



Weekend Miracles Program

WEEKEND MIRACLES PROGRAM & ADVOCACY TRAINER GUIDE

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Weekend
Miracles
Program

Weekend Miracles Program Program & Advocacy

Trainer Guide

Agenda

Trainer's notes: *Trainer welcomes the group to the training, explains their role in the program, and asks families to introduce themselves. Trainer states the purpose of the training "to ensure families understand program protocols, the roles and responsibilities of Kidsave, host families and DCFS, and understand how best to advocate for their host child." The trainer should set the tone for an interactive, collaborative training.*

Trainer says "The concept of having families partner with DCFS and a private organization to advocate for a child to find a permanent family is innovative, out of the box thinking! As a result, ideas for advocacy are constantly evolving & growing as more people become involved in the program, and more children move to permanency through hosting." Trainer should encourage that families speak up and share ideas on how to advocate for your host child. Remind families that their great idea may work perfectly for another family sitting next to them!

Trainer reviews training agenda.

Part 1 - Program

- Review Host Family Agreement
- Criteria for Host Families
- Day Hosts versus Weekend Hosts
- Process of Matching

Part 2 - Advocacy

- What is Advocacy?
- Kidsave's Role in Advocacy
- Host Families' Role in Advocacy
- Tracking Your Advocacy
- Role Play & Scenarios
- Benefits to the Youth
- Discussion Q & A

Part 1 - Program

Host Family Agreement

Trainer's notes: Trainer says, "You have all signed Kidsave's Host Family Agreement, and we have included a copy in your Program and Advocacy Training Handouts Packet. We are going to review its contents to ensure everything is clear, and that there are no questions."

Trainer reviews slides with attendees, and uses the Host Family Agreement located in the handouts packet to go into more depth.

Criteria for Host Families

Trainer's notes: Trainer asks families to refer to **Criteria of Host Parent** document. Trainer reviews document.

Day Host vs Weekend Hosts

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 with them on the weekends. Hosts who are not licensed or certified are approved by LA County to spend "day visits" with the child. Caregivers can approve overnight visits using the Prudent Parent law, once the child and the host get to know each other. The host is the child's partner in searching for an adoptive family. Ideally the relationship will continue beyond the one year point.

Approval Process

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

- Complete the host application packet – which includes the host application, legal forms and waivers, livescan, 15 hours of training, CPR/First Aid, TB test and driving documents.
- Once all application components are submitted the information will be forwarded to DCFS who will then assign a DCFS liaison (social worker) to complete your in home assessment. You can expect to have your home visit completed and assessment approved within approximately 7 weeks.
 - The more flexible your schedule the quicker the assessment will be completed.
- Ultimately is it the decision of the DCFS Supervisor whether you will be approved to host.
- A note on the approval and matching process:
 - There is a difference between "Kidsave time" & "DCFS time". DCFS workers have very large caseloads. Patience will be key in your relationship with DCFS. Kidsave advocates to move host families through the process as quickly as possible. Please contact us to check-in at any time during the process with questions, concerns, or just to get an update.

Process of Matching

Trainer's notes: Trainer reviews the process for being matched with a host child.

1. Attend monthly events where you will interact and engage with the youth.
 - a. Complete post event evaluation form after each event
 - i. The program is youth-driven, and even if a youth has not written a family's name down on their form does not mean they are not open to spending more time with that family.
 - ii. Kidsave will use the information from a family's form to help determine who will attend future smaller strategic events together.
 - b. Kidsave staff will follow up with each family after each event to discuss their experience and prospective matches.
 - c. It may take multiple events before you find a youth who you feel is a prospective match.
 - i. The youth also do need time to form a relationship.
 - d. It could be the case that a youth who a family is interested in may not feel the same way.
 - e. There is the potential for more than one family being interested in the same youth.
2. Drive a youth to the events once approved to help build a relationship.
3. Kidsave keeps DCFS informed of a family's interest in a particular youth at monthly meetings.
4. Once a family is approved to host and has spent a minimum of three events with a prospective youth and if it's mutual, match steps may begin.
 - a. Kidsave reviews the youth's program referral with the prospective host.
 - i. Kidsave follows up on any questions.
 - b. If the prospective host is interesting in proceeding, the youth's social worker is informed about the potential match.
 - c. The youth's social worker informs the youth of the prospective match, and confirms that the youth is open to being matched with the family.
 - d. If the youth agrees to the match, an introductory meeting is scheduled.

Introductory Meeting

- Goal: All parties understand roles and responsibilities of the hosting relationship
 - Parties must include host youth, host family, caregiver, Kidsave staff, youth's social worker (adoption worker or primary worker)
 - Anyone else who is a part of the youth's team would be welcome
- Meeting takes place at the youth's current placement -- whether a group home, foster home or residential center
- An opportunity to get off on the right foot with caregivers
 - Host family should be seen as a valuable member of the youth's team
- Discussion topics include:
 - Hosting is a component of a youth's permanency plan
 - Hosting visits cannot be taken away as a form of discipline
 - Best methods to arrange visits and communication
- Once the introductory meeting takes place, weekend visits will be scheduled by the youth's caregiver and the host

You are matched!

- Your first priority is getting to know the youth and building a trusting relationship

- Honor where the youth is emotionally with regard to hosting
 - Acknowledge that how they feel today may be different from how they feel two months from now
- Start slowly with day visits
- The first visit to your home
 - Once the youth and you are ready
 - With approval of social worker
 - Don't underestimate the value of being together as a family in your home (doesn't always need to be a big activity)
 - Cook dinner, watch a movie, play games – keep it simple!
 - Don't leave out valuables or items of importance
- The first overnight visit
 - All parties are informed and approve
 - The youth look forward to this
 - Youth might be scared or nervous
 - May need a nightlight
- Complete weekend host reports
 - Should be completed after every visit with host youth
 - Help Kidsave and DCFS to provide necessary support to hosts
 - Information about the youth (interests, accomplishments, etc.) are used to update advocacy materials

****Ending the Hosting Relationship**

Trainer's notes: *Trainer reviews with prospective hosts what the procedure is for ending the hosting relationship. Trainer says, "Ideally a relationship will also continue beyond the one year mark, and can also continue once the child moves in with a foster-adopt family."*

- If a host wishes to end their relationship with the youth, Kidsave and the child's CSW will help terminate the relationship.
- The termination process will be based around the needs of the youth and hosts will need to participate in that process.
 - We ask that you wait until we find another host for the child prior to terminating the hosting relationship.
- Do not discuss termination with the child.
- All hosts will be required to participate in a closure visit.

The Youth's Team

Trainer's notes: *Trainer explains that there are many members of a youth's team. Trainer lists and explains each. Trainers says "Now that you have been matched with your host child you are the newest member of their team. You will need to be familiar with the role that each team member plays in the youth's life."*

- Foster family or group home case manager
 - In most cases, the child is living with the foster parents who have daily knowledge of him, including present likes and dislikes, behaviors and personality. They have ongoing responsibility for the child's safety, education, and well-being, along with an ongoing

commitment to the child until he moves into a permanent family or placement. They are a vital source of information for helping the Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles team. Their recommendations regarding discipline, medications, likes and dislikes of the child should be valued and adhered to as much as possible.

- Primary social worker
 - Represents the agency (Los Angeles County Department of Family Services) and has legal custody of the child. Their role is to ensure that the child's needs are met in foster care and that he is in a safe environment. They have knowledge of the child's history, placements and behaviors. The primary social worker, who has a relationship with the child, coordinates services for the child and assists in preparing him for recruitment and placement activities.
- Adoption social worker
 - In charge of coordinating efforts to identify permanency for the youth
 - Conducts adoption home studies
 - Completes adoption placement
- Permanency Recruitment Unit (PRU) worker
 - Actively recruits for prospective adoptive families for each youth
- Weekend Miracles Host
 - The Host is a volunteer adult(s) who spends time with a child who is participating in the Kidsave Weekend Miracles program. The Host invites the child into their home for weekends and supports the child's routine of homework, physical activities, etc.
 - The Host also commits to helping the child find a permanent family by introducing the child to the network of people they know, and by participating in Kidsave recruitment activities.
 - The Host commits to spending a minimum of two days a month for a minimum period of one year with the child.
- Foster Family Agency
 - If the resource family is certified through a dually licensed foster family agency, the agency is responsible for the safety standards of the home.
- Judges
 - Reside over the youth's court appointments.
 - The youth attend court approximately every 6 months to address needs they have.
- Attorney
 - Every youth is assigned an attorney
 - Represent the youth at their court appointments
- Therapist
 - The input of the therapist is helpful in gauging how the child will react therapeutically to certain recruitment activities. In conjunction with the caregiver, the therapist's recommendations are helpful in planning appropriate activities for the child.
- School Personnel
 - Teachers, school administrators and others who support the youth in academics.
- Program Manager
 - Manages the implementation of direct service operations of the Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles Program, including recruiting and training the host families and advocates. This position is the liaison between the agency social workers and the host

families. Program Manager oversees the activities and weekly reports of host families. The manager is aware of all planned activities and weekend events.

- Child's advocate (non host)
 - Advocates are volunteers who speak to community members and other adults or groups on behalf of foster youth in the program, or about a specific child available for adoption, in an effort to identify an appropriate adoptive family for that child.
 - Advocates can enter Los Angeles Kidsave Weekend Miracles formally or informally.
 - "Formal" advocates volunteer for the program, go through training, and select the role of "Advocate". They will then be matched with a child and host family or be involved in the program based on the advocate's interests, network and skills.
 - "Informal" advocates will become part of Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles simply by coming into contact with the child or host family.
 - Advocates have no time requirements in terms of their involvement.
 - It is in the best interest of the program, if the advocate remains supportive of the child and the host family until the child's adoption is finalized.
 - An advocate will learn about a specific child in the Weekend Miracles program, and about that child's specific needs for an adoptive family.
 - The advocate will form ties with the host to support them, and initiate ideas with the host on ways to enhance the opportunity for an adoptive family to be identified.

Trainer's Notes: *Trainer talks with participants about additional support staff and individuals who are involved in the child's life.*

In addition to the roles that have already been discussed, there is additional support staff and individuals who are typically involved in the lives of the Kidsave children. These include: School Personnel, and CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates). With the goal of permanency, each team member brings a vast amount of knowledge and experience regarding the same child. The sharing of this information assists in matching the child with the appropriate host family, and preparing the child for new endeavors.

Trainer's Note: *It is now time to transition to the advocacy portion of training.*

Part 2: Advocacy

Advocating

Trainer's Notes: Trainer states that the purpose of advocacy training is to reinforce the significant role each family plays in advocating for the child they are hosting. The trainer shares that the training will address:

- What is advocacy?
- Why advocacy for EVERY child is important
- Basic advocacy tools

Trainer's Note: Trainer asks families how they would define advocacy and why it is important. Answers below to be shared after conversation.

What is advocacy?

Advocacy can be defined as “the pursuit of influencing outcomes.” The outcome Kidsave is seeking is for every child to find an adoptive family or a lasting connection to a stable, caring adult.

Why is advocacy important?

Advocacy is the driver behind finding adoptive families and lasting connections for children. Advocacy creates awareness and increases interest in and support of making miracles for kids who need families!

While hosting, families must be willing to focus on the child's need for a family, and participate in advocacy efforts for the child's future.

Kidsave's Role in Advocacy

Kidsave utilizes many different tools and resources when advocating for every child in the Weekend Miracles program.

- Monthly advocacy events
- Community partnerships
- Media
 - Distribute event and host family press releases
 - Social media, online publications and adoption websites
 - Local radio interviews and campaigns
- Provide advocacy tools for families
- Child-specific advocacy flyers are created
- Pocket Parties create opportunities for prospective adoptive families to spend time with hosts and their host child
- Work with the youth to help them share their stories
- Website, blogs, E-newsletters

Trainer's Notes: Show example slides of advocacy strategies

Confidentiality

Trainers Notes: Review confidentiality guidelines for Kidsave host families below.
Handout: Confidentiality Guidelines

Information that can be shared by the Host family

- Your experiences in hosting the child
- Child's likes and dislikes
- Child's behavior
- Child's personality
- Child's interaction with siblings or others in the host's home
- Child's interaction with pets/animals
- Child's grade in school
- If they have siblings who are part of the program
- Where the child is currently living (i.e., foster family, group home, residential facility)
- How the host child is feeling about adoption

Information that cannot be shared by the Host Family

- Identifying information about the child's family or caregivers
- Information about the child's background (e.g., details about any abuse history)
- Information about the child's placement history and background
- Child's legal information other than adoptability information
- Child's medical information
- Child's psychological evaluations or diagnosis
- Anything that the child discloses as confidential
- Cannot share child's last name
- Cannot disclose the specifics of where the child is living

Kidsave or DCFS staff will talk with interested families about information you cannot share.

Trainers Notes: Trainer reviews with host families how to advocate for the child in different scenarios. See scenarios below:

Advocating When the Child is Present

- Be respectful when bringing up the subject of the child.
- Don't make pleas or cases for adoption.
- Alert groups BEFORE you bring the child to an activity or organization to advocate
- Do not use the words "orphan" or "foster kid." The children in our program often want to separate themselves from the word "foster kid" as much as they can.
- Think about how you are going to introduce the child in public, and discuss it with your host child.
- Never tell the child that they are spending time with a prospective adoptive family.

Advocating When Interested in Adoption

I want to adopt, so do I still need to advocate?

- Every host family, whether interested in adopting their host child or not, must join Kidsave in becoming an advocate for the child they are hosting. Until a family is matched for adoption, the County and Kidsave will continue advocacy efforts for the child. Ideally, the child has a voice in deciding which family they will be placed with for adoption.

Where to Begin Advocating

Where do you start? For the first step, the easiest place is:

1) Your Family

- a. Tell them about the program and what you're doing before you start hosting.
- b. Make sure they understand that you are personally and emotionally invested in the outcome of this child's future.
- c. Let them know that you might need their help. You can ask them to reach out to their own networks and share flyers, or use Facebook and other social media outlets to find the child a permanent family.
- d. Understand that sometimes your family and friends may experience a period of adjustment to the commitment you're giving your host child.

The next place you can advocate for your host child is:

2) Your Personal Network

- a. Reach out to your place of faith and civic organizations via email, social media, employee newsletters and/or bulletins.
- b. Organize a table outside your church, a local street fair, etc. so you can speak with people about Kidsave and your host child.
- c. Reach out to a group with the same hobbies or interests as your host child, and go to the meetings or activities together.
- d. Share information about your commitment to your host child and share something special about your host child that you've observed (i.e., he/she is great with our dog, has wonderful manners, etc.). You can share a story about something you've observed.
- e. Use whatever tools are relevant to you – share and post your host child's advocacy flyer.
- f. Tell others your reason for hosting and why it is important.
- g. Blog, tweet, Facebook, and use other social media sites to post events and share your experiences.
- h. Be proud and share your reasons for hosting, and why hosting is important for the children in the Weekend Miracles program. Make sure those close to you also understand that you are personally and emotionally invested in the outcome of this child's future.

Host families also have the option of advocating through the local media:

3) Local Media

- a. Reach out to local media by distributing materials provided to you by Kidsave. There are templates available in the community resource page online.
 - i. Make personal calls to local media. As a resident, sharing your personal story is more interesting and compelling to media than an employee calling.
 - ii. Refer to key message points to assist you in talking with media about Kidsave and the Weekend Miracles Program.
- b. Invite media to events – media exposure is key to recruiting prospective adoptive families.
- c. Create a family pitch letter using the template provided.
- d. Kidsave may be able to arrange interviews for kids and hosts at different events. We encourage you to share your story and help your host child share theirs.

Lastly, host families can advocate at the monthly weekend events:

4) Kidsave Weekend Events

- a. Weekend events are an integral part of child advocacy.
- b. You can and should invite prospective adoptive families and others to learn more about the program.
- c. Help other families engage with your host child -- adults can be just as shy as the kids when they first meet.
- d. You should encourage your host child to engage with different families at events.
- e. Sometimes you and your host child might have an opportunity to spend time with a pre-screened prospective adoptive family following an event. Be open to these opportunities, since these adoptive families may be travelling from another state.
- f. Be aware of your host child's comfort level.

Advocacy Tools

Trainer's Notes: *Trainer asks families to look at the "My Advocacy Tools" document, it is the final page in this guide. Trainer gives families 5 minutes to go over the document, and to highlight favorites. Trainer goes through each category to see where they will be the most successful in advocacy.*

Handout: Advocacy Tools

- Which of these tools best with your family and your community? What is something you feel you can reasonably do given your resources? Any ideas for other resources?
 - Ask for 2 volunteers to share their responses

Advocacy can best be accomplished when utilizing a variety of resources and tools.

Trainer's Notes: *Trainer reminds families that they should be proud that they are advocating for their host child – share information about their family's commitment to hosting a child, and tell them to share their story, including how their host child has impacted their lives.*

Prospective Adoptive Families

Trainer's Notes: Trainer reviews with families the protocols around visiting families and the role of the host family.

- Are licensed, certified, or in the process.
- Are interested in moving towards adopting a child without hosting them first.
- Must be oriented prior to interacting with youth at events.
- May attend several events to spend time with a child they connect with.
- May need encouragement to engage with the kids.
- May be travelling from another county/state.
- May spend time with a child and their host outside of an event to get to know a child better.
 - All prospective adoptive families must submit a Kidsave application before they spend any additional time with a child outside of an event. The child's social worker must also approve of these meetings.
- May NOT spend any time alone with the youth. All interactions must include the host family.

Pocket Parties

Trainer's Notes: Trainer describes pocket parties as opportunities for interested, screened families to spend more time with a specific child in a smaller setting. They are organized by the host family in collaboration with Kidsave.

Pocket Parties should include:

- An interactive activity in a comfortable environment
- No more than one interested family per child
- Other children in the program, so no child feels as if they are under a microscope.

Pocket parties **cannot** include personal questions or discussion of adoption. The idea is for it to be a fun and relaxing experience - without the pressure of more traditional adoption recruitment.

Host families should introduce prospective adoptive families as 'friends of the family' or someone who heard about the program and wants to learn more about it.

Other Ways to Advocate for Your Host Child

Trainer's Notes: Trainer states that advocating for a child to find an adoptive family is not the only way you can advocate for your host child.

- Be a positive role model.
- Be an active member of their team.
- Support youth with their academic needs.
- Help them to develop life skills.

- Help them to access resources in the community.
- Spend time with siblings.
- Help them make the transition into an adoptive family.
- Support them through challenges, and celebrate their successes.

You are not alone in this. Kidsave is here to help you navigate and identify the resources you need to successfully advocate for your youth.

How do I split my time between advocacy and building our relationship?

It's a balancing act. The time you spend advocating for a child is just as important as the time the child spends with your family.

It will take time to get to know a youth before you can really start advocating. Kidsave recommends your first few visits focus on getting to know each other.

You can always start advocating by telling others about your involvement in the Weekend Miracles program, and sharing your host child's flyer.

Tracking My Advocacy

***Trainer's Notes:** Trainer states that our lives are busy, and that the advocacy plan will help you keep track of your goals and help you manage your time. Trainer asks families to take out the advocacy worksheet handout, complete their plan, and then discuss it as a group.*

Handout: Host Family Advocacy Worksheet

Life is busy! It helps to create an advocacy plan that outlines how you will advocate for your child. It's important to make goals and review them regularly.

Please use Kidsave as a source to help you work through any difficulties with advocacy, the host children, or foster family. We are here to help you and are always available to assist you in any way that we can.

Role Play

***Trainer's Notes:** Trainer asks host families to refer to the "Role Play Examples and Scenarios" handout. Trainer asks for volunteers to read role play exercise. Trainer says, "We are going to take a few minutes to talk about some scenarios that you may need to address as a host family. We will need a few volunteers for this exercise."*

Handout: Role Play Examples 1, 2, and 3

Role Play Example 1: The Workplace –

Person #1

Hey, how was your weekend?

Host Parent

It was great! I'm actually currently spending time with a child who is looking for a family to adopt him. We spent Saturday playing basketball, and then we cooked a great dinner together. It was nice to be able to share some time with him.

Person #1

Oh wow...so you guys just hang out? Where does he live right now?

Host Parent

He lives with a foster family. He was referred to the organization I work with, Kidsave, by the LA County Department of Children and Family Services, as a child who wants to be adopted. So I am not only a mentor to him, but I'm also advocating to find him an adoptive family – getting the word out so others are made aware of him and his desire for adoption.

Person #1

That sounds great – what's his name?

Host Parent

His name is Tony. He is such a character and so fun to be around!

Person #1

Well I'll definitely help get the word out!

Host Parent

Thanks! I will email you his advocacy flyer. Please share it with your network, and post it to your Facebook page too! We can even get together so you can meet him. I am thinking of taking him hiking. Want to come?

Role Play Example 2: Nosey Neighbor –

Neighbor

“Who is that child staying in your home? Where did you meet her? She doesn't look like any of the other family members that I have met - plus she called you by your first name. I know that I wouldn't let my nieces or nephews talk to me that way.”

Host Parent

“This is Rachel and she is sharing the weekend with me and my family. Rachel is a great kid. I spend time with her doing the things that families do. She fits right in. She'll meet some of my friends and family, and hopefully someone will step forward who is interested in giving Rachel a permanent home. “

Neighbor

“Why don’t you adopt her?”

Host Parent

“My role is to help Rachel come into contact with as many people as possible in my circle of friends and family, and advocate to help Rachel identify a permanent home. I became involved to help her find a loving, stable family. I’m not going to be her parent, but I can help Rachel find one.”

Role Play Example 3: Are You Going to Adopt Me? –

Trainer’s Notes: *“Celia and you are driving Amanda home from your 3rd visit since being matched as her host, and you start talking.”*

Amanda: 13 year old Kidsave youth

Celia: Kidsave host for 2 months

Amanda: “Celia, I really had fun with you today. I have actually had fun with you the last couple of times.”

Celia: “Me too.”

Amanda: “Have you ever thought about spending more time having fun together than 2 times a month?”

Celia: “Amanda, if there is a time that you wanted to meet more than 2 times a month, I would be happy to see if I am free.”

Amanda: “Actually Celia, I was wondering if you have ever thought about adopting a kid--maybe adopting me. I promise that I wouldn’t be much of a problem. I would be good all the time.”

Celia: “Amanda, I love our time together. You are a wonderful young lady, and an adoptive parent would be lucky to adopt you. Unfortunately, right now my life is so busy between our visits that I know I wouldn’t be able to spend the time with you that every child deserves. I became a Host family because I wanted to spend special time with you, and hopefully help find the best adoptive family that you deserve. Would it be OK with you if we still meet 2 times a month? I would love that.”

Trainer’s Notes: *Trainer says, “We find that it is best to be honest and open with your Kidsave youth in a strength-based way.”*

Benefits to the Youth

Trainer’s Notes: *Trainer reminds prospective hosts how they can positively impact their host child’s life by referring to the visual.*

There are many benefits for a youth to have a host family. As you can see, hosts:

- Become super mentors.
- Find and build on the youth's spark.
- Serve as a bridge for youth who are being adopted.
- Talk about the youth as someone they care about.
- Inspire others to take action.
- Spend time with the youth because they care.

Discussion Q and As:

Trainer's Notes: *The trainer introduces the guests to the group and explains how they are connected to the organization. Ideally, the guests should include a Kidsave family that hosted and adopted, a Kidsave family that hosted as an advocate, and a Kidsave host child. It is ok to have a family who has had challenges post adoption or during hosting. It is important that the guests be honest about their experiences. Examples of questions that can be asked include:*

Adults:

What advocacy efforts were most effective for you?

What would you have done differently?

What did you find the most challenging?

What were the biggest surprises?

What were the greatest moments?

Youth:

Is there anything that could have been done differently to make you feel more comfortable while you were being hosted?

What did you enjoy the most?

What did you find the most challenging?

Is there anything else that you would like to share with the host families?