



AMERICA'S  
**KIDS BELONG**™



# **FOSTER FRIENDLY**™

BY AMERICA'S KIDS BELONG



**BUSINESS AMBASSADOR  
GUIDEBOOK**



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# INTRODUCTION

Thanks for your interest in becoming a local ambassador for our Foster Friendly program. Our mission is to improve the experiences and outcomes of kids in foster care. We accomplish this through three key focus areas:



## Family Recruiting

We work to recruit and retain foster parents until there are more willing families than kids awaiting placement. Our *I Belong Project* is one key program that features videos of kids in foster care eligible for adoption as a way to help them find forever homes.



## Community Engagement

We equip businesses, faith communities, and civic organizations to become *Foster Friendly* and connect these groups to foster families via our innovative *Foster Friendly App* until there is a community for every family.



## Sustainable Change

We work with governors’ and mayors’ offices, child welfare, and other leadership voices to raise awareness and drive sustainable change in foster care, leading to hope for every community.

Did you know...

that nearly half of parents stop fostering within the first year? One of the most-cited reasons is **lack of community support**.

While an app doesn’t have the power to change those outcomes, it does result in connections between certified kinship and foster families and groups in the community that desire to honor, appreciate, and support the work they are doing as they stand in the gap with vulnerable kids.

This guidebook is intended to give you the information and support to engage businesses in your community to join the movement to make your community Foster Friendly.





We Support

## WHAT IS MY COMMITMENT AS A FOSTER FRIENDLY AMBASSADOR?

### Responsibilities

- Register local businesses for the Foster Friendly App.
- Communicate the importance of supporting local kinship and foster families and increasing retention rates in our local community.
- Help businesses relate their products/services to the fostering lifestyle and the needs of kids and families in foster care.
- Follow up with businesses after they're published to the app to:
  - › Give them a welcome packet and window sticker.
  - › Take photos/videos to welcome the business and promote their offer on social media.
- Additional activities your state chapter may request:
  - › Maintain weekly communication with state coordinator.
  - › Send thank you cards to businesses.

### Qualifications

- Being bold about advocating to improving the experiences and outcomes of kids in foster care.
- Being comfortable engaging and networking with local business leaders.
- Having good communication skills.

### Time Commitment

- We request ambassadors make a six-month commitment. Monthly activity typically involves:
  - › Participate in one-time ambassador onboarding
  - › Connect with a minimum of six businesses a month
  - › Coordinate and communicate with state staff via phone, text, or email
  - › Attend business networking opportunities (optional)

### Training and Support

- One-hour ambassador onboarding, includes download and tour of Foster Friendly App and review of this guide
- Access to state staff
- Free trauma-awareness training (optional)

### Benefits

- Positively impact the experiences and outcomes for kids in foster care and help retain much-needed foster parents
- Grow your knowledge and compassion for kids in foster care
- Meet new people and expand your philanthropic network
- Use your gifts and skills to serve others
- Join the national Foster Friendly movement as a valuable member of the America's Kids Belong family

### Resources

- This guide
- Access to state chapter liaison, email, and phone for questions and support
- Foster Friendly business guide, sample Foster Friendly window sticker, and image of Foster Friendly digital badges to use and show on visits



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**WE ARE**

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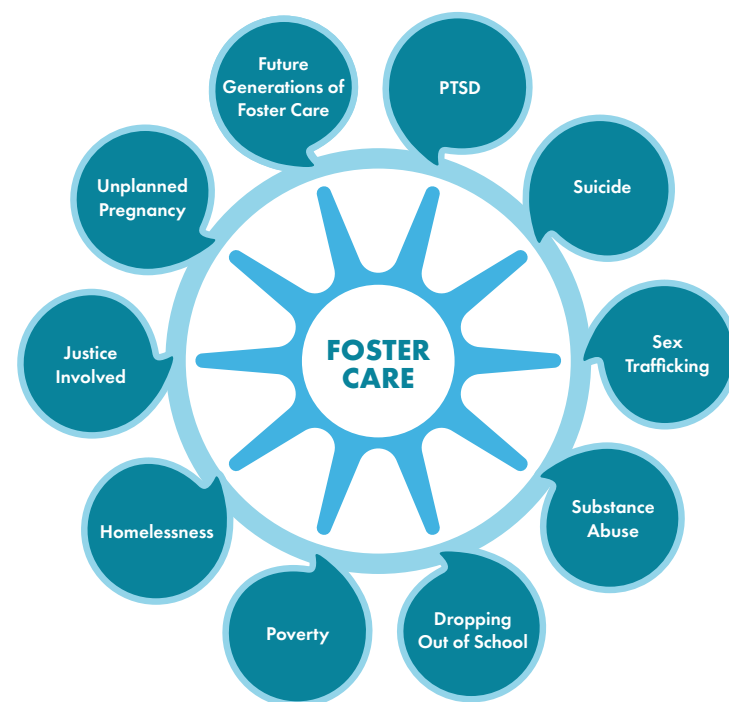
## HELP BUSINESSES FIND THEIR “WHY”

Businesses are for-profit enterprises that are approached every day to support and donate to a wide range of causes.

### Here’s Why Foster Care Is a Smart Investment and a Heart Investment for Businesses

Here are three clear and compelling reasons that it makes good business sense to support foster care:

1. When kids in foster care age out (at age 18) without a stable, loving family, they are at greatly increased risk for 10 social wounds that directly impact our communities, and they’ll require an average of \$300,000 in social services over their lifetimes.
2. Foster care is a nonpartisan issue that garners broad-based support.
3. Investing in foster families has the power to create generational impact. Businesses that support foster care are helping create sustainable change in foster care.



## BUSINESS ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND APPRECIATION

Business leaders who will choose to participate in the app care about kids in foster care and have a mindset toward corporate responsibility. To show our gratitude, we do our best to appreciate and recognize our business partners:

- Business showcased on app
- Business logo featured on website
- Business discount showcased on social media (LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook) at least once a year
- If interested, we will produce a video case study to further promote the business’ support of the mission.



# PLAN YOUR VISIT

Take a little time to research online the businesses you're going to visit and learn what you can about whom they serve, what they value, and how to align with their business priorities.



- When are they busiest?
- What are their values? What do they already support? How can foster care complement and build upon what they're already doing?
- Have the app pulled up on your phone before you walk in. Also have the QR codes accessible either in your photos or from this guidebook.

## Here Are Some Tips to Work Smarter, Not Harder



- Find a leasing center for a retail complex and target the entire retail leasing center. As you get their neighboring businesses to commit, it creates momentum and healthy peer pressure. "Wouldn't it be amazing to make this entire complex Foster Friendly?"
- Ask for referrals. When you connect with a business person who "gets it," ask them for referrals before you leave. Maybe they'll even connect you with some colleagues via text to provide a warm intro.
- Engage your state staff to leverage connections to chambers of commerce, Christian chambers of commerce, downtown associations, Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Club, etc.

**Note: Avoid businesses whose offerings might be questionable or potentially unsafe for kids in foster care.** Examples of businesses to avoid include liquor stores, gun and knife shops, CBD, etc.

## Develop Your Elevator Pitch

Some tips to keep in mind as you prepare your elevator pitch.

1. First remember it is **your** pitch. The more it is your own, the more impactful it will be.
2. Aim for 60 seconds or less – that's about 150 words!
3. Remember, you're not asking for a favor. You're inviting business leaders to invest in their community in a meaningful and rewarding way.
4. It's good to be shameless when it comes to advocating for vulnerable kids!

Finally, your coordination with your Kids Belong chapter is key because it's not the initial agreement but how we continue to connect with and engage the business that will determine whether we secure "just another coupon" or a valued business partner.

## Key Messages for Your Elevator Pitch



- Did you know that there are approximately \_\_\_ kids in foster care right here in our community?
- There's always a shortage of foster parents, and one reason is that nearly half of them quit after the first year, citing a lack of community support as a key reason.
- Helping these families feel connected, seen, and valued is crucial. At America's Kids Belong, one way we do this is our Foster Friendly App, where we connect families with local businesses and faith communities that care about the work they're doing and come alongside them to lighten the load with discounts and services they need.
- As a business, this is an easy way to impact your community. But it's more than just another discount. It's an investment in the future of [our town] by investing in helping kids and families thrive.

## Sample Pitch (2 mins)

Hi, Kelsey! I represent a nonprofit called \_\_\_\_ Kids Belong, and I just want to say up front: I'm not here to ask you for a donation! We exist to support and encourage kids and families in foster care.

Are you familiar with the foster care system? (Assume affirmative head nod here. Most people are at least a little aware of what foster care is, so that's good enough for now.) So you probably know foster care can be really hard! A foster family may have two kids at the breakfast table and six kids at the dinner table. That brings lots of challenges that take a toll on families over the long haul.

So one of the cool things we've done is to launch this app called "Foster Friendly" (have it in hand to flash at them, but not for a detailed explanation right now), and it's a very simple concept: The app connects businesses directly with foster families in our area to offer services and products at discounted rates or with special promotions, like BOGO. There are no ads and no benefits to our organization – just a platform to connect.

Now I'm sure you would agree that a 10 percent discount on a restaurant meal or a BOGO at the trampoline park is not going to be a life-changing thing for a foster family, but here's the really cool thing. That discount doesn't just help them reduce their expenses. When you become a Foster Friendly business, you are saying to a family who walks in your door, "I see you! I appreciate what you're doing to care for kids in foster care! I know it's hard, and I want to say thank you with my business!" And that appreciation can be a life changing thing! Does that make sense?





## YOU GOT A “YES.” NOW WHAT?

You’re asking the business owner if they are willing to include a free service, discount, or other offer for certified kinship and foster families who will show up at their businesses with a Foster Parent ID Card that looks similar to this:



When a business says “Yes” to joining our Foster Friendly Community, here’s what happens next:

1. **Register Now:** If they have time, have the owner/manager scan the QR code for their device (Apple or Google).
  - a. Download the Foster Friendly App.
  - b. Under My Profile, choose Become a Foster Friendly Business and complete the registration form.
  - c. Then, also under My Profile, go to Account Details and toggle on “I am a foster friendly business.”



2. **Do Later:** Give them the Foster Friendly App flyer with directions about how to download the app and apply.
3. **Stay Connected:** When you leave, be sure you have your contact’s business card or contact information (name, best phone number, and email) so we can follow up with them and stay connected.
4. **What to Expect Next:** Once they register on the app, the state coordinator will review and approve their submission to be published to the app. Once that happens, they’ll receive a confirmation email, a Foster Friendly sticker (for their window), and digital badge (for their online profiles) that they can use to let families and the community know theirs is a Foster Friendly business!

5. **Be Social:** Let businesses know that we will promote their participation via social media and encourage them to do the same and to tag us.

## IDEAS FOR OFFERS BY BUSINESS CATEGORY

Here are some ways to frame the need and ideas for specific asks you can make of area businesses.

### Automotive

- Transportation is often a barrier to foster families taking in more kids, especially sibling groups. If there are more than three kids in a family, they often are split up because homes aren’t equipped to say yes, and transportation is a key piece of that.
  - › View Nissan video [here](#).
  - › Tennessee version [here](#).
- Extra kids mean extra messes in vehicles and extra wear-and-tear on vehicles.

#### • Ideas:

- › Loaner vans for foster families who take in large sibling groups.
- › Discount on vehicle purchase for foster parents upgrading to larger vehicles to accommodate more kids.
- › Discounts on tire rotations, oil changes, and other routine maintenance.
- › Free car wash or upgrade on service to include interior.

### Celebrations

- Many kids will be spending their birthdays in a strange home, away from bio family and friends – all that is familiar to them.
- Kids in foster care often tell us they have never had a birthday party.
- Special celebrations can help make them feel special, seen, and valued.

#### • Ideas:

- › Free birthday cake or cupcakes with their names.
- › Discounted or free birthday party package at a kids’ venue.
- › Balloons to celebrate adoption days.
- › Birthday party entertainment giveaways and/or discounts: favor bags, inflatables, clowns/magicians/other entertainers.

### Recreation

- Kids in foster care don’t often get to just “be kids.” Help them enjoy some simple childhood pleasures like visits to museums, zoos, trampoline parks, and other kid-friendly destinations.

#### • Ideas

- › Free or deeply discounted family pass for foster/kinship families.
- › Behind-the-scenes experience.
- › Discounts on food and/or drinks.
- › Gift of apparel/merch.



## Fitness

- Help foster parents maintain their sense of self-care and well-being as they continue to work out and have childcare available.
- Allow kids to have a safe place for sports and activities.
- **Ideas:**
  - › Discounted family membership/kids activities, regardless of the number of kids in home on any given day.
  - › Discount off family membership plan at Ys or similar facilities.
  - › Provide scholarships or discounts for summer camps/classes.
  - › Offer equestrian therapy/riding lessons.

- **Ideas:**
  - › Care package of grocery essentials for new foster arrivals.
  - › Grocery discounts.
  - › Meal discounts.
  - › Kids eat free.
  - › Discount on meals and/or drinks.
  - › Special seating or reservations to help foster families.

## Health & Beauty

- Delight kids in foster care with a haircut, manicure, skin care, or other personal care treat that might not have experienced before, or at least recently.
- Offer a little self-care to weary foster parents.
- **Ideas**
  - › Discount on massages.
  - › Free back-to-school haircut for child in foster care.
  - › Discount on makeup/skin care consultation for teen girls in foster care.
  - › Discount on spa/hair treatments for active foster families.

## Photography

- Kids in foster care may not have printed photos of themselves. Help them see and appreciate themselves at their best with a portrait sitting.
- Capture kinship and/or foster families and the kids they're caring for with discounts on family sessions or adoption day celebrations at the courthouse.

- **Ideas:**
  - › Discount on family sessions.
  - › Photos of adoption day/reunification day celebrations.
  - › Portraits of kids in care.
  - › High school senior portraits.
  - › Discounted photo memory books.

## Real Estate

- Help kinship and foster families afford a new home or home renovation to accommodate more kids.
- **Ideas:**
  - › Discount on realtor commissions. Or, donate a percentage of commission to America's Kids Belong. Give clients an opportunity to choose from a list of nonprofit organizations you support where you will donate a percentage of commission or a fixed amount from a transaction.
  - › Discount on remodeling services.
  - › Design consultation to make more efficient use of space.
  - › Discount on storage unit to create more living space.

## Retail

- When kids enter foster care, they often don't get to bring everything they need. Retail and other gift cards can be a true gift to enable kids, especially teens in care, to shop with dignity and with trendy clothes. It's hard to get involved in sports in a new school without the right apparel and gear too.

- **Ideas:**
  - › Clothing gift cards.
  - › Sports apparel and equipment discounts.
  - › Self-care discounts, including blow dryers, flat irons, makeup, facial products, hair care products, etc.
  - › Cold weather apparel – jackets, hats, scarves, and gloves.
  - › Footwear discounts, BOGO.

## Services

- It's always something. Help busy foster families meet those unexpected and often costly needs that pop up. It's tough for foster parents to make time for everything.
- **Ideas:**
  - › Discounts on lice treatments or bed bug treatment.
  - › Keep homes bug-free with discounted insect and/or rodent treatment.
  - › Free or discounted lawn care and mulch services.
  - › Snow removal.
  - › Junk hauling.
  - › Carpet cleaning.
  - › HVAC maintenance.
  - › Technology support – safe and secure computers/phones.

*Discounted Restaurant Meals Are the #1 Request of Foster Families!*

## Food

- Cooking and dining out become exponentially more costly when the number of kids at the dinner table doubles or triples unexpectedly.
- Foster parents often talk about the need to go out for a cup of coffee with another foster parent who "gets it." Become a foster friendly location that invites them in and says, "We see you. Come rest and refuel."



## Sports/Entertainment

- Entering foster care is extremely traumatic for kids. Help them do things that bring them joy and promote connection with their foster families during hard weeks.
- **Ideas:**
  - › Discount on movie tickets, bike rentals, and other outings.
  - › Discounted or free memberships to zoos, aquariums, children's museums, etc.
  - › Note: The number and identities of kids change frequently in foster families, so when possible, offer family-package discounts (e.g., up to 6 kids).

## Travel

- The unrest and uncertainty of foster care can cost kids the opportunities to just "be kids." Foster families have to jump through hoops in order to take a child out of state. So finding fun in their own communities is very valuable, as is help with travel logistics if they are focused on getting the necessary approvals for travel.
- **Ideas:**
  - › Discounts on travel and stays at in-state parks and family-friendly destinations.
  - › Help foster families book a vacation full of memories and experiences that will last a lifetime.
  - › Provide a limo/ride for a special occasion.

*"The zoo didn't suddenly erase the trauma he had endured, but for the first time since he came to our home several days ago, he was able to be a 9-year-old little boy – to laugh, explore, pet a kangaroo, and not feel like a caretaker/protector to his younger siblings."*

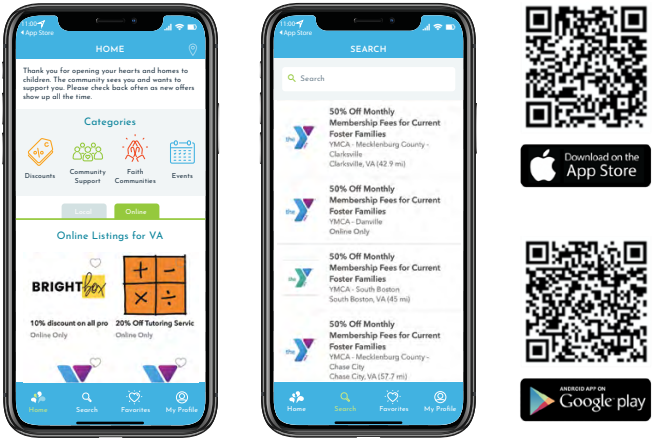
*- Foster Mom*

## Other

- No matter the type of business, if your customers are adults with families, you can create an offer to let them know you see them and that you appreciate and honor the hard work they are doing on behalf of vulnerable kids.
- It's our privilege to work with any business to craft an appropriate offer.

## THE FOSTER FRIENDLY APP

Here are some screenshots of the app you can use to share with a business, should your app not be accessible on your phone. Also included here are the QR codes to download the app for Apple and Google Play.



### Additional Opportunities for Business Support

The best option for most businesses that are motivated to support kinship and foster care is to create an offer on our Foster Friendly App; but it's not the only option. Here are several other ways that businesses may choose to provide support.

### Business Sponsorship

Some businesses may not have a product or service that fits our target audience. We welcome businesses to also consider becoming corporate sponsors. If a business is open to a corporate sponsorship or would like to explore/design a sponsorship opportunity that aligns with their business mission, connect the business leader with a staff member.

**Note:** We do not offer advertising in-app at this time.

### In-Kind Donation

Another valuable opportunity is for a business to make an in-kind donation to support our work. For example, a business that sells computer equipment may offer to donate PCs or tablets, which offers the same benefit as a sponsorship to purchase them but at a lower out-of-pocket cost to the business.

These opportunities can be identified and coordinated with state staff.

### Add Trauma Awareness Into Staff Training

Businesses may be open to making their locations more welcoming and accessible for kids in foster care by offering trauma awareness training to their staff and employees. This also is valuable in hiring young workers who may have experienced trauma, no matter what their backgrounds.

### Make HR Practices Foster-Inclusive

Another wonderful way for businesses to support the mission of changing the experiences and outcomes for kids in foster care is to embrace the trauma awareness training (above) and then actively seek to recruit, hire, train and mentor kids who have been in foster care, particularly for kids 18 and above who have aged out of foster care.

Additionally, businesses can consider including foster families in their employee benefits and participating in foster care awareness initiatives with their employees.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Q. How many children are in foster care in my area?

A. Nationwide more than 400,000 kids are in foster care. And more than 20,000 age out every year. Without the stability and love of a family, they face a challenging future and are at a much higher risk for the top 10 social wounds including homelessness, drug addiction, justice involvement, etc.

### Local/State Data:

## Q. Do people get paid to be foster parents?

A. Foster parents receive stipends to meet some of the expenses for each child; however, it does not cover the full cost of their care. Think of all that it takes to care for your own children on a monthly basis. Now imagine you have two kids at the breakfast table and by dinner, without advance warning, you have five kids, including a highly traumatized sibling group who has just been separated from their family of origin under painful circumstances. That's a lot for anyone to take on.

Wrapping around these families with some simple discounts and other services are a way to say, "We see you," and we value the gift you're giving our communities as you stand in the gap with these vulnerable children. Its value goes far beyond the cost of the extra sandwich, for example.

## Q. Does this program include adoptive families too?

A. We support and promote foster care and adoption, specifically adoption of kids out of the foster care system. But this program was created to serve the acute needs of foster families because of the pressures that come with the situation described in the previous question.

Right now, half of foster parents quit fostering within the first year because they feel so overwhelmed, isolated, and unsupported by the community. Our Foster Friendly program is a simple, yet effective response to that problem.



## About America's Kids Belong

America's Kids Belong is a 501(c)3 organization that mobilizes government leaders, child welfare providers, faith communities, and business leaders to improve the experiences and outcomes of kids in foster care. America's Kids Belong runs innovative initiatives in states to help ensure a family for every child, a community for every family, and sustainable change in foster care.

America's Kids Belong currently operates in 10 states: California, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia. Learn more at [americaskidsbelong.org](http://americaskidsbelong.org). Follow us (and your state's chapter) on LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook.



[www.americaskidsbelong.org](http://www.americaskidsbelong.org)