



## Compassion Coalition

### Ways to Connect with Foster Care and Adoption

*“What you need to stay out of the foster care system is some role model of how to be a functional family. You need people who might be willing to come into your home and help you. And you need some hope that the future might be better. The church can be a place where families are surrounded by all these things.”*

*-Dawn Coppock, Adoption Attorney*

#### **Make a Difference Through Prayer**

- Pray for children in foster care longing for unconditional love, belonging and security. May God bring them families who care for them, and may each one find loving church families as well.
- Pray for the healing and protection of children who have been wounded through neglect and/or abuse. Pray they can experience the restoration of healthy family relationships, or the gift of new adoptive families.
- Pray that older adolescents in state custody will have continued spiritual, emotional, social, physical, and financial support after they “age out” of foster care.
- Pray for foster and adoptive parents to be sustained through the tough times with encouragement, patience, and joy.
- Pray that more Christians would come forward to provide foster care homes and loving “forever” families for children in state custody.
- Pray for wise public policies and effective systems relating to children in need of state care.
- Praise God for all the "forever families" created through adoption that have brought joy to parents and children.

#### **Make a Difference Through Your Life**

- If you are uncertain or anxious about reaching out to hurting kids, talk with others who have been involved with children in state care to get a picture of the challenges and the rewards.
- Connect with kids in the foster care system by helping out with activities and field trips, volunteering at a group home, or becoming a mentor through Youth Open (524-7483) or Youth Villages (560-2595).
- Consider opening your home to children in foster care, either as foster care parents or as respite care for other foster families. To learn about what is involved, you can take the PATH (Parents As Tender Healers) course without making a commitment.
- Consider becoming a "forever family" to a child whose parental ties have been severed, especially children frequently passed over for adoption: those with



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disabilities or other special needs, African American or Hispanic children, older children, and sibling groups.

- Youth who have “aged out” of state custody are at great risk of homelessness, pregnancy and trouble with the law. Reach out to older teenagers in foster care as they approach adulthood with friendship, mentoring and practical support. Programs to help you connect with older youth include LIFT (560-2595) and Youth OPEN (524-7483).
- To review Knox County foster care placements and the efforts made to get children into safe, permanent homes, join the Foster Care Review Board (215-6452) and serve for two hours per month.
- Offer a listening ear, encouragement and acts of kindness to foster or adoptive parents going through challenging times as a family.

### **Make a Difference Through Your Church**

- Host a training on providing foster care or adoption, or working with children who have special needs. Contact an agency listed below to arrange a guest speaker. Consider doing this in November, National Adoption Month.
- Connect with adoption agencies to organize "adoption showers," especially for families taking in children with special needs. If "flesh and blood" additions to a family are celebrated, why not also celebrate children of the heart?
- Donate meeting space for parents to visit with children who have been placed in state custody. Contact the Resource Linkage Coordinator of the Knox County Department of Children's Services (329-8879).
- Provide transportation for children in the foster care system who want to attend church services or church-sponsored youth activities.
- Start a foster parent's night out, which involves caring for children in the church for several hours on a Friday or Saturday while foster parents enjoy some needed alone time. Contact the Knox County Foster Care Association (740-4325).
- Prayerfully develop a partnership with a foster care agency or group home. Set up regular visits to spend time with the youth and provide music, games, sports, Bible studies and other activities. Encourage church families to make one-on-one connections with specific youth. Find creative ways to support the staff and facilities. (See lists of agencies and more specific suggestions below.)
- Become a support network for foster parents and "kinship care" providers (grandparents or other relatives caring for children), by meeting needs for clothes, food, childcare, emotional support, and spiritual nurture. Contact the Knox County Foster Care Association (740-4325) or the Knox County Relative Caregiver Program (483-9111) to get started.
- Offer the church as a supportive partner for birth parents working to regain custody of their children by meeting goals such as substance abuse treatment, parenting training,



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- family counseling and adequate housing.
- Form a group of several families in your church (or from several churches) who are willing to go through the foster care process together and encourage one another. Form a larger support team in the church that wraps around this group, offering practical assistance (such as respite care and meals), and emotional and prayer support. This eases the burden of care from an individual family, and the kids will benefit from belonging to an extended "family" who loves them.

### **Make a Difference as a Volunteer**

Following are some of the many organizations that meet the needs of children, their birth families, and foster families. See the chapter on families for other organizations that help struggling families.

### **Foster care services**

These are some of the organizations that provide foster care placements and services to children in foster homes. Make a connection if you are interested in becoming a foster family, want to offer support ministries to foster families, or want to support the work of these organizations.

Childhelp Foster Family Agency of East Tennessee: 865-637-1753,

<http://www.childhelp.org>

*Provides training, constant support, and supervision for families who provide foster homes for abused and neglected children. Also helps families adopt children who are in need of a loving forever home.*

- Offer to care for foster children on respite days scheduled for foster parents.
- Donate toys or clothing for the children who have not yet been placed with a family.
- Help with children in the program on special days such as trips to Dollywood or cookouts at the fifty-acre farm in South Knoxville.
- Groups: Help with grounds improvement projects.

Foster Care Program (Child & Family Tennessee): 865-524-7483, <http://www.child-family.org>

*A network of services that assist with the reunification of foster children and their birth families, prepares children for adoption, and gives teenagers the skills to live independently.*



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- Organize special days of games or sports activities for families with foster children.
- Become a foster parent or help recruit potential foster and adoptive families.
- Families: Mentor children in foster care by engaging the youth in positive activities and modeling positive lifestyles.

Foster Care Services (Florence Crittenton Agency): 865-602-2021,

<http://www.fcaknox.org>

*Offers a residential program for females ages 12-18 who have been placed in state foster care due to abuse and/or neglect. Also places non-parenting teens as well as teens with new babies in foster homes.*

- Become a tutor, mentor or foster parent to a teenager in the program.
- Families: Help with landscaping and maintenance work on the 26-acre campus.

Omni Visions, Inc.: 865-524-4393, <http://www.omnivisions.com>

*A placement agency that provides each individual and each family a community support system to facilitate and inspire growth and development. The primary focus is to support the family in overcoming barriers that prohibit both the child's development and the ongoing operation of a positive family system.*

- Mentor a child through tutoring, sports activities, and community service.
- Become a foster or adoptive parent for a special needs child from the ages of 10-17.

Youth Villages: 560-2550, <http://www.youthvillages.org>

*Provides foster care and adoption services for special needs children with serious emotional and behavioral problems. Sponsors the Governor's Mentoring Initiative, a program that aims to provide a mentor to every child aged 9-17 in foster care in Tennessee (560-2595).*

- Support a young person through an ongoing one-on-one relationship to build his or her self-esteem and motivation.
- Serve as a positive role model and friend; plan and participate in activities as you spend 4 to 6 hours per month together.

Additional opportunities to serve children in foster homes include (note that training and background checks may be required):

- Organize special days of games or sports activities for foster care families.
- Commit to an ongoing connection with a child as a mentor. (Consistency is



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important.)

- Provide tutoring and educational support.
- Offer respite care to give foster parents scheduled breaks.
- Engage children in foster care in community service experiences – let them share the experience of helping others.
- Donate toys, clothing and personal care items for children.
- Reach out to older youth with friendship, guidance, and connections with job training and employment opportunities.

Family Bonding Center of the Appalachian Region: 414-0388

*Works with special-needs adopted children, children in foster care, and their families. Specializes in attachment disorders and incorporates outdoor therapeutic activities into traditional therapy.*

Tennessee Regional Alternative Care Environments (TRACES) (Helen Ross McNabb Center): 637-9711, <http://www.mcnabbcenter.org>

*A therapeutic foster care program for children with significant behavioral, emotional, or social problems.*

Youth OPEN (Child & Family Tennessee): 524-7483, [www.child-family.org](http://www.child-family.org)

*Empowers teenagers in foster care who do not yet have a permanent family to seek options for permanency and build life-long connections with supportive family-like relationships.*

### **Adoption services**

(Note: Many of the foster care agencies listed above also offer adoptive services.)

Bethany Christian Services: 588-5283, [www.bethany.org/easttennessee](http://www.bethany.org/easttennessee)

*A nonprofit Christian adoption and family services agency. Helps pregnant moms through the decision to release their child for adoption.*

Dawn Coppock, Adoption Attorney: 933-8173, <http://www.dawncoppock.com>

*A sole practitioner focused on adoption law, including representation of birth parents,*



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*adoptive parents and sometimes agencies. Available to mediate issues regarding termination of parental rights and adoption related disputes.*

Harmony Adoptions: 865-982-5225, <http://www.harmony.cc>

*Works to share life, love, and joy through adoption by providing home study services, placement of children, post-adoption services and trainings.*

- Help with special events that are held throughout the year.
- Provide childcare at adoptive parents' support group meetings.

### **Group homes**

The following organizations provide residential care and therapeutic services for children in state custody and/or having difficulties living at home. (Some are located outside Knox County but take children from this area.) Churches and individuals can make a difference for the youth in these homes in many ways. The most important common element is showing kids who are separated from their birth families that they are not forgotten – that they matter, they are valued, and they can have a positive future:

- Give a youth your time and attention as a mentor. Share activities such as helping with homework, playing sports, pursuing a hobby together, or just hanging out.
- Families: Come play games or host parties for the youth, or invite them to participate in youth events hosted by your church.
- Share your musical or artistic gifts with the children, and make a connection with kids who have similar artistic interests.
- Bring pizza, board games and puzzles, and host a game night.
- Provide a special connection with children during holidays, when they are most painfully reminded of their separation from their birth family.
- Make kids feel special on their birthdays with a card, small gift, party or outing.
- Lead a Bible study or worship time for youth (permission to do this may vary by facility)
- Help with special events and field trips.
- Improve the facilities by providing yard care and gardening, doing building maintenance or repairs, or redecorating the kids' rooms.
- Serve on an advisory council for a group home, or join the Foster Care Review Board.

Child & Family Tennessee Group Homes: 524-7483, <http://www.child-family.org>

*Residential facilities include Cooper House Group Home (Knoxville), Johnson Group*



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*Home for Girls (Maryville), and Blount County Boys' Home (Maryville). Contact Steve Houston, Administrator of Residential Services, to make the best connection with a facility. .*

Columbus Home (Catholic Charities of East Tennessee): 524-9896, <http://www.ccetn.org>  
*Therapeutic housing for adolescent boys in state custody. Provides individual, group and family counseling, 24 hour supervision, and educational support, and teaches anger management, conflict resolution, and independent living skills.*

Foster Care Services (Florence Crittenton Agency): 602-2021, <http://www.fcaknox.org>  
*Offers a residential program for girls age 12-18 in foster care due to abuse and/or neglect. Places teens in foster homes, including teenage parents.*

Holston United Methodist Home for Children: 633-9844, <http://www.holstonhome.org>  
*Offers services designed to reunite families and keep them together. Provides a group residential home for children and special-education school in Greeneville. Recruits and trains foster families and provides a range of adoption services.*

John Tarleton Home (Helen Ross McNabb Center): 637-9711, <http://www.mcnabbcenter.org>  
*Serves adolescents 16-21 in state custody. Teaches independent living skills while youths attend high school or college. Offers tutoring, life skills workshops, help setting career goals and finding employment, and mental health assessments and referrals.*

Smoky Mountain Children's Home: 453-4644, <http://www.smch.cc>  
*A Christian multi-service agency that provides professional care for children referred due to emotional, behavioral, and life situations.*

Tennessee Baptist Children's Home: 1-800-624-8591 or 423-892-2722, <http://www.tbch4kids.org>  
*Provides care for children in crisis in a family-style setting, providing spiritual,*



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*emotional, and academic guidance.*

Wears Valley Ranch: 429-5437, <http://www.wvr.org>

*A Christian children's home and school that cares for children ages 6-14 from crisis family settings, providing nurturing and structure in a family-style setting.*

Youth Villages: 560-2550, <http://www.youthvillages.org>

*Provides foster care and adoption services for special needs children with serious emotional and behavioral problems.*

### **Other organizations that provide services related to the foster care system:**

Court Appointed Special Advocates of East Tennessee, Inc. (CASA): 329-3399,

<http://www.casaofeasttn.org>

*Provides trained citizen advocates to make sure that neglected and abused children have the attention and services they need, and are placed in a safe and permanent home in a timely manner.*

- Provide administrative assistance, and recruit additional volunteers.
- Become a child advocate by enrolling in 36 hours of training. Conduct home visits, gather information from social service providers, attend DCS meetings and court proceedings related to the child, and make recommendations to the court regarding the child's best interest.
- Join CASA's Interfaith Coalition Against Child Abuse and Neglect, which offers a program and materials for use by members of the faith community who want to help abused and neglected children.

Grandparents As Parents Program (CAC): 546-3500, <http://www.knoxcac.org>

*Provides support sessions and information for grandparents who are raising grandchildren. Trains volunteer advocates to accompany grandparents during Juvenile Court custody hearings and school meetings.*

Knox County Department of Children's Services: 329-8879, <http://www.state.tn.us/youth>

*Recruits foster families to provide safe and supportive temporary homes in which*



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*children's emotional, physical and social needs can be met. Works toward permanent options for children when reunification with birth parents is not possible, including adoption, or independent living arrangements for older youth.*

Knox County Foster Care Association: 740-4325, [knoxfosterparents.com](http://knoxfosterparents.com)

*An organization consisting of foster parents, DCS staff, and others with an interest in foster children. Promotes fellowship and training among foster and adoptive parents who encourage one another and learn better ways to provide children a safe and secure home.*

Knox County Relative Caregiver Program (Foothills Care): 483-9111

*Supports children living with relatives other than their parents, with the goal of keeping them from entering state custody. Services to relative caregivers include information (including downloadable Community Resource Directory) and referrals, support groups, educational workshops, respite and recreation, family advocacy, and emergency financial assistance.*

### **How to Learn More**

- Visit [www.adoptuskids.org/states/tn](http://www.adoptuskids.org/states/tn) to view profiles of children in need of adoptive homes.
- The Tennessee Department of Children's Services website ([www.state.tn.us/youth](http://www.state.tn.us/youth)) [offers information](#) about fostering and adopting.
- The Knox County Department of Children's Services Resource Linkage Coordinator (329-8879) offers a presentation on the work of DCS.
- Child & Family Tennessee (524-7483) provides information on foster care and respite care for teenagers who live in group homes.
- Child & Family Tennessee (524-7483) and Omni Visions (524-4393) offer informational sessions on becoming a foster parent (with no further commitment required).
- The Knox County Foster Care Association (740-4325) makes presentations to groups and organizations.