

Engaging Faith-Based Communities to Achieve Timely Permanency for Children and Youth Waiting to Be Adopted



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

Introduction

Faith-based communities and leaders have long been involved in the important work of recruiting, preparing, and supporting families for children and youth in foster care. They continue to be key partners for child welfare systems seeking to achieve permanency for children and youth waiting to be adopted. Developing and sustaining relationships with faith communities helps child welfare systems expand their meaningful partnerships with people and groups that have credibility and strong ties in communities where potential adoptive parents can be reached.

Opportunities to Engage Faith-Based Communities

- ▶ Engage faith leaders as champions for encouraging adoption from foster care and highlight the need for adoptive families in their communities. Explore options for having faith leaders share information with their faith community about the number of children and youth waiting to be adopted in their area and ways that people can help, including—but not limited to—becoming adoptive parents.
- ▶ Develop partnerships with individual churches, temples, mosques, or other places of worship to have their members provide support to families who adopt children from foster care (e.g., assisting with transportation, providing respite care, delivering meals, etc.).
- ▶ Partner with places of worship to hold collaborative recruitment events and activities for adoptive parents, combining the resources, relationships, and knowledge of both child welfare staff and faith communities to reach potential adoptive parents.
- ▶ Use or adapt existing models for partnering with places of worship to engage their help in finding adoptive families for specific children and youth waiting to be adopted. One example is the One Church, One Child model. One Church, One Child is a national minority adoption recruitment program, founded in 1980 by Father George Clements, an African American Roman Catholic Chicago priest. In working with Father Clements, an alliance was formed between the church and state which brought together African American ministers, adoptive parents, and the Department of Children and Family Services. The efforts “to find one family in every one African American church in Illinois to adopt one child” was coined by Father Clements as One Church, One Child.
- ▶ Explore options for using space at places of worship for community forums, prospective adoptive parent orientation sessions and trainings, support group meetings, and other gatherings for prospective and current adoptive families as an alternative—and possibly more welcoming—location for families.
- ▶ Hold recurring gatherings (e.g., luncheons, dinners, etc.) with leaders from faith communities to thank them for their support of adoptive family recruitment and support efforts, and have ongoing discussions about creative ways to partner on behalf of children and youth waiting to be adopted. Seek input on feedback that faith communities have about the needs of adoptive families in their communities and what additional steps the child welfare agency could take to be more effective at recruiting, preparing, or supporting adoptive families.