



Children deserve a village beyond the system

2020 YEAR END *Report*

contents

- 3 A LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER
- 4 A SAFE HAVEN WHEN IT'S NEEDED MOST
- 5 COVID-19 RESPONSE
- 6 NEW PROGRAMS
- 8 ELLA'S STORY
- 9 IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD
- 10 VULNERABLE CHILDREN ARE EVERYWHERE. WE JUST DON'T ALWAYS KNOW WHO THEY ARE.
- 11 THE LOVE OF A FOSTER FAMILY CHANGES A LIFE FOREVER...BUT FOSTER FAMILIES NEED HELP TOO.
- 12 THERE IS A GAP BETWEEN THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND THE FOSTER FAMILIES WHO NEED THEIR SUPPORT.
- 13 IMAGINE A VILLAGE BEYOND THE SYSTEM.
- 14 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES NEED YOU TO CLOSE THE GAP.
- 15 YOU CAN BRING DIGNITY TO THOSE IN FOSTER CARE AND EMPOWER FAMILIES TO OVERCOME ADVERSITY.
- 16 WHAT FOSTER FAMILIES TELL US ABOUT THE SUPPORT THEY RECEIVE CONFIRMS THE NEED IS GREAT – BUT LOVE IS GREATER.
- 17 YOUR GENEROSITY WILL CHANGE THE FUTURE OF AN ENTIRE VULNERABLE POPULATION OF CHILDREN.
- 18 THANKS TO YOU, FOSTER VILLAGE IS CHANGING THE TODAYS AND TOMORROWS FOR FOSTER FAMILIES AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN.
- 19 NOT EVERYONE CAN FOSTER. BUT EVERYONE CAN DO SOMETHING.
- 20 WAYS TO GIVE • QUESTIONS

A LETTER FROM

Our Founder



What a year, Village. None of us could have foreseen the many challenges of this year nor the incredible response of support from this community. We have seen our already overwhelmed child welfare system stretched in ways that have left even wider gaps for our most vulnerable children to get lost in. But thanks to you, we continue to stand ready in these gaps to walk alongside our children and families in crisis by Equipping them with critical necessities, Connecting them with ongoing wraparound support services, and Advocating for community engagement beyond the system.

We are moving the needle toward a more dignified and healing experience for children in our communities who are walking through the worst kinds of adversity. We have seen connection, restoration, and dignity provided to the thousands we serve—breaking cycles of childhood abuse, neglect, and loss of family.

2020 hasn't looked anything like we expected it to, but we have seen God continue to show up in miraculous and humbling ways through this incredible community. We have seen our mission grow in depth and breadth despite the many challenges we've faced this year as a non-profit on the front lines. This year has shown us that when the going gets tough, this village keeps going.

As we head into a new year filled with more uncertainty, we are all the more grateful for each and every one of you. We have big goals to continue meeting the big needs. Thank you for being on this journey with us.

Here's to another year of being on mission together!

WITH IMMENSE GRATITUDE,

Chrystal Smith

A safe haven when it's needed most

With the additional stressors brought on by COVID-19 this year, we have experienced a dramatic increase in the amount of children staying at our Oak Haven resource center while awaiting suitable homes. These are children who, without our safe haven, would be sleeping in somber CPS offices. Children who have experienced abuse, neglect, human trafficking, mental illness, and separation from families under heartbreaking circumstances. Our home-like haven serves as a dignified middle place for these kids along with their familiar caseworkers. Somewhere for them to have a hot meal, shower, clean bed, and a comfortable place to feel cared for while waiting.

*Just a couple of examples of children we had the opportunity to provide home-like shelter for this year (*names changed to protect identities)...*

Thirteen-year-old Javier and his two younger sisters were found by Child Protective Services investigators living alone in a small apartment with no adult supervision. The investigators entered their home to find them with no food, no electricity, no running water, and no grownups. Javier has special needs and his two sisters were his main caregivers. Without any next of kin to turn to, Child Protective Services (CPS) searched the entire state of Texas hoping to find a licensed foster family willing and able to take in all three siblings. Sadly, they were only able to find a home for the sisters and Javier was left in limbo. Child Protective Services was able to bring him to our Oak Haven resource center while they continued the search for a safe home for all three siblings. He had a warm bed, therapeutic sensory tools, a place to prepare a hot meal and shower. And the home-like space made it possible for the foster parents of Javier's sisters to bring them to come play and visit with him until their more permanent home was found.

Fifteen-year-old Anabelle has been in foster care since she was 4 years old. She bounced between five different foster homes before becoming the target of child sex traffickers. She was eventually categorized as a runaway before landing back in CPS custody. Due to her traumatic past, Anabelle needed a very specialized residential treatment center. Sadly, all of the suitable treatment centers for children in state custody were full, so she was left sleeping in the CPS office while they scrambled to find a safe place for her. Thankfully, her caseworker was made aware of Oak Haven and they brought Anabelle to stay there for one week while waiting for a spot to open up at a treatment center out of state. She was able to request groceries, practice cooking, meet with a therapist, and sleep in her own comfortable safe space.

Over 60 children have stayed at Oak Haven this year while awaiting homes, totaling over six thousand hours of dignified care and safe shelter. We have never seen the needs this high. This resource center is the only one of its kind in Texas and is setting the standard for other communities. We anticipate this huge need to continue as the strains on child welfare are only expected to increase over the coming year. And we aim to be proactive rather than reactive.

2020 has made it clear that we need to expand this space in order to continue meeting the needs in the most healing and efficient way. Through the community's support in 2021, we have plans to grow this haven to be more customized to the increasing needs. And it's going to take the community's support. We look forward to setting a higher standard and restorative experience for our most at-risk children with your help.



hope to grow
a haven



COVID-19 Response

Like most Americans, March 13th 2020 was a day we won't soon forget. After a year of planning, we were ready to welcome all 350 guests to our sold out Grow the Village Gala. As concerns around COVID-19 escalated overnight, in the early morning hours of March 13th we were faced with the impossibly hard decision of notifying all of our guests and vendors that we needed to postpone our big event. As a community-funded organization, our thoughts then turned to, "How will we possibly meet the needs this year?"

Over the last several months since March, this generous community has continued to surprise us by bridging every gap in miraculous and innovative ways. Not only have we been able to meet the anticipated needs for the year, we were able to fulfill all requests for the increased number of children and families in crisis who came to us for help. As the needs increased, so did the power of the village.

In September as children returned to school for the first time in months, we experienced a **40% increase** in requests, including the most requests we've ever seen in a 24-hour period. Families who were already struggling to care for their children have been faced with the added stressors of job loss, food scarcity, domestic violence, addiction relapse, and mental health crises.

We have seen a number of our volunteers step up this year to become licensed foster homes, opening their homes to any and all needs (some of the biggest needs are for sibling groups, teens, and children with special needs). We've served countless relative caregivers so that they can adequately care for grandchildren, nieces, nephews and next of kin (over 60% of children removed from their homes by CPS in our coverage area are placed with kinship caregivers/noncustodial parents), many of whom are under-resourced and/or living below the poverty threshold. **And we have had the opportunity to walk alongside over 100 parents who did the hard work to break cycles of adversity and bring their children out of foster care.** From placement to permanency, there have been countless gaps bridged by this village of support.

EXAMPLES OF COVID-19 SPECIFIC RELIEF PROVIDED THROUGH YOUR SUPPORT THIS YEAR:

- **Over 9,000 meals to families facing food insecurity**
- **Over \$10k in gift cards for groceries and basic necessities**
- A Virtual Village group created for caregivers at all of our nationwide locations to connect and share resources
- Holistic wraparound support to a kinship aunt who lost her husband to COVID-19 the week before Christmas
- Caregiver Coaching with our TBRI® Practitioners, case management to navigate social services, and free telehealth counseling with a LMFT
- Deliveries of basic necessities to foster families and aged-out foster youth under quarantine while recovering from COVID-19

Despite the many added stressors this pandemic has brought to the already vulnerable population we serve, we have seen significant healing, sustained placements, and holistic support.



New Programs

CONNECT FOR SUCCESS

This year, in light of the huge need for academic support during major school changes, we were able to add free after-school tutoring to our services. Children in foster care are more likely to fall behind in school due to regularly changing homes and schools, and we aim to provide them with the educational support they need. Children are matched with a personal volunteer tutor, and one-on-one tutoring can be offered virtually. Volunteers are trained in relationship building, trauma-informed care, cultural competency, and supplemental educational resources for online learning. Through healthy connections, children have the opportunity to gain confidence and enthusiasm for learning, setting them up for greater academic and lifelong success.

Connect for Success was born from one foster mom's personal experience of seeking educational support for her foster daughter. When Andrea Brauer (a licensed social worker, foster mom, and child welfare advocate) searched for resources for her 13-year-old foster daughter, she was disheartened to learn that there were no existing tutoring programs in her area for children in foster care. As part of the Foster Village family, she decided to do something about it and created the *Connect for Success* program utilizing her skills as a licensed social worker, her 15 years of experience in public policy and coalition building in Austin, and her personal insight as a foster mom.



“

I am able to collaborate with the foster parents and use my experience as a teacher to provide the extra one-on-one reading practice this child needs. I believe he will learn to read this year!

-CONNECT FOR SUCCESS TUTOR



For the first time in my life, I feel like I have a healthy support system. This has made it possible for me to be the mom that my kids deserve and it's given us hope for a brighter future.

- MOM REUNIFIED WITH HER THREE CHILDREN

PARTNERS IN PERMANENCY

We believe that children thrive when they are surrounded by a community of caring adults, including their foster family and their biological family. Unfortunately, the narrative often pits foster families against biological families, creating an environment where the biological family is villainized, and the foster family is cut out when a child is reunified with their biological family. This means biological families rarely get the support they need, creating a cycle where children are often in and out of the system.

Thanks to a growth grant from Glimmer Austin and a generous family with a shared passion for supporting reunification efforts, this year we launched *Partners in Permanency*, a program designed to create a healthier reunification process for children and their biological families by surrounding them with a village of support as they transition back into life together. We coach foster parents on how to be a healthy support system to the reunifying family and create environments where foster families and biological families can both be involved in the child's life.

When we do this, biological families are better equipped to overcome the adversity that put them in the child welfare system in the first place and build new, permanent lives for their families – while their children maintain loving, long-term relationships with those who supported them along the way.

Through *Partners in Permanency*, foster parents have the opportunity to develop relational skills and strategies to build a foundation of lifelong connection with the families of children in their care. Foster parents who are members of this initiative also have the opportunity to nominate biological families for our extended holistic support services during the reunification process, setting these families up for sustainable permanency with the tools, resources, and ongoing support they need to thrive for generations to come.



SOMETIMES YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

finds you.

At least that's how Maggie and Miguel describe it when asked why they decided to become foster parents.

It was late in the day when Maggie and Miguel received a call from a frantic caseworker. They could anticipate by the tone of her voice that this was an urgent request to place a child in need in their care...a request that needed to be met that same day.

They were prepared for a child but had no idea the age or gender. When you choose to become foster parents, you don't get to choose who or when. You just say yes.

A few essentials had been set aside, but that was about it. It's difficult to create a home for a child you know nothing about.

When the caseworker arrived with Ella, you could tell she was in a hurry. She was only with the family long enough for them to sign the stack of papers. She dropped Ella off with all her belongings in a small trashbag...all she had brought to begin a life in this stranger's home.

As the door closed behind the caseworker, Ella just stood there. A 13-year-old girl in an unfamiliar situation, in the living room of an unknown house and in a new neighborhood that was the farthest thing from normal she could imagine.

The anxiety of the transition had almost paralyzed her. Ella didn't look up much in the first hour. She just spoke softly and quietly as Maggie and Miguel tried to get to know her and make conversation.

That night, Ella went to bed with a roof over her head, but without many of the things she would need to get through the next weeks or months here. Maggie and Miguel didn't get much sleep at all, overwhelmed by suddenly having to turn their house into a home for a 13-year-old girl...a girl whose background they knew nothing about, who was part of a system they were just learning to navigate.

It takes a village to raise a child.

Sadly, Ella's story is a common one. Every day, children are placed in foster care with just the clothes on their back. They find themselves in unknown and unpredictable situations, creating both short-term and long-term vulnerability in their lives. It is a lonely place to be, especially for a child craving a sense of home.

The courageous foster families who step up to care for our community's vulnerable children also find themselves feeling alone and overwhelmed. Without a larger village of support, they carry the weight of meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of a child they just met...and who they might only know for a few short weeks.

Our community's vulnerable children and the foster families caring for them deserve more. They need a village of support that goes beyond a system and helps combat loneliness, burnout, overwhelm and ultimately the cycle of vulnerability.



IT ALSO TAKES A
COMMUNITY
TO SUPPORT A FAMILY.



Vulnerable children are everywhere. We just don't always know who they are.

There are over 430,000 children in the U.S. foster care system due to abuse or neglect. These are children who need to know they matter while their families wrestle through and heal from their own struggles.

No parent ever chooses to send their child into foster care. But sometimes that's the best next step for the child caught in the middle of a difficult situation—for them and their biological families.

Unfortunately, the instability and trauma of being removed from home has a lasting impact on vulnerable children.

Children who experienced foster care account for roughly ...

- 50% of the current U.S. homeless population
- 80% of human trafficking victims

And because of a foster system that failed them ...

- 80% of children in foster care suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression
- 90% of children with five or more foster placements will end up in the criminal justice system

There is an urgent need to break the cycle of brokenness and care for innocent children like Ella — and the foster families who are stepping up to fill the gap.

*fill
the
gap*

The love of a foster family changes a life forever...but foster families need help too.

When you experience unconditional love, it changes everything. And that's what foster families give to vulnerable children.

But just like a child needs a village to help them discover the world and live into their potential, the families who live and love on the front lines need a support system too.

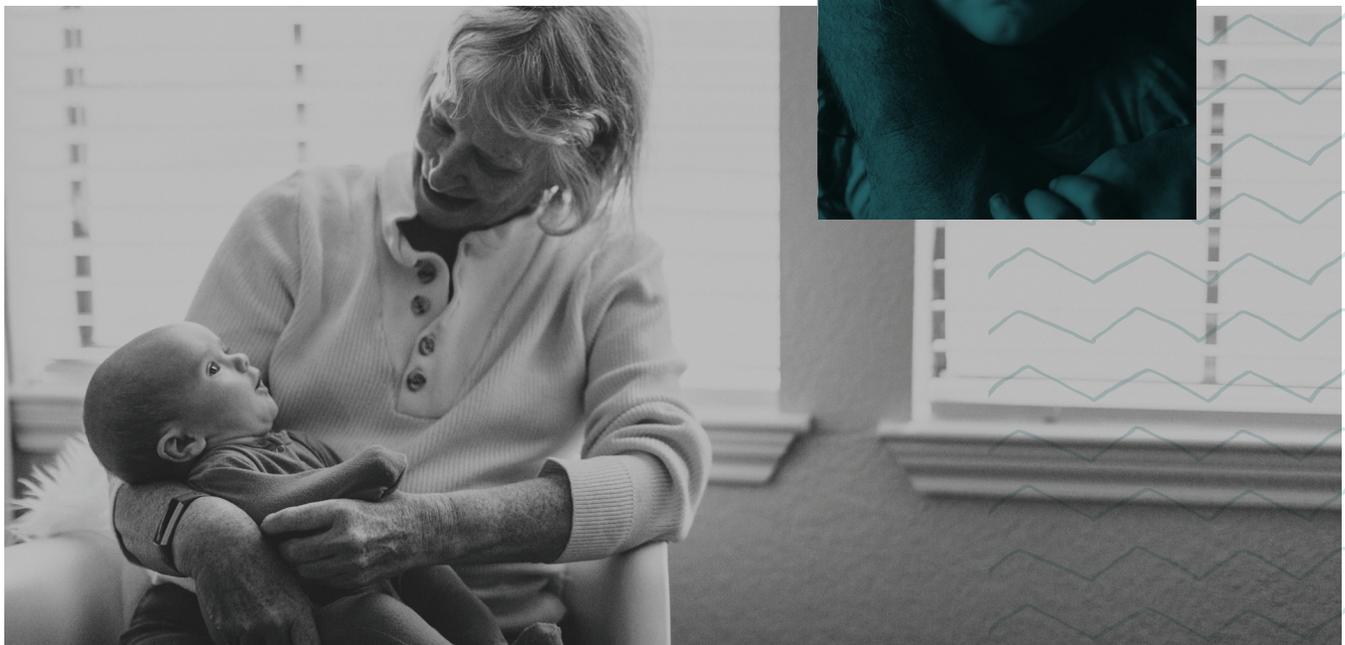
Half of all licensed foster homes quit after their first placement. Most foster families foster for less than a year, citing burnout as the reason.

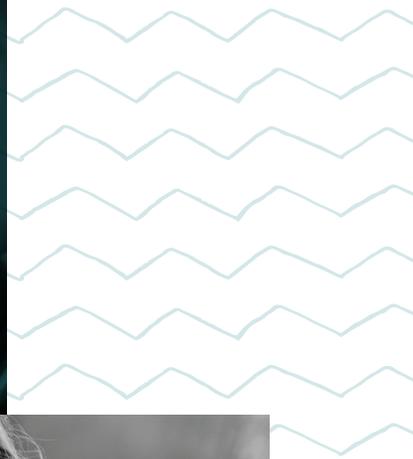
They don't quit because their passion changed or they changed their minds. They quit because the responsibility was too much for one family to do all on their own. They needed help the child welfare system wasn't designed or prepared to provide.

Foster families without the right support system often feel chronically overwhelmed and defeated.

This creates more instability for the children in their care and the many others who need safe homes and loving parents to stand in the gap for them in their time of need.

And everyone loses when that happens. Everyone.





There is a gap between those who care about vulnerable children and the foster families who need their support.

While 85% of people say they care about vulnerable children and want to help, most will never become foster parents. The truth is that not everyone is called to take that step. But we can all play a part in creating a support system for the families who directly care for our vulnerable children.

The foster care system is not set up to address the factors that cause burnout or provide holistic support and dignity to foster families, caregivers, biological families and children in foster care.

But we are.

We, the 85% of us who care about vulnerable children in our community and are looking for a way to help.

People just like you.

You can be that village of support that children and families need...and deserve.



you can help



Imagine a village beyond the system.

What would it look like if this gap was closed? What does it mean for a community to surround vulnerable children and families with a village of love and support?

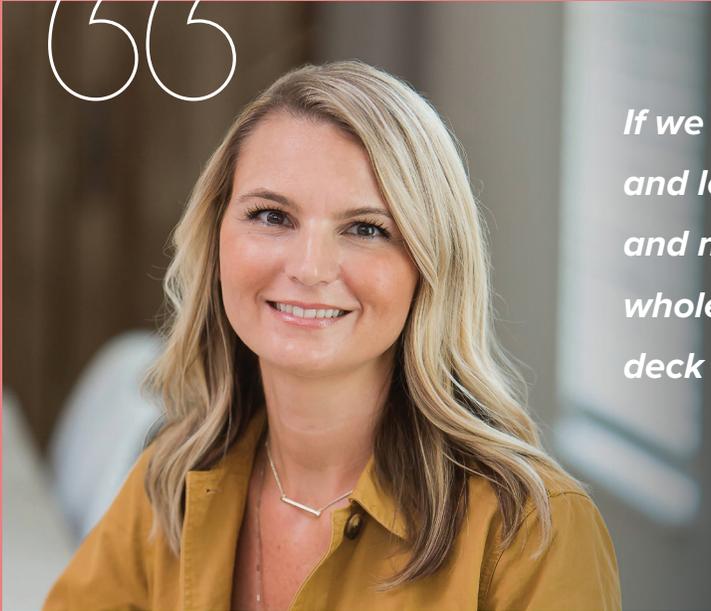
It means:

- **Children in foster care have their needs met from Day 1.** When a child is placed with a family, there are many needs that need to be supplied at a moment's notice. It's rare that there is much time to prepare. Foster families need beds, clothes, strollers, etc. They need all the essentials that a biological family would need to support a child based on their age.
- **Foster families and the children in their care receive holistic support.** Wraparound support is a term that describes a complete approach to ensuring the foster family and child have the best chance for success. Foster families and children deserve a comprehensive approach that addresses their practical, emotional and spiritual needs and a community to help sustain them.
- **Children in foster care receive advocates to stand for them and their future.** The ultimate goal is to change the way communities care for vulnerable children. This begins by making sure foster families can successfully care for the

children placed in their care. This includes trauma-informed care for children, testifying to lawmakers about the needs of children and families in the system and hosting community forums to educate people on the needs and changing perceptions surrounding foster care.

- **Children receive a pathway to permanency.** Foster care is designed to be a bridge between a biological family in distress and stable family permanency. Many times biological families are able to be reunited once they have resolved the issues that made it impossible for them to care for their children for a season. What's unfortunate is that many children get caught in a cycle where they are in and out of foster care because the root causes of why they ended up in the system are never addressed. We can do better.

These are the things the system can never provide...but you can, when you step up to close this gap.



If we want to see our city’s children in safe and loving homes, end cycles of abuse and neglect and see broken families made whole, it’s going to take an all hands on deck approach.

Chrystal Smith

FOSTER VILLAGE FOUNDER

Children and families need you to close the gap.

Foster Village bridges the gap between foster families and people like you who want to help, meeting practical needs and providing holistic support beyond the system.

Your support makes sure foster families and children have their basic needs met, connects foster families to resources and to each other and advocates for change in the system, creating a better future for our community, our children and the caregivers who raise them.

When you partner with Foster Village, you directly:

- **Equip caregivers with support.** At Foster Village resource centers, families and children can get beds, car seats, clothing, school supplies, therapeutic tools and other basic necessities—completely free. These resources are uniquely chosen and assembled in a trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate environment. Our resource centers also serve as safe, home-like temporary housing for vulnerable children awaiting foster placement.
- **Connect families to each other.** Foster families are navigating a complex system and challenges that are unique to fostering. By connecting foster families with other foster families, biological families and trusted resources, families are strengthened and empowered to continue fostering.

- **Advocate for change in the system.** The reasons a child ends up in foster care are many, which is why full circle change is needed. You can help us fight disconnection, injustice, trauma and the other adversities facing families and create a better future for all.

When you do this, you provide sustainable care and stop the cycle of burnout among foster families.

In fact, 90% of the families we serve cite the support they receive from Foster Village as one of the primary reasons they are able to keep fostering.

You can bring dignity to those in foster care and empower families to overcome adversity.

We believe children and families deserve more.

They deserve to know they are loved, that they matter and that they are worthy.

That's why, with the support of a community of people like you, we do more than just meet the immediate needs of families in the child welfare system. We also address the root causes and vulnerabilities that created the system in the first place.

We understand the dynamics of the system and the gaps because we are foster families ourselves. We've witnessed the needs — our needs — that are not being met and have committed every day to being the change that children in foster care — our children — deserve.

Together, we can help one family at a time re-imagine what it means to care for vulnerable children by:

- **Bringing dignity to the system.** The child welfare system is often cold and utilitarian, addressing a problem but not meeting emotional needs or fixing the root causes that create the problem in the first place. We strive to bring dignity to the children and families we serve, understanding the root causes of why a child ends up in the foster care system and facilitating relationships between foster families and biological families when it is healthy and possible. We understand that isolation and disconnect are the real villains, and we are here to make sure no one feels alone.
- **Providing a holistic approach to care.** Everything we do is trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate, creating safe, loving spaces for children in foster care and their families. We understand the context around the child welfare system, including the causes and effects of foster care and the social framework that has created the system. Though our work is focused on hands-on support of families today, we seek to create a better future for our community's vulnerable children tomorrow.
- **Creating an inclusive community where everyone can belong.** Everyone is welcome in our village. We serve foster families and welcome volunteers from all backgrounds. We know it takes everyone to bring the change needed, and we are all in this together.

Today, Foster Village is a nationwide movement with affiliate locations around the country. But it will always be based on deep empathy for caregivers, an understanding of the foster care system and the belief that children deserve more than a system; they deserve a village.



Children and families deserve more.



What foster families tell us about the support they receive confirms the need is great – but love is greater.

“

I think Foster Village uniquely understands and supports the WHOLE family—the foster family, relatives and biological family. And they understand the tensions and complexities of doing that. These children and families are connected to us, and we are connected to them. The best outcomes for everyone happen when we realize the healing power of love. Foster Village exemplifies that.

- HALLIE

“

It's always a little hectic when you get a new placement. These kids are scared to death. You are trying to scramble to get things together at the last minute to make your home ready for the age and gender of the child who is being placed in your care. Foster Village has literally had supplies and is able to be there with supplies within 24-hours of a new placement.

- KIMBERLEY

“

Foster Village came alongside us over and over again during our foster care journey. Every time we got a new placement, they were there the same or next day with bags full of everything we needed. They also do an amazing job of connecting foster families together to walk through this difficult role together. We are so thankful for the Foster Village team.

- ZACH

“

They were able to provide everything we needed to be able to care for our emergency placements: toddler beds, mattresses, clothes, shoes, a baby monitor and even put in some fun books and toys into the mix. And they did all of this in record time when the items were needed most.

- CHANTAL

“

You guys made this transition in my life awesome. I truly appreciate everything you have done and am truly grateful and blessed.

- KOMEKA



Your generosity will change the future of an entire vulnerable population of children.

Children in foster care are bright, capable and strong. And when they are surrounded by the love and care they need to feel safe and secure as well as given the tools to be successful, they can:

- Break the cycle of trauma that leads to homelessness, incarceration and addiction
- Heal from abuse and/or neglect, become resilient and thrive in life
- Overcome adversity and reach their God-given potential
- Become outstanding daughters, sons, parents and members of our communities

But their foster families can't do it alone.

They need you to assure them that someone is advocating on their behalf and working with them to create a personal support system that will sustain them through the ups and downs of foster care.



IN 2020 JUST IN

Austin

2,156 TOTAL CHILDREN SERVED

742
requests fulfilled for homes caring for children entering foster care (average request valued at \$600 in necessities)



Over 6,000 hours of safe haven shelter provided for over 60 children ages 4-18 awaiting suitable foster homes

208
hours of Caregiver Support (virtual) Gatherings, trainings, therapy sessions and workshops

100
holistic support provided to over 100 reunifying families

Thanks to you, Foster Village is changing the todays and tomorrows for foster families and vulnerable children.

But we need to do more. And we need the generosity of people like you to help us expand our programs and reach thousands of new vulnerable children and families around the nation.

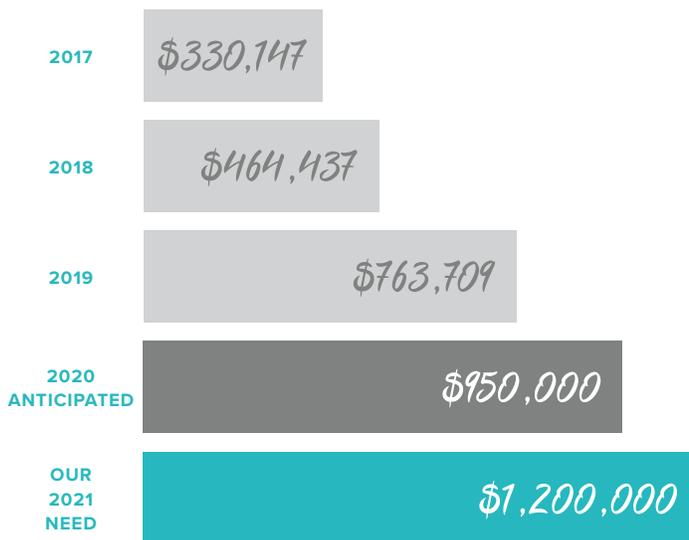
Your gift today will help us:

- Meet critical needs and provide holistic wraparound support to over 4,000 children impacted by foster care in the Austin area
- Provide vulnerable children with safe havens in our resource centers while they await foster placement
- See lasting permanency for the more than 70% of children reunited with relatives, with direct support and financial assistance to at least 10 families being mentored through our Partners in Permanency initiative
- Advocate for sustainable and lasting improvements to our child welfare system and enlist over 1,000 local volunteers to fill the gaps as needed
- Train and launch at least five more affiliate locations nationwide

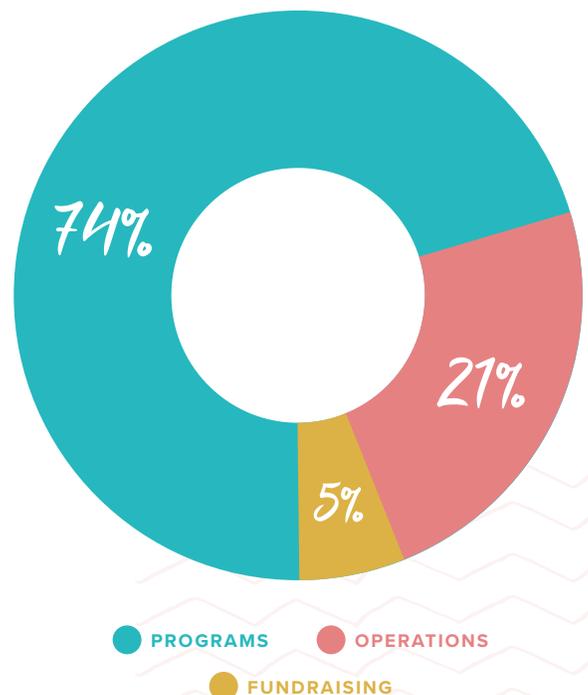
And that's just over the next two years. This is what we can accomplish together. This is the power of a village.



ANNUAL REVENUE BY YEAR



FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY



Not everyone can foster. But everyone can do something.

Imagine if Maggie and Miguel had a Foster Village to call on that first overwhelming night with Ella.

Imagine if Ella could have been met with clothes, toiletries and toys tailor picked for her, along with therapeutic support and mentoring to help her navigate the fear and uncertainty of transitioning into foster care.

And imagine if Maggie and Miguel didn't have to rely on the busy caseworker for support but could instead reach out to a network of other foster families who could help them navigate the system, care for Ella and offer them emotional support on the days they wanted to give up.

It's not hard to imagine because it's happening every day in Austin and beyond through Foster Village.

Foster families are being sustained.

Vulnerable children are getting the unconditional love they need to overcome trauma and adversity.

And entire generations of families are being transformed through the love and support of a village.

You can make a forever difference in the life of a child by providing them with the village of support they deserve. And when you prevent a vulnerable child from being lost in the system, you give them the opportunity to break the cycle and ensure their trauma isn't passed on to the next generation.

Will you stand with us and the families of these vulnerable children so they have the chance to know and experience the safety, security and stability that can only come from knowing you are loved?

*The change
begins with you*

SAY YES—FOR ELLA.

For Maggie and Miguel. And for all the children and families who are waiting for a community of people like you to be their village.

Ways you can give

BY DONOR ADVISED FUND OR CHARITABLE STOCK DONATIONS:

Email chrystal@fostervillageaustin.org with questions.

BY MAIL: Gifts can be mailed to 15400 Fitzhugh Rd Dripping Springs, TX 78620

BY PHONE: Please call our office at 512.599.4144, and someone from our team can help process your gift.

ONLINE: www.fostervillageaustin.org

EIN 81-3143881

“

*There is a heart passion and calling behind Foster Village.
It's genuine. That makes all the difference in the world.*

Eric BUSINESS SUPPORTER & DONOR

Questions?

Please contact us at info@fostervillageaustin.org or call us at 512.599.4144. We'd love to hear from you.

