



NEXT STEPS

FOSTER CARE PANEL



EVENT GUIDEBOOK

T E N N E S S E E
KIDS BELONG™

FROM EDUCATION TO ENGAGEMENT

For many, the term *foster care* carries negative connotations, harsh stereotypes and many unknowns. It is often the fear of what is unknown that keeps people from engaging.



**9,000
KIDS**

There are nearly **9,000 kids in foster care** in TN, including teens, siblings & those with medical needs



**4,500
HOMES**

There are approximately **4,500 foster homes** ready and able to serve the most vulnerable kids in our state



**50%
BURNOUT**

Half of all foster parents **close their homes after just one year** citing "isolation" and a "lack of social support"

RISKS OF AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

Children who **age out** of foster care without a family are far more at risk to experience the following:



- **TRAUMA**

1 in 4 experience PTSD, higher than war veterans

- **SUICIDE**

Attempts are 4x more likely than peers

- **SEX TRAFFICKING**

50% to 90% of victims were in foster care

- **DROP OUT OF SCHOOL**

Less than half graduate high school

- **ADDICTION**

1/3 admit to a problem; 1/2 admit to use of drugs

- **INCARCERATION**

By 23, nearly 1/2 of males spent time behind bars

- **UNPLANNED PREGNANCY**

3x more likely to be pregnant by 19

- **LOSE KIDS TO SYSTEM**

#1 risk factor is mom's welfare history

- **POVERTY**

1/3 live at or below the poverty line

- **HOMELESSNESS**

1/2 become homeless within a year

While children enter foster care for a variety of reasons, it is never through a fault of their own. Kids in foster care need a safe, loving network of adults rooting for their success. There is an urgent need for more foster homes and community involvement to support foster parents. Faith communities are uniquely equipped to answer this call. While not everyone is able to foster, we know **everyone can do something to ensure children have a place to belong.**

FROM PLANNING TO EXECUTION



Next Steps Panels share **accurate information** and present **first-hand experiences** to your faith community. It is crucial to offer a safe space where interested individuals can **ask questions**, **dispel fears** and, ultimately, **feel empowered** to find their place supporting those in foster care.



LOCATION & LOGISTICS

Determine a **warm, inviting space** to accommodate your estimated attendees

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- How will guests register?
- What dates/times work best for attendees?
- Will the event be in-person, virtual, or both?
- Can you provide snacks or a meal?
- Will childcare be offered?



PREP YOUR PANEL

Bring together and moderate **diverse, powerful voices** connected to foster care

AIM TO INCLUDE

- Current Foster Parent(s)
- Former Foster Youth
- "Bio" Kids of Foster Sibling(s)
- Child Welfare Professional(s)
- Tennessee Kids Belong Staff



CONNECT WITH DCS

Notify **local child welfare contacts** of your upcoming event, and invite them to attend

DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP

- Share updates and stories
- Take food or treats to an area office
- Offer your location for training sessions
- Consider hosting a Parent Night Out and more!



FOLLOW UP & NEXT STEPS

The **real work starts now!** How will you support those ready to foster or volunteer?

BE PREPARED

- Have timely follow up emails ready to send
- Include *Next Steps* for fostering
- Have opportunities for volunteers
- Identify those who can donate
- Continue to check in with all attendees

YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

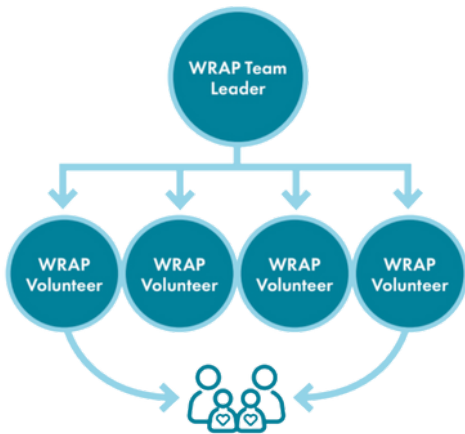
Our team is here to help with any and all aspects of these events. We can assist in identifying locations and panelists. We can connect you with local child welfare workers and area agencies. We'd even love to moderate your event.

Scan to connect with our Community Engagement Team to help plan your event. →



FROM SOLO TO SUPPORTED

If families in your faith community commit to the critical work of foster care, **we strongly recommend building a network of support for their journey.**



WRAP Teams walk alongside kinship and foster families to provide practical, hands-on support. In addition to day-to-day parenting responsibilities, foster parents juggle additional roles as transporters to various appointments, trauma-informed practitioners in times of need, students of continuing education courses, administrative professionals documenting all the things... and so much more! **They shouldn't have to do this life-changing work alone.**

To best set parents up for success, WRAP Teams provide **tangible and intangible support in realtime**, allowing homes to stay open stronger and longer and ensuring kids in care receive the **consistent support needed to heal.**

W

WORDS OF
ENCOURAGEMENT

- Write a kind note
- Recognize special days
- Send a gift card for a night out

R

RESPIRE
CARE

- Offer childcare
- Take kids to a park
- Allow parents time to connect with bio kids

A

ACTS OF
SERVICE

- Bring a meal
- Shop for needed items
- Visit and help with housework

P

PRAYER
TIME

- Pray for the kids
- Pray for healing
- Pray for the right words at the right time

**NOT EVERYONE IS CALLED TO FOSTER OR ADOPT,
BUT EVERYONE CAN DO SOMETHING**

find your **yes**



Next Steps Panels bring reliable information, first hand experiences, and an opportunity to ask tough questions to members of your faith community. These events are crucial to dispel fears and empower people to find their role in the foster care story. Provide attendees **clear ways to support kids in care and those who embrace them.**

I'm ready to take the Next Step! I want to...

- ☐ Become a certified foster parent in Tennessee
- ☐ Help my business become Foster Friendly®
- ☐ Serve on a WRAP Team
- ☐ Volunteer to help area organizations
- ☐ Donate to Tennessee Kids Belong

SAMPLE EVENT TIMELINE

PRE-EVENT

at least 30 minutes prior to start time

- ☐ Room set up complete
- ☐ Partner table set up (i.e. DCS, TKB, etc.)
- ☐ A/V equipment set up and tested
- ☐ Moderator(s) and panelists arrive
 - ☐ Soundcheck, if needed

OPTIONAL

- ☐ Finalize lighting design
- ☐ Childcare volunteers arrive, if provided
- ☐ Refreshments set out, if provided

EVENT TIMELINE

TALKING POINT(S)	POINT PERSON/LEAD	TIME
INTRO		
Share purpose of event and church's heart for foster care	Faith Leader	5 mins
Prayer	Faith Leader	2 mins
PROGRAM		
Explain the flow of the evening and any other logistics	Moderator(s)	3 mins
Panelists introduce themselves and tell their "story"	Panelists	15 mins, 3 mins ea
Direct and open-ended questions to various panelists*	Moderator(s) & Panelists	30-40 mins
*Sample Questions provided in Event Guidebook		
Q&A		
Question and answer session with attendees	Moderator(s) & Panelists	30 mins
CLOSING		
Thank you to panelists and moderator(s)	Faith Leader	2 mins
Encouraging words to those considering next steps	Faith Leader	2 mins
Instruct attendees to complete <i>Next Steps Survey</i>	Moderator(s)	2 mins
Closing Prayer	Faith Leader or Guest	2 mins

POST-EVENT

- ☐ Tear down
 - ☐ Give gifts to moderators and panelists, *recommended*
 - ☐ Compile information collected from attendees
 - ☐ Make plan to send follow up email with next steps to all interested *foster parents & volunteers**
- *Sample scripts included in Event Guidebook

OPTIONAL

- ☐ Send thank you notes to event volunteers
- ☐ Ask us about becoming Foster Friendly®
- ☐ Inquire about Promise Serves software

SAMPLE PANEL QUESTIONS

FAQs

- ☐ How has being a foster family impacted **biological children**? (ask kids or parents on panel)
- ☐ What would you say to someone who is afraid to get “**too attached**” while fostering?
- ☐ What do you do as a couple if **one person** is more excited about fostering than the other?
- ☐ Can you foster if you’re **single**?

PARENTS

seasoned and new foster, adoptive & kinship parents

- ☐ What has been the **hardest thing about fostering/adopting**? The **best thing**? The **biggest surprise**?
- ☐ How have you **built relationships** with the children that have come into your home?
- ☐ Is there one thing you wish you would have known **before getting started**?
- ☐ What kind of **support** has been the most helpful to you and your family?
- ☐ What led you to begin **exploring adoption**?
- ☐ What types of questions did you ask different **adoption agencies** before deciding on one?

FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

former foster youth - adults or older teens

- ☐ Tell us about **your experience** growing up in a home that fostered. How has it impacted you?
- ☐ What were some of the **hard things** about this experience and what were some of the **good things**?
- ☐ What did your parents do to explain things to you and **get your perspective and input**?
- ☐ Is there anything else you’d want to share about **fostering teens**?

PARTNERS

nonprofits, CASA workers, foster closets

- ☐ **Tell us about your organization** and how you help/support kids in foster care.
- ☐ Why are **volunteers** critical to your work?
- ☐ Share a story about how your organization had a **positive impact** in the life of a child/family.
- ☐ Is there **anything else** you’d want to say to someone considering volunteering with your org?

PROCESS

DCS, private providers

- ☐ Can you give us a basic overview of the **process to become a foster parent**?
- ☐ What **support** do you offer to foster parents (both new and seasoned families)?
- ☐ What is the difference in becoming a foster parent through **DCS vs. agency**?
- ☐ What are the largest **needs in our region** right now?
- ☐ Why should people **consider opening their home** to these kids?