



Weekend Miracles Program

WEEKEND MIRACLES ORIENTATION TRAINER GUIDE

KIDSAVE®

www.kidsave.org
1-888-KIDSAVE



100 Corporate Pointe, Suite 380
Culver City, CA 90230
T 310.642.7283 | F 310.641.7283

4622 Wisconsin Avenue, NW, Suite 202
Washington, DC 20016
T 202.503.3100 | F 202.503.3131

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Weekend
Miracles
Program

Weekend Miracles Program Orientation

Trainer Guide

Opening

Trainer's notes: Trainer welcomes the group to orientation and asks families to introduce themselves by answering the following questions: How did you learn about Kidsave? Do you know someone who adopted, fostered, or hosted? What is your interest in getting involved? Trainer states that the purpose of the orientation is "to learn more about the Weekend Miracles program to see if it is a right fit for you."

Trainer should encourage families to speak up and ask questions.

Trainer reviews the agenda.

- Kidsave history and programs
- How the Weekend Miracles works
- What it means to host
- Application process
- Other ways you can get involved

Kidsave History

Trainer's notes: Trainer briefly reviews Kidsave's history. Trainer says, "Kidsave is an advocacy organization working to find families for older children growing up in orphanages and foster care."

- Started in 1997
 - Based on founders' experiences in foreign orphanages where they discovered poor conditions and a lack of resources to move youth into adoptive families."
- In 1999 Kidsave started bringing youth to the United States
 - Youth were first brought from Russia and Kazakhstan.
 - Utilized the Family Visit Model – giving hosting opportunities for youth who need permanency to experience family life and build relationships with caring adults.
 - Since then over 4,000 family visits for both international and domestic adoption.
- Kidsave's programs have since grown to include:
 - Summer Miracles - U.S.
 - Russia
 - Encuentros Milagrosos - Colombia
 - Kidsave Sierra Leone - Africa
 - Weekend Miracles - Los Angeles County
 - Started in 2005
 - Kidsave realized that despite the U.S. status as a first world country, there was still a need to help the older youth in U.S. foster care.

The Problem

Trainer's notes: Trainer reviews the child welfare problem in Los Angeles County. Trainer says, "Los Angeles County has the largest child welfare system in the United States. These

youth are hidden from the community. There is little exposure for foster youth who are in need of an adoptive family.”

- Over 35,000 youth are receiving services
 - 17,826 youth are living in out-of-home care
 - Half are living with relatives other than their biological parents
 - The rest are living in foster homes, group homes, or residential centers.
 - About 500 youth waiting to be adopted every day.
 - LA County has no identified adoptive families for these youth.
 - Due to no fault of their own, many of these youth are overlooked because they are considered too old.
 - Many families want the babies and toddlers, but it takes a special type of family who is willing to open their home to a 13-year-old.
 - Due to older youth being harder to place, approximately 1,000 age out of the foster care system every year without a stable adult in their life.
 - This means:
 - Less than 50% will graduate high school
 - Half will remain unemployed by the age of 21
 - 40% of the homeless population consists of former foster youth
 - Former foster youth are 10 times more likely to be imprisoned than their peers.

Solutions – Connections

Trainer’s notes: *Trainer states that the connections are the solution to help these foster youth.*

- Research indicates that a connected, caring relationship with an adult is the most important factor in preventing negative outcomes for foster youth and orphans.
- This connection helps lead the youth on a path towards a healthier and productive adulthood.

The Weekend Miracles Program

Trainer’s notes: *Trainer states that the Weekend Miracles program was developed to be a part of the solution in Los Angeles County -- to help find connections for older foster youth in need of permanency.*

- Weekend Miracles is partnered with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)
 - DCFS refers the youth to the program, approves families for hosting, and helps provide support during the hosting relationship.
- Weekend Miracles connects older youth, ages 9-17, with adults who help them achieve legal and relational permanency.
 - Legal permanency is defined as either adoption or legal guardianship
 - Relational permanency is defined as having a stable and long lasting connection with a caring adult.
- Weekend Miracles offers a weekend hosting program where “hosts” volunteer their time and spend a minimum of two days a month with a foster youth for an entire year.

- Lastly, Weekend Miracles provides opportunities for youth and potential hosts and adoptive families to meet through monthly events.

The Goal

Trainer's notes: *Trainer reads the program's goal slide with attendees.*

The Youth

Trainer's notes: *Trainer reviews the youth who are referred to the Weekend Miracles program. Trainer states that the Weekend Miracles youth have spent an average 6 years in foster care and moved to 8 different placements during that time.*

- They are foster youth with no stable adult connection.
 - Some may still have relationships with biological family members, such as siblings or grandparents, but they are not stable connections that these youth can count on – contact may be sporadic.
- They are between the ages of 9 to 17.
- Family reunification services have been terminated.
 - DCFS is no longer trying to reunify them with their biological parents. Parental rights, however, have not been terminated. California does not terminate parental rights until an adoptive family has been identified for that youth.
- They are living in foster families, group homes, and residential centers throughout Los Angeles County.
 - Some of the Weekend Miracles youth may even be located outside of LA in San Bernardino County and Orange County.
- These youth are open to adoption, guardianship, or a connection.
 - While LA County is looking to find them a permanent family, not all of the youth are ready for adoption. Some may be ambivalent.
 - Weekend Miracles gives youth a chance to explore the idea of adoption by giving them the opportunity to experience family life and build relationships with caring adults.
- The youth are mentally and physically able to handle the program.
- Participation is voluntary.
 - Youth have the option to decide if they want to be a part of the program or not.

Hosts in Action

Trainer's notes: *Trainer shares the story of Joy and Joe. (The goal is to tell attendees how a host can make a positive impact in the life of their host child.)*

- Joy joined Weekend Miracles in 2006. She wanted to host a girl because she thought she would connect more easily with a girl.
- Joe, a 14-year-old foster youth, was reluctant to join the program. He had been in over 20 placements and was very guarded. Joe wasn't sure if he wanted to open up to another adult.

- At Joe's first event, he wore his headphones and kept to himself. Joy saw Joe sitting by himself and made an effort to talk to him – she was friendly and persistent. She drove him to the next event and they discovered they had a connection.
- Shortly after meeting, Joy and Joe began their hosting relationship.
- Joe moved into Joy's home in 2008. Joy became his last placement.
- Joy wanted to adopt, but Joe didn't want to be adopted. Joy is, however, still an important mother-figure in Joe's life.
- Joe has graduated high school. He started going to college but decided it wasn't for him. Joy continues to provide support and guidance to Joe, and is helping him figure out his next steps in life.

What it Means to Host

Trainer's notes: *Trainer explains what it means to be a weekend host.*

- Hosts are volunteers
 - Kidsave welcomes all families who want to help support an older youth in foster care and help make a positive impact on his or her life.
 - Some families may be foster parents, or licensed or certified to adopt
- Hosts make a 1-year commitment
- Spend time with a youth a minimum of twice a month.
 - Hosts are welcome to see their youth more than twice a month. Depending on what resources are available to the youth, hosts are allowed to communicate over the phone and social media.
- They build a relationship and develop trust.
- Transport the youth to monthly community events
 - This is especially important if the host is only advocating for their youth and has no plans to adopt. Adoptive families come to the monthly events in hopes of meeting a youth who will become a part of their family – and that youth could very well be one you are hosting.
- Hosts provide a safe, stable environment.
- May support youth with academics, life skills, and transitions
- Advocate to help the youth find a permanent family
 - Most important role of a host.
 - Hosts will introduce their youth to their own personal network of friends, family, and colleagues.
- Day Hosting or Weekend Hosting
 - Weekend Hosting – If hosts are licensed with Los Angeles County, or certified with a Los Angeles dually licensed foster family agency, they can be approved to have a child spend overnight visits and stay with them for the entire weekend.
 - Day Hosting – Hosts who are not licensed or certified are approved by LA County to spend “day visits” with the child. The youth's caregivers can approve overnight visits using the Prudent Parent law, once the child and the host get to know each other.

Who Can Host

Trainer's notes: *Trainer explains who can host in the program.*

- 24 years and older
- Couples
- Singles
- Families with other children
- There are important considerations - prior medical/psychiatric history, arrests (including DUI), substance abuse, etc.
 - These must be disclosed and could prevent program participation.

Community Events

Trainer’s notes: *Trainer reviews how families will meet and get to know youth in the program. Trainer states, “Events are designed to increase public awareness and advocate for the youth in the community.”*

- Weekend events are youth-centered, interactive, fun and engaging.
- Activities include bowling, scavenger hunts, cooking, arts & crafts and more. These events are where connections occur.
- Events provide an opportunity for youth and prospective host and adoptive families to get to know each other.
- Events are typically about 3 hours long, and food is always provided.
- Events occur monthly and alternate between Open and Strategic.

Open Events

- These events are large (about 75-100 adults and 25-35 youth)
- Open to the community.
- Attendance at an orientation is mandatory prior to attending an event.

Strategic Events

- These events are smaller and designed to build on established connections made at prior Open events.
- They typically include 25- 35 adults and 10-15 youth.
- Strategic events allow youth and prospective hosts to spend more one-on-one time together.
- At the end of each event youth and prospective hosts will complete a post-event evaluation form, which includes a question asking who they would like to get to know better.
- Kidsave will use the information from the youth and family’s forms to help determine who will attend future smaller strategic events together.

Trainer’s notes: *Trainer encourages families to continue coming to events until they connect with a youth. Let families know that even if a youth has not written a family’s name down on the evaluation form, that does not mean the youth is not open to spending more time with that family. For some people, a youth-adult connection is made at the first event. For others it can take several months or longer. Also let families know about the next upcoming open event that they can attend and start meeting youth. Families only need to attend an orientation meeting to attend monthly events – not the entire host application process.*

Host Approval Process

Trainer's notes: *Trainer explains the process for being approved as a host family.*

- Complete orientation
- Complete the online host application
 - Host application is divided into 2 parts: general information and legal waivers and forms. Both must be submitted.
- Clearances
 - Background checks for both criminal and child abuse
 - Families will request an office location to do their clearances while completing their host application. Kidsave will submit a request to that office location and inform families when they can go to the location to do their finger prints.
 - Clearances are needed for anyone age 18 years and older who lives in the prospective host's home.
- Driving documents
 - Current driver's license, auto insurance, and vehicle registration
- CPR/First Aid
 - If families are only looking to host with no plans to adopt, they may complete this certification online. Kidsave can provide qualified websites at the family's request.
- TB test
 - A TB test is needed for anyone age 3 years and older who lives in the prospective host's home.
- 14 hours of training
 - All trainings are offered once a month
 - 12 hours of host family training is facilitated by a licensed social worker
 - Classroom setting
 - Separated into two 6-hour classes (Host Training Part 1 & Host Training Part 2)
 - 2-hour Program & Advocacy training
 - Online webinar
 - Learn how to advocate to help a youth find an adoptive family
 - Those who have already completed (or are in the process of completing) MAPP training required by Los Angeles County DCFS, or other eligible training through a dually licensed FFA will only need to participate in Kidsave's two-hour Program & Advocacy Training. Proof of completion will be required.
- Once all application components are submitted the information will be forwarded to DCFS or a dually licensed FFA who will then assign a social worker to complete the host applicant's in-home assessment.
 - A social worker will come to your home
 - The social worker will address your suitability to host, and will check to make sure your home is a safe environment for a youth in foster care.

Application Overview – Three Month Timeline

Trainer's notes: *Trainer encourages families to complete their part of the host application process within 3 months. Trainer reviews the suggested application breakdown on the slide. Let families know this isn't a set timeline; they can complete whatever step is easiest first.*

Encourage families to first submit their application and driving documents, and complete host training part 1 and their clearances. Once families complete those requirements they are approved to start driving youth to the monthly events. Driving is an opportunity to spend additional time with the youth they are transporting. These car rides can be a great way to get to know each other in a relaxed one-on-one environment.

Impact

Trainer's notes: *Trainer goes over Weekend Miracles' impact.*

- Permanency and positive outcomes for youth
 - Weekend Miracles has connected about 75% of participating youth
 - 51% in legal permanency
 - 24% in relational permanency
- Engages families who would otherwise not become involved
 - Not all participating families want to adopt or are able to adopt at this time. The majority of the families want to help support an older youth in foster care, and help make a positive impact on his or her life.
- Make “believers” out of social workers
- Youth Empowerment
 - This program is youth-centered
 - Their voice is valued in helping to create hosting matches.

Next Steps

Trainer's notes: *Trainer informs families of the next available training classes. If those dates do not work for attending families, let them know there are other training dates online that they may also RSVP to.*

Going To Our Event?

Trainer's notes: *Trainer reads over the Dos and Don'ts for families attending events. After going through the list, ask families if they have any questions or need any clarification.*

Not Ready to Host?

Trainer's notes: *Trainer reads through the other volunteer opportunities for families who feel they are not ready or able to host.*

How Will You Get Involved

Trainer's notes: *Trainer lets families know that this concludes orientation. Thank them for coming and inform them that they will be receiving an email within the next 24 hours, which describes the host application process, where to sign up for trainings, and any additional information about upcoming events.*

