



The ALL IN for FOSTER ADOPTION Challenge: The Goal and Strategies to Care for Waiting Kids

Today there are approximately over 400,000 young people in the foster care system and 122,000 youth in foster care currently eligible for permanency and adoption. Many are children that have never known the security of a loving home and often must wait for over three years for permanency. While others are shuttled between a multitude of homes; the number of placements sometimes soaring into the double digits.

One can only imagine what the lasting impact might be on a child who has never known the safety of a loving family. And what strain does this put on our communities overall?

**What can the
local church
do?
They can go
“All IN.”**

Sex-traffickers that prey on these children, increased homelessness, and incarceration that is seemingly inevitable due to lack of guidance and substantial gaps in education. These bleak, cultural realities stand in stark contrast to the mission of the church – to care for those in need.

What's at Stake?

In a March panel discussion, former foster youth turned Youth Engagement Coordinator for the ALL IN for FOSTER ADOPTION Challenge, Joshua Christian Oswald, shared his inspiring story of being adopted just a few months ago. We listened in awe as he told the story of becoming a forever son to his caseworker of many years. Even as a 23-year-old man the formation of a real family was the realization of a lifelong dream.

What might a story like this mean for the church? Though we wish Joshua would have been adopted sooner, saving him years of intense trial and hardship, his story tells us there is always hope--Godly people can come into a life at any point and make a significant impact.

Today, approximately 20,000 youth exit foster care to emancipate annually. In other words, these are young people who have aged-out of the system. Think of 20,000 young adults entering communities with the expectation of knowing how to find a home, how to get a job, and how to create a successful life - without ever experiencing the love or guidance of a real family. When asked what's at stake for kids who aren't placed in permanent, loving homes, Alex Olson, an ALL IN for FOSTER ADOPTION Challenge Team Member whose own forever family fostered over 110 youth over time, said,

"I had a friend in the system who took his own life at 11 years of age. And many young people I know have had similar experiences. It really is our lives that are at stake."



"Human lives made in the image of God are what's at stake."

The “ALL IN” Goal: Forever Families

CityServe seeks to empower the local church to fulfill its purpose in transforming lives by overcoming despair. When it comes to The Orphan initiative of ministering to children and youth in foster care, The ALL IN for FOSTER ADOPTION Challenge is our greatest asset.

Created by former Assistant Secretary for Health and Human Services - Administration for Children and Families, and now CityServe Vice President of Children and Youth Initiatives, Lynn Johnson, The ALL IN for FOSTER ADOPTION Challenge mission is to find “forever families,” for every waiting child or teen in the foster care system.



In the recent panel discussion with three former foster youth who are now partners in the ALL IN for FOSTER ADOPTION Challenge, Trent Taylor of North Carolina expressed urgency in regard to the desperate need for permanency and forever families,

“What we need...is a quicker path to permanency. Whether that be by reunification [with family of origin] or adoption. It is just so harmful for the child’s development every time they have to move, it hinders their ability to attach. Even just a year in the system is traumatic.”

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-Trent Taylor of North Carolina

Through the ALL IN Challenge, federal, state, and local government officials have been called upon to provide the essential leadership needed to prioritize waiting children. Measures such as removing state-specific barriers to adoption must happen in order to achieve permanency more quickly. The goal of permanency for all foster youth would seem daunting and frankly unattainable if not for what we know to be true about God’s people – that when they prayerfully mobilize, profound change happens. We believe that change will come as a result of fighting the battle on two fronts: proactive abuse prevention and communal support for fostering and adoptive families.



Inspiring God's People to Action: Strategies for Prevention and Communal Support

Like most of CityServe's initiatives, the issue of children in foster care is closely tied to the issue of poverty and hunger. Therefore, when effort is focused in one area, we see impact upon another. Take, for example, 61% of children are removed from their homes due to the consequences of poverty.

What would it mean then, if the church stepped in to fulfill its role in ministering to the poor? And if poverty is a major risk factor associated with child abuse, then what would it look like for the church to step in with job training or a love offering to help relieve some of the pressure on low-income households?

These are the kinds of questions our network of churches and nonprofit organizations are asking. They're the kinds of questions that must be asked by all churches who hope to make a real difference in the foster care system and help find permanent homes for waiting kids. The issue is not as simple as providing short-term summer camps for foster youth or running an after-school program. Though these initiatives are beautiful ways to minister to children, the church needs to do more to address the underlying problems that lead to kids becoming casualties of an overwhelmed system.

In Part One of this series, we discussed some of the ways a church might wraparound struggling families to offer support. Now, we want to outline additional forever family development strategies and methods of advocacy.

Increase Awareness

Church leadership should remember that not everyone in the pews on Sunday is aware of the issues facing their own communities. Creating awareness is key in fighting against the problems of our cultural moment. Take the time to speak from the pulpit about the issues foster children are facing. Gather local statistics on the number of foster youths in your community and share them with your church community. Begin to normalize praying for issues surrounding adoption as an everyday part of life in the church.



Recruit Forever Families

Assist in the recruitment of forever families for children in need. Your church can volunteer with local organizations (such as a group home), using the opportunity as a way for loving families to connect with youth who need families. It's amazing how even something as serious as the decision to adopt can be "contagious" in the church.

Churches are also essential to foster and adoptive family retention. As foster families open their doors to these youth, they may deal with volatile behaviors that might cause them to reconsider.



Providing wraparound services, such as trauma training, and communal support are vital to making a long-term placement and "forever family" a reality for these kids.

Finding Homes for Special Needs Children

Similarly, families in the church who have a heart for children with special needs will need training for the unique challenges of raising children with disabilities. Church fundraising or facilitation of trainings for prospective families would be a true blessing for these families, including the broader church family.

Education

In 2018, the rate of absenteeism among children in foster care was double the California statewide average. Only 59% of 12th-graders in foster care graduated high school with their class, compared to 83% of all students (edsources.org). These numbers are discouraging but not surprising when we consider the amount of instability that occurs with school placement when frequently moving from home to home. Churches can offer support in the form of tutoring and educational assistance. Leadership should consider the vast resources available to them in their congregation, resources in the form of talented classroom teachers or college students who may have the time desire to help.





Mentors for Youth Aging Out

According to YouthMentor.org, “Youth who meet regularly with their mentors are 46% less likely than their peers to start using illegal drugs and 27% less likely to start drinking.”

As adults, we take certain life skills for granted. We often don’t think twice about the type of outfit we might need for a job interview or that we should shake hands with the interviewer, but these are the social nuances that are often overlooked when youth have lived most of their lives in survival mode and have not been prepared for adulthood. Becoming a mentor to a young adult aging out of foster care is a way to offer that support. Your church can help design a system that includes matching mentors and mentees or partner with local organizations who specialize in that process. One such organization is FosteringHopeLA.org who provides, “job readiness training and Christian mentorship.”

Resources

CityServe has a vast network of distribution centers and resources to provide home furnishings, appliances, school supplies, and more to foster care and adoptive families. Become a HUB or POD (point of distribution) so your church can better serve its members and the surrounding community.

Public Relations

Your church can join the ALLIN for FOSTER ADOPTION Challenge to bring awareness to National Adoption Day each year.

Summits

Host a virtual or in-person summit to help inspire your community to participate in the ALL IN for FOSTER ADOPTION Challenge.

We hope the strategies we have shared above inspire ideas within your own church and stoke a fire within your congregation to claim America’s kids as their own.



At CityServe we believe the church has been entrusted with a faith that moves mountains and that adoption can and must happen for every child. We also believe that the church can be the catalyst for a quicker path to permanency and forever homes for America's kids.

Join us in making the belief a reality. We challenge you to be the church that is "ALL IN" for America's kids. With CityServe, when you commit to being "ALL IN" you'll be connected to a national collaborative platform and strengthened with the capacity to care for waiting kids.



ARE YOU
All In?

Join us at www.cityserve.us

