ask them about the culture and current ministries of their church. Consider how the church culture and current ministries might connect with the foster care needs in your community. Ask specific foster families to connect you with their pastor or church leaders so you can share.
- Look for churches who are already doing something for at-risk kids and share with them opportunities to help kids in foster care.
- If you know a pastor who is already passionate about foster care, extend an invitation to coffee or lunch. Ask for help in developing and connecting with other pastors who are, or could be, open to foster care ministry.



HOW TO CONNECT

- As previously mentioned, look for ways to connect what a church is already doing with the needs of kids in foster care. Most people love to do more of the things they do well. Few people want to do more of the things they don't do well. Keep a big picture perspective and consider all the ways churches can support kids in foster care and foster/adoptive families. When meeting with pastors or church leadership ask which ministries they believe are most successful. Then listen. Listen for the ministry areas the pastor finds exciting and look for ways to connect those ministries with supporting kids in foster care.

- Bring a packet of promotional materials when meeting with pastors to provide a visual of ways the church can be involved in foster care ministry. For instance, marketing materials or a checklist for promoting a Foster Care Info Night.
- Tell Stories. Use information from your research into the local community to paint a compelling picture of the need. Congregations for Kids in Charlotte, NC has done a good job in this area through their #DoYouSeeMeCLT campaign. [View it here: tinyurl.com/127-cfk-doyousee](http://tinyurl.com/127-cfk-doyousee)
- Touch-points. Look for ways to reconnect with pastors/church leaders every month or two and ensure foster care stays top of mind. Consider dropping off a logo mug filled with candy. Notice things the church is doing to help the community and send the pastor a thank you note. Look for ways to connect that don't involve asking for something.
- Consider organizing a Foster Care Forum or Leaders' Gathering to share the needs and possible solutions in the foster care system. Invite leaders from your local or state/county child welfare agency and others in the child welfare field in your community. Involve foster and adoptive families in the planning and presentation of the event. Foster families can also be helpful in inviting people who are passionate about this issue and might be interested in getting involved.



FOSTER/ADOPT FRIENDLY CHURCHES

One way to encourage churches to dive into foster care ministry is to encourage them to become a Foster and Adoption Friendly Church. Once a church has met the criteria set for a Foster and Adoption Friendly Church, a Foster and Adoption Friendly Church badge could be issued to be used on the church website and linked to your ministry website. Your website could provide a list of all Foster and Adoption Friendly Churches in the community. Project 1.27 can support creating a badge with your ministry name.

Check it out here: project127.com/churches.html



BINGO CARD

Use this BINGO-style card as a tool to share the range of ways churches can get involved in foster care ministry. It includes five categories (communication, recruitment, family support, youth support and ministry pioneers). There are no levels of involvement to avoid giving churches the impression that some churches are better because they do more. The BINGO card simply provides churches an overview of ways to serve.

Personalize the BINGO card to fit the needs in your community. Consider adding links so church leaders can easily connect with more information. For example, in the box that states “preach on James 1:27 once per year” offer a link to several sermon outlines. In the box that states, ‘show a video during service or host a Film Night’ provide a link to appropriate films.

Download the card here: tinyurl.com/127-bingocard

B

COMMUNICATION



Preach on James 1:27 once per year

I

RECRUITMENT



Recruit volunteers to support foster families in your church

N

SUPPORTING FAMILIES



Prepare meals for foster families or a support group

G

SUPPORTING YOUTH



Collect school supplies and backpacks

O

MINISTRY PIONEERS



Start a Foster Care Ministry in your church



Show a video during service or host a Film Night



Recruit volunteers for Royal Family Kids Camp



Organize a supply closet for kids in foster care



Collect new car seats, cribs, bikes, diapers and gift cards



Encourage caseworkers with coffee and donuts or lunch



Include messages about foster care in social media and print materials



Recruit CASA volunteers for kids in foster care



Organize a Foster Parent's Night Out



Collect funds to pay sports/activities fees or musical instruments



Provide training for church volunteers about trauma



Host a Foster Care Info Table after service



Host a Foster Care Informational Lunch



Host a support group for foster and adoptive families



Be a mentor to youth aging out of foster care



Develop a sensory room for trauma exposed kids



Promote Foster Care Information Nights



Host a Foster Care Information Fair



Provide babysitting or transportation for foster families



Encourage business owners to hire teens from foster care



Provide 'buddies' for trauma exposed kids during service

Pray for God's direction about serving kids in foster care

Pray for families considering foster care or adoption

Pray for foster and adoptive families and kids in their homes

Pray for judges, caseworkers and others in the foster care system

Pray for church leaders involved in foster care ministry