

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her eyes and dark hair. The image is used as a background for the text.

5 THINGS
YOU SHOULD
KNOW ABOUT
foster care



Introduction

"I've heard about the foster care crisis in my community."

"I feel overwhelmed by how big and complicated the problem is."

"I want to help, but I don't know where to start."

This ebook is for you.

We can't possibly cover every aspect of foster care in a short ebook, but our hope is that these pages help you understand foster care in a new way: not as numbers and statistics, but as names, faces, and stories.



01.

Children enter foster care through no fault of their own.

Children can enter the foster care system for a variety of reasons. These can include abuse, neglect, substance abuse, incarceration, or medical problems that prohibit their biological parents from caring for their children properly.

Typically, someone reports an unsafe family situation to the Child Abuse Hotline, and either the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) or the Arkansas Crimes Against Children Unit at the Arkansas State Police investigates the allegations and determines whether those allegations are true. They also look at several factors to assess whether a child can safely remain in his or her home. If the child cannot remain safely at home and there are no safe and appropriate relatives, then the child will be placed into foster care.



Meet Anthony

Anthony is a 7-year-old child in Arkansas. His teacher recently called the Child Abuse Hotline after noticing that Anthony had unexplained bruises on his arms and legs. After visiting his home and speaking with his mother, DCFS determined that it was not safe for Anthony to stay at home due to the abuse and neglect he had been experiencing. After searching and failing to find a safe and appropriate relative for Anthony to live with, the DCFS case worker placed him in a foster home.



02.

The primary goal of foster care is reunification.

Placement in foster care is usually temporary and gives families time to make necessary changes so the child can safely return to his or her home and community. Most children in foster care return home to their families. This is called reunification. When children cannot return home, they find permanence through adoption, guardianship, or other means.

Although cases of extreme abuse do happen, the most common reason for a child's entry into foster care is neglect, followed closely by substance abuse. Often, biological parents simply lack the experience, knowledge, or resources to properly care for their children. After they are given the services and support they need, many parents are able to successfully reunify.



Meet Britany

Britany is a single mom of toddlers, Madison and Aiden. Their father went to jail for auto theft, leaving Britany without a place to live or an income. She soon became involved with another man who was abusive to Britany and both toddlers. One evening, the police were called to their home for a domestic dispute. They found both Britany and her boyfriend under the influence of drugs, and they noticed that the children had several bruises.

Britany and her boyfriend were arrested because drugs were being manufactured in the home. The children were taken by the police and local DCFS staff to the hospital for examination. Doctors found evidence of multiple broken bones at various stages of healing, showing the abuse had been happening for a while. The two children entered foster care. After Britany was released from jail, she entered drug rehabilitation and started the process to regain custody of her children.



03.

Foster parents are needed in our state.

Foster parents offer temporary care to children who have been removed from their biological families. Potential foster parents must complete background checks, a home study, and mandated training in order to be licensed and open for foster care.

Foster parents not only provide a safe and loving home to children in foster care, but they also play a vital role in supporting and encouraging the biological family in their journey to reunification.



Meet the Wall Family

John and Christina Wall have 2 biological children. They recently decided to open their home for foster care. After an initial informational meeting, they filled out their background checks and signed up for training. During training, they learned about parenting children with a history of trauma and the role they would play in helping children reunify with their biological families.

The Walls have now fostered over 20 children since their home was opened. They have seen the ups and downs of foster care, but continue to love and care for children well.



04.

Foster parents need your support.

Parenting children impacted by foster care is different from parenting biological children. Children in foster care have experienced trauma and loss, and helping children manage these experiences requires a unique level of care and attention.

Foster parents need the support of their churches and community in order to care for these children well. You can support a foster family in your community in a variety of ways including:

- Take a meal
- Offer to babysit
- Help with housework/yard work
- Send an encouraging gift or note
- Pray with and for them



05.

Everyone can do something.

Not everyone is called to open their home for foster care, but we firmly believe that God calls all of us to look after the most vulnerable in our communities. This looks different for every church, family, and person. The CALL can help you find your fit in foster care!

There are many ways to engage in foster care right where you are. The first step is to reach out to The CALL in your area. Visit TheCALLinArkansas.org/contact to get connected to our team where you live.

