



History of Kidsave and the Weekend Miracles Program

INTRODUCTION

Kidsave seeks to create government change and reduce the time that children spend languishing in orphanages and foster care. Since 1999 Kidsave has developed a family visit model program that could be applied worldwide in connecting older youth (who are growing up without parental care in orphanages and foster care) with supportive adults who commit to being a lifelong connection for that child. Kidsave's Weekend Miracles program, operating in Los Angeles County (the largest child welfare system in the U.S.) introduces domestic foster care children (ages 9 to 18) to people in the community who have the opportunity to host them in their homes on weekends and help the children find permanent families. This program has seen tremendous success in Los Angeles County, finding stable connections for 81% of active participants. Additionally, the success of the Weekend Miracles program has inspired the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services to implement new methods of family recruitment and community engagement for these older, hardest-to-place youth.

THE NEED

In 2012, nearly 400,000 children were in the U.S. child welfare system, with 100,000 of those children classified as "waiting to be adopted." If a child in foster care is unable to reunify with their family, the next step is to identify a permanent home for that child, either through adoption or legal guardianship.

The average length of time that a child waits for a permanent home is almost three years, and many never achieve permanency. Over one-quarter of the youth who emancipated from foster care in 2011 first entered the child welfare system at age 12 or younger, which means they were in foster care for a minimum of 6 years and no permanent home was identified for them in that time period. Research has proven again and again that foster care and group and institutional living is no substitute for life in a permanent family. Without a permanent family to offer them love and support, the outcomes these foster youth experience upon leaving care are extremely grim.

The world of adoptive parent recruitment is evolving, with a growing emphasis on child-focused and child-specific recruitment. Child-specific recruitment efforts do seem to be more effective, but they don't address all of the challenges encountered when recruiting families for waiting children, particularly older waiting children. For example, many older children may not be open to or ready for adoption, and could sabotage an adoptive placement. Prospective adoptive families are also less likely to consider an older child (age 9 or older), as they are intimidated by the potential challenges and issues an older child might bring into the home.

Additionally, traditional family-finding efforts do not allow prospective adoptive parents to spend time with or get to know a child unless they have

completed all the required steps for being approved to adopt. This approach greatly limits the number of prospective families who get to meet a waiting child. Moreover, by requiring families to be approved to adopt prior to meeting any children, there is a risk that a family will fail to complete the long and arduous process. Families who do complete the adoption approval process are still given little to no opportunity to interact with a child unless they agree to be placed in an adoptive “match,” which is the first of many steps towards an adoptive placement. This is a difficult decision to make when one has very little actual information on the child. The fact that there are 100,000 children waiting to be adopted supports the assertion that current family-finding and recruitment efforts are not meeting the need.