



SEND Relief

PARTNERING WITH SOCIAL SERVICES

“What do you need?”

It might seem like common sense, but unfortunately it’s not a question commonly asked when we think of serving our communities. Our enthusiasm to serve and preconceived ideas of what kind of ministry we think we should create cloud our concern for meeting the needs of others.

When partnering with your state department of family and children services (often referred to as DFCS or similar acronym), you might be surprised with their answer to your questions. We encourage you to search out your local office with the intention of learning more about their challenges.

Once you’ve asked them, “What do you need?” consider some of these ways you can support them and the families they serve.

- Encouragement for the Workers

The leadership and social workers play an essential role to the safety of children and health of families, but their work is often unrecognized and carries a significant emotional and physical burden. Circumstances often dictate that they work during off hours and in tense situations. They epitomize self-sacrifice for the betterment of others.

Consider unique ways that you can support them such as cards, gift cards, recognition lunches or providing volunteer help in their offices.

- Job Readiness

Each year, thousands of teens “age out” of the foster care system. Many of these youth experience negative outcomes such as homelessness, teenage pregnancy, and low academic achievement. Despite these discouraging statistics, studies have found that youth who have employment opportunities and enriching experiences while in foster care are more likely to finish high school, maintain consistent employment, and become self-sufficient after exiting care.

Your state might have a program to help transition teens to adulthood and independence. These programs are designed to ensure that foster youth are equipped with the skills and opportunities necessary to enable them to mature into well-balanced and self-sufficient members of society. These programs often included a focus on job

readiness assessments, job skills training, and assistance with job training.

Although technically a child might exceed the age limit for benefits, foster children often require support for a time that goes beyond the state's ability. This creates an opportunity for the church to come alongside them in unique and exciting ways.

- Educational Assistance

Children in foster care are often underachieving academically. Through state-organized educational assessment, social workers can identify children in need of educational support.

By developing an educational assistance program, social workers may recommend children for tutoring services. These programs require accountability to ensure that the children are making progress in areas of identified need.

In addition to supporting a child's educational requirements, these programs create opportunities for supporting the family.

- Afterschool Programs

Your church can support families within low to- moderate income communities and the foster care system, ensuring that every child and youth has access to high quality youth development programming within their community.

States often fund programs that increase their capacity to design, implement, and sustain quality youth development programs and services. These programs provide opportunities for youth to establish positive relationships with their peers and caring adults during traditional non-school day hours. The states will provide technical assistance to organizations, such as churches, as they implement services and activities that support the youth's overall well-being as they prepare for and transition into young adulthood.

Afterschool programs are proven to reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage; and prevent and reduce unplanned pregnancies among single young adults.

Funded programs often include:

- Apprenticeship Opportunities (high school youth)
- Project-based Learning Opportunities (elementary and middle youth)
- Well-being and Enrichment Activities (all youth)

Connect with your local office to find out more about developing a program in partnership with your state.