

Voice for Adoption Policy Call:
Wendy's Wonderful Kids
Unadoptable is Unacceptable

January 9, 2012

3:00pm

Rita L. Soronen, President & CEO



DAVE THOMAS
FOUNDATION
FOR ADOPTION®

Finding Forever Families for Children in Foster Care

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1.800.ASK.DTFA (1.800.275.3832)

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

- *Mission:* Dramatically increase the adoption of children from North America's foster care systems
- *Vision:* Every child will have a permanent home and a nurturing family
- *Core Values:*
 - Every child deserves a safe, nurturing and permanent home
 - No child should leave foster care without a permanent family
 - Every child is adoptable

Wendy's Wonderful Kids



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Wendy's Wonderful Kids: *Why*

- Youth growing up and aging out of care
 - Post ASFA (1998), adoptions of younger children outpaced older children
 - In 1998 approximately 17,300 youth emancipated from care, compared with more than 27,000 in 2010
- Resource challenges across the nation
- Lack of evidence-based practices
- Inconsistent accountability
- “These children are not someone else’s responsibility. They are our responsibility.”

Dave Thomas

Wendy's Wonderful Kids: *Model*

■ Critical Components

- Initial child referral
- Relationship with child
 - Minimum of monthly contact
- Case record review
 - Identify significant people in child's life; understand child's history and needs
- Assessment
- Adoption preparation
- Network building
- Active, dynamic recruitment plan
- Diligent search

Wendy's Wonderful Kids: *Grantees*

- Public (11%) or private (89%)
- Access to children
- Provide portion of supervisor time
- Meets goals for matching and adoption
- Participate in evaluation activities
- Participate in ongoing financial, statistical and narrative reporting to the Foundation
- Attend annual Summit of recruiters and supervisors



Wendy's Wonderful Kids

Recruiter

- Master's degree in social work or related field with ≥ 2 years child welfare experience
- Uses the WWK Child-Focused Recruitment Strategy
- Hired by and reports to grantee agency
- Participates in evaluation activities
- Participates in ongoing financial, statistical and narrative reporting to the Foundation
- Attends annual Summit of recruiters and supervisors

Wendy's Wonderful Kids: *Caseload*

- 20-25 cases
- Active recruiting for 12-15 cases
- Children may be in different stages of adoption recruitment, adoption readiness/preparation
- Case closure:
 - Finalized adoption or legal guardianship
 - Permanency goal is changed and recruiter has no access to child/child's files
 - Child ages out and child welfare case is closed
 - Recruitment strategies exhausted and active recruitment for 2 years

Wendy's Wonderful Kids: *Children*

- Children must
 - Be in public foster care system
 - Have a plan for adoption or be freed for adoption
 - Have no currently identified adoptive family

- Children may
 - Be part of a sibling group
 - Have had previous recruitment efforts
 - Have had disrupted/dissolved adoptions
 - Be in various stages of adoption readiness
 - Rescind their consent to adoption
 - Have special needs

Wendy's Wonderful Kids

- April 2004: Pilot project launched
 - 7 sites
- January 2005: Full program launch
 - Expansion to 27 sites
 - Wendy's national commitment / funds raised return to the community through WWK grants
- 2006: Expansion into Canada
- 2007: Expansion to all 50 states, DC = 125 sites
 - National evaluation implemented
 - HHS Adoption Excellence Award
- 2009: Celebration of 1,000 finalized adoptions
- 2010: Celebration of 2,000 finalized adoptions
- 2011: Release of national evaluation results

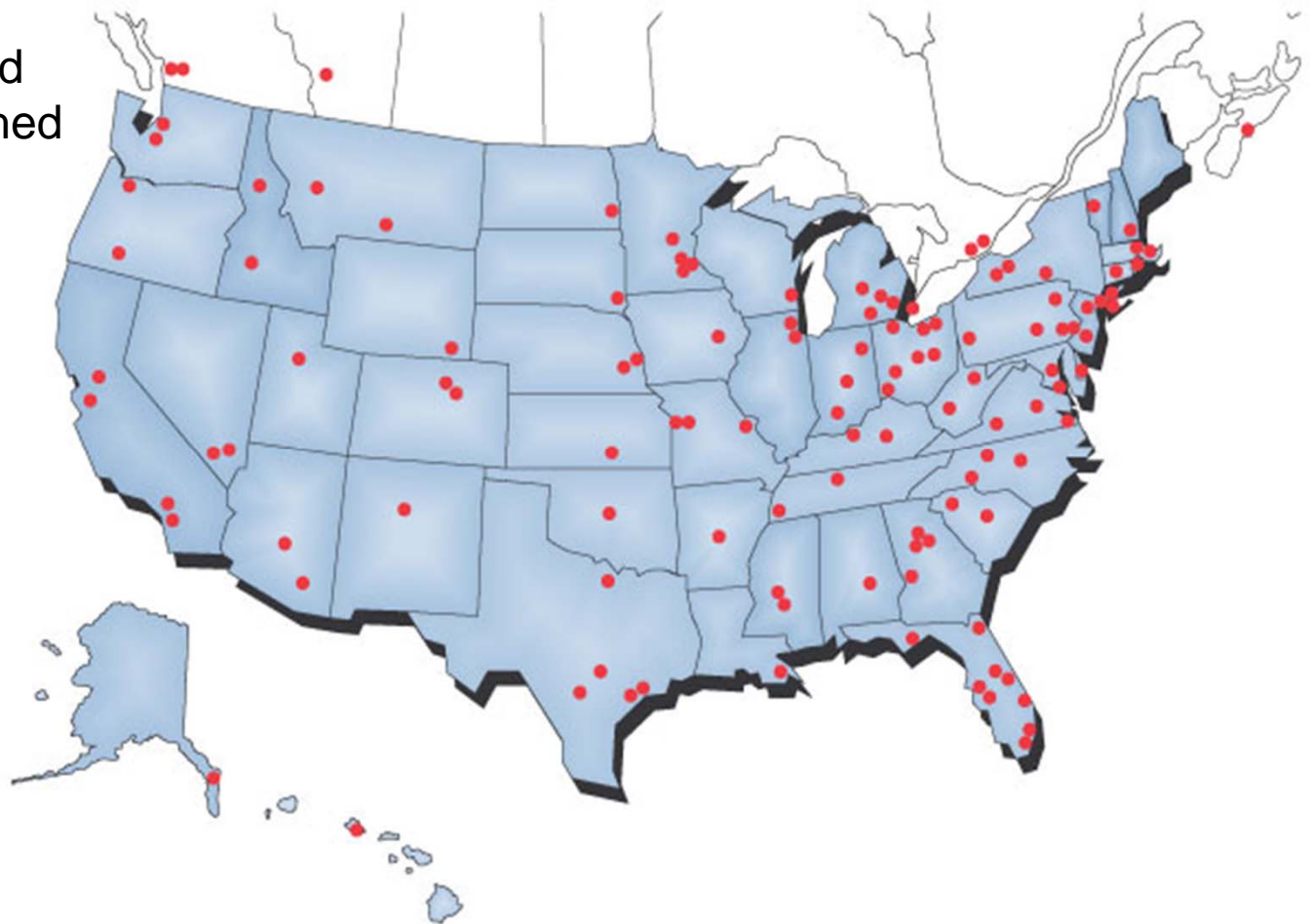


Wendy's Wonderful Kids

As of December 20, 2011

- 122** Funded sites
- 7,523** Children served
- 5,009** Children matched
- 683** Pre-adoptive placements

2,675 Adoptions



Wendy's Wonderful Kids National Evaluation

Evaluation Mission:

To document if, how, and when the Wendy's Wonderful Kids model can improve the permanency of children in foster care, and to provide information to help guide ongoing program planning

- Five-year research conducted by Child Trends
- Most rigorous empirical study of child-focused recruitment practices to date
- Quantitative (impact)
 - WWK online database
 - Automated random assignment of children into treatment (WWK) and control (non-WWK) groups
 - Administrative data from state child welfare agencies about children in the treatment and control groups
- Qualitative (process)
 - How is WWK being implemented?
 - How and why does this difference (or lack of difference) occur?

Children Served Characteristics



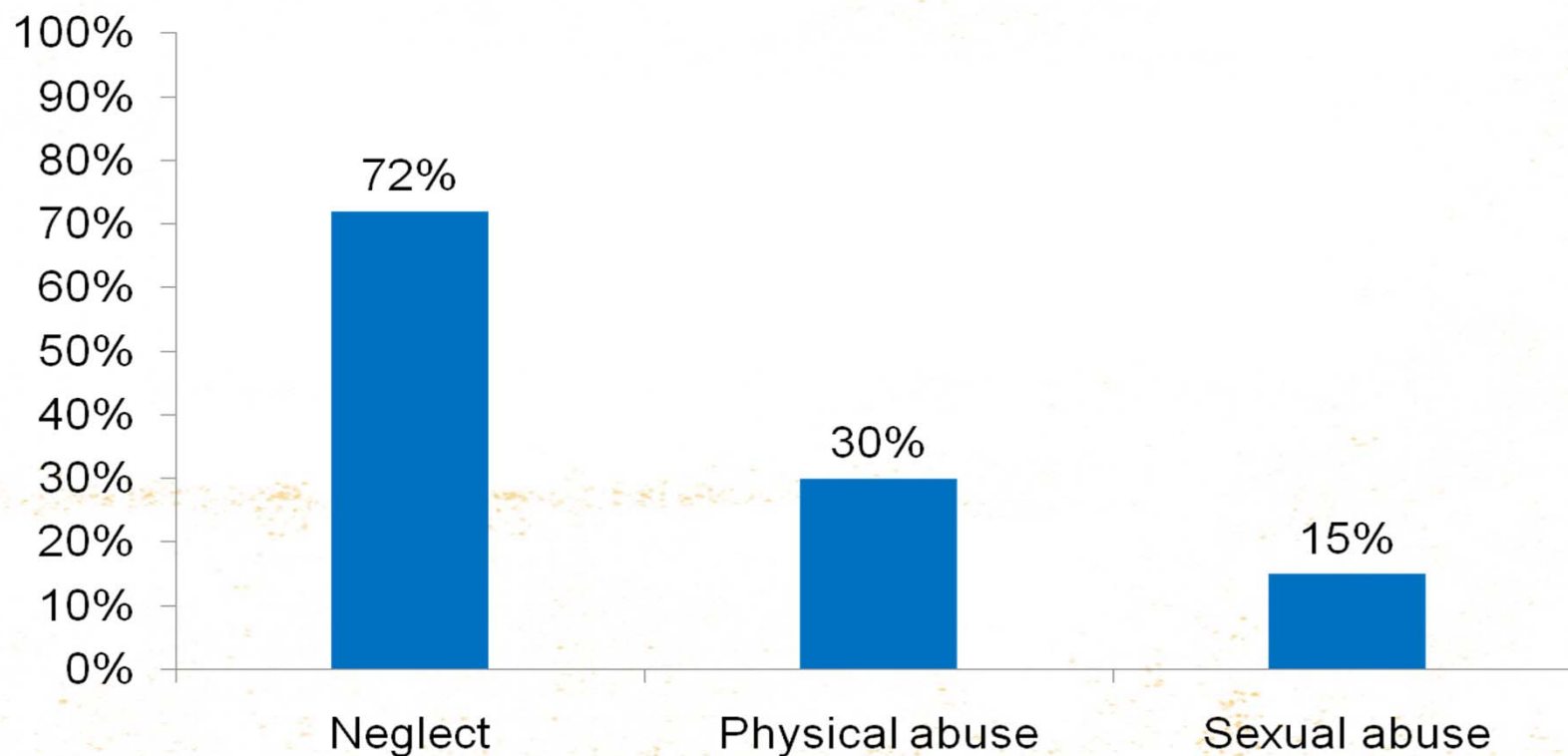
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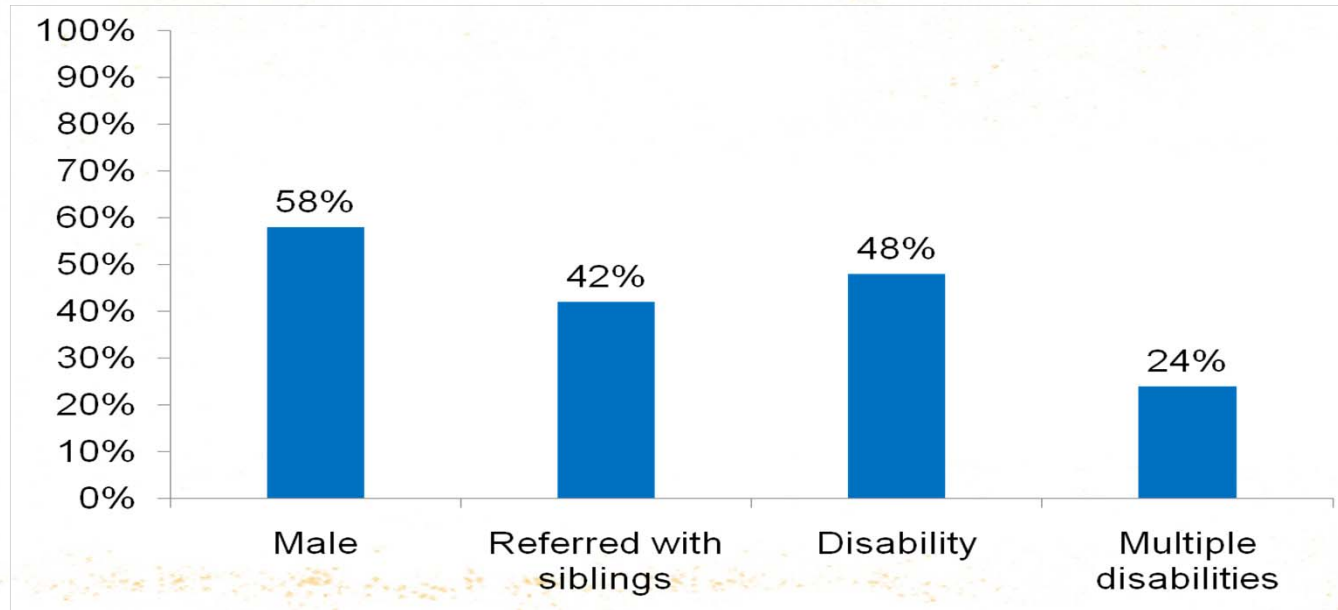
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Children Served

Reasons for entry into foster care



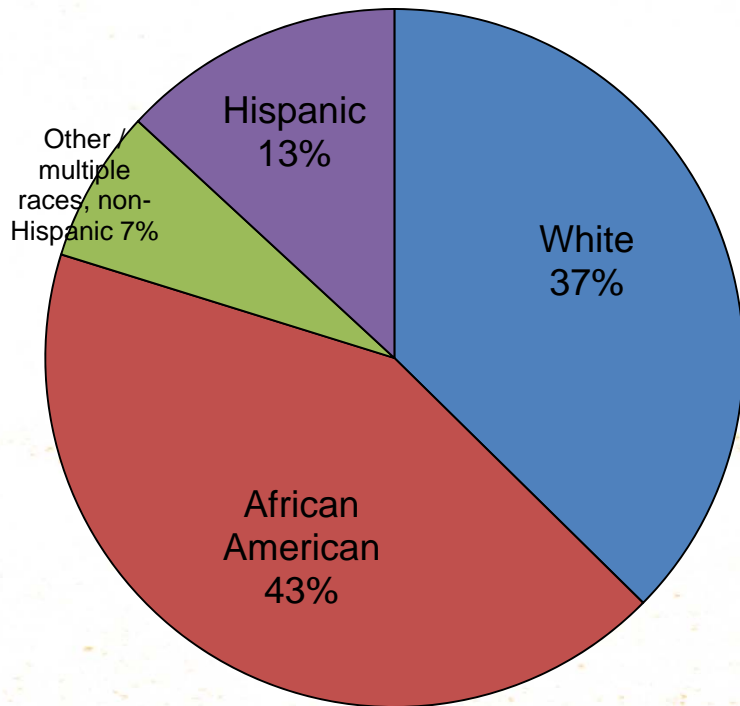
Children Served



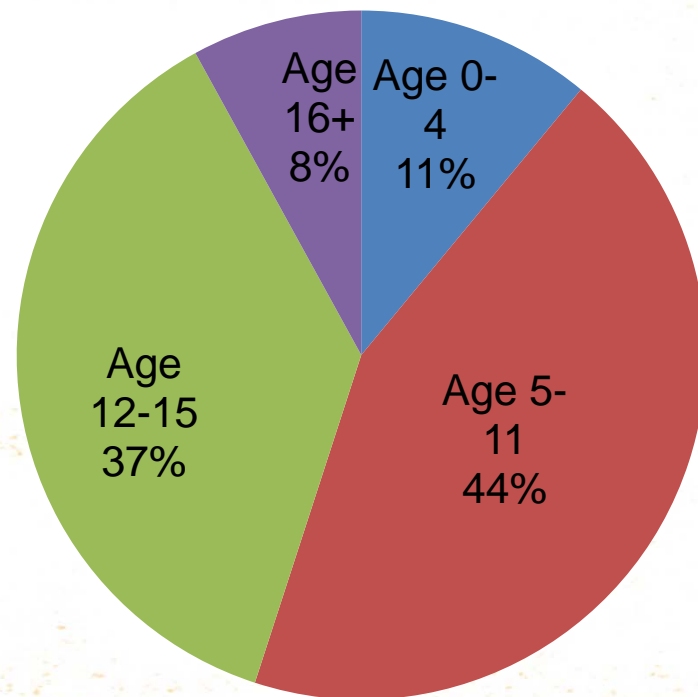
- 20% residing in group homes, institutions or supervised independent living
- 27% six or more placements at time of referral; 8% ten or more placements at time of referral
- 50% in the system > four years at referral; 10% in the system > ten years at referral

Characteristics

Race/Ethnicity

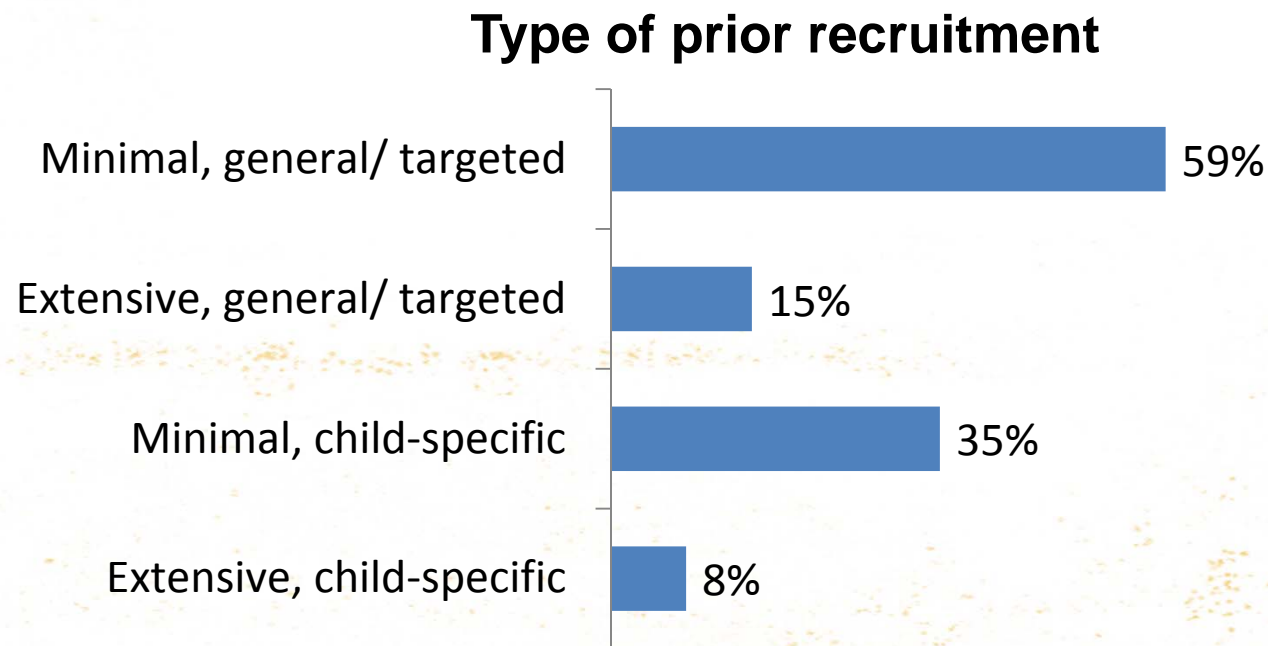


Child age



Characteristics

Half of referred children (51%) had no reported past recruitment efforts.
Among those who did have prior recruitment:



Key Findings



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Key Finding

“Wendy’s Wonderful Kids substantially and significantly increases adoptions from foster care.”

Child Trends



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Key Finding

A child served by a Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiter is **1.7 times (170%) more likely** to be adopted than a child not served by Wendy's Wonderful Kids.



Key Finding

For older children, the impact of the WWK model is greater:

- For children referred to WWK at age 8, the likelihood of adoption was **1.5 times higher.**
- For children referred at age 11, the likelihood was **two times higher.**
- For children referred at age 15, the likelihood of adoption was **three times higher.**

Key Finding

Children with mental health disorders were **three times more likely** to be adopted when served by WWK than those not served by a WWK recruiter.

Key Finding

Although using the full model is critical, success of the WWK model is most directly linked to two key components:

- Establishing one-on-one relationships with children
- Diligent search

Parent & Youth Interviews



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Parent Interviews

- Phone interviews with prospective and current adoptive parents who were or had pursued adoption of a WWK child
- Conducted June 2009-June 2010
- Final sample: 101 parents from 19 states
 - Average age = 44
 - 63% married
 - Ethnicity
 - White (60%)
 - African-American/Black (31%)
 - Native American (3%)
 - Hispanic/Latino (2%)
 - Multiracial (2%)

Parents Interviews:

Key Facilitators

- Parents described a number of key individual-level facilitators to navigating the adoption process:
 - 80% reported good or very good parent adoption preparation; 20% had adopted previously
 - Managed expectations about child, process, policies & paperwork
 - 92% reported recruiter knew the child very well and transferred that knowledge to the parent
 - 84% reported recruiter followed up routinely post-placement
 - 71% reported follow-up, post-finalization
 - Assistance with interstate paperwork, ensuring subsidies and Medicaid in place, troubleshooting problems, emotional support

Parent Interviews

Key Barriers

- 26% reported that the adoption process ended. Challenges included:
 - feeling unprepared to meet the intensive needs of the foster child they were pursuing to adopt, particularly those that exhibit sexually acting out behaviors and have severe physical ailments
 - having difficulty balancing the needs of the foster child in addition to the needs of the existing children in their home
 - lack of available community services to assist them in meeting the needs of the children in their care, such as intensive in-home therapy and additional financial supports

Youth Interviews

- In-person interviews with foster youth who received WWK services
- Conducted July 2009 - May 2010
- Final sample: 74 youth from 18 states (age 12 or older)
 - Age range 12-18
 - 55% male; 45% female
- Placement
 - Foster home (50%)
 - Pre-adoptive home (24%)
 - Group home (22%)
 - Medical/mental health facility (4%)
- Average of 8 years in out-of-home care ; average of 7 foster care placements
- 20% experienced a past adoptive placement disruption; 5% experienced past adoption dissolution; 2 youth experienced both

Youth Interviews:

Facilitators to success

- 91% reported that their WWK recruiter had been helpful to them
- 89% reported enjoying their time with their recruiters
- Youth who were previously opposed to adoption were significantly more likely to feel open to adoption after working with the recruiter
- Youth reported several techniques used by the recruiters that contributed to being open to or remaining open to adoption including:
 - Emphasize the advantages of adoption (having a permanent home, family that cares for them)
 - Seek relatives and other connections to adopt (having someone they know express interest in adopting them can help them to become open to adoption)

Youth Interviews:

Facilitators to success

- Be open and honest about the adoption process and the possible outcomes while still remaining hopeful (being adopted is not guaranteed, process can take a long time, many families prefer younger children)
- Empower youth during the adoption process (emphasize that it is their choice to be adopted, be open to hearing what the youth desires in a family)
- Address all questions and concerns about adoption (address general fears, misperceptions)
- Build a relationship with the youth (spend leisure time with them to show that you care about them and are invested in meeting their needs)

Youth Interviews:

Barriers

Youth identified **system, community and personal barriers** that are perceived as hindering them from securing an adoptive home including:

- System level barriers
 - Caseworkers overworked and/or are uncommitted to the goal of adoption for an older youth
 - Caseworkers documenting negative behaviors rather than focusing just as much attention on documenting positive behaviors and individual strengths
 - lingering in the system for extended periods of time causes emotional problems in foster youth; placement instability causes attachment issues

Youth Interviews:

Barriers

➤ Community level barriers

- Lack of prospective adoptive parents in their communities who are willing to adopt older children
- A general community perception that all foster youth have behavioral and emotional problems and are set in their ways.
- Unrealistic expectations of prospective adoptive parents (not being understanding of common challenges that come with raising a teenager such as rebellion)

Youth Interviews:

Barriers

- Personal barriers / opposition to adoption
 - A lack of hope in being adopted
 - A desire to not be moved to another home
 - A desire not to change their last name
 - A desire to be reunified with their biological families or keep those relationships intact
 - Having a hard time trusting anyone new in their lives
 - Fear of being mistreated by an adoptive parent

Parent & Youth Interviews:

- Relationships are key
- Open, honest and ongoing communication is essential
- Barrier assistance and follow-up is critical
- Empowerment is necessary
- Preparation is mandatory – set real expectations and dispel misperceptions
- Patience, grace and humor

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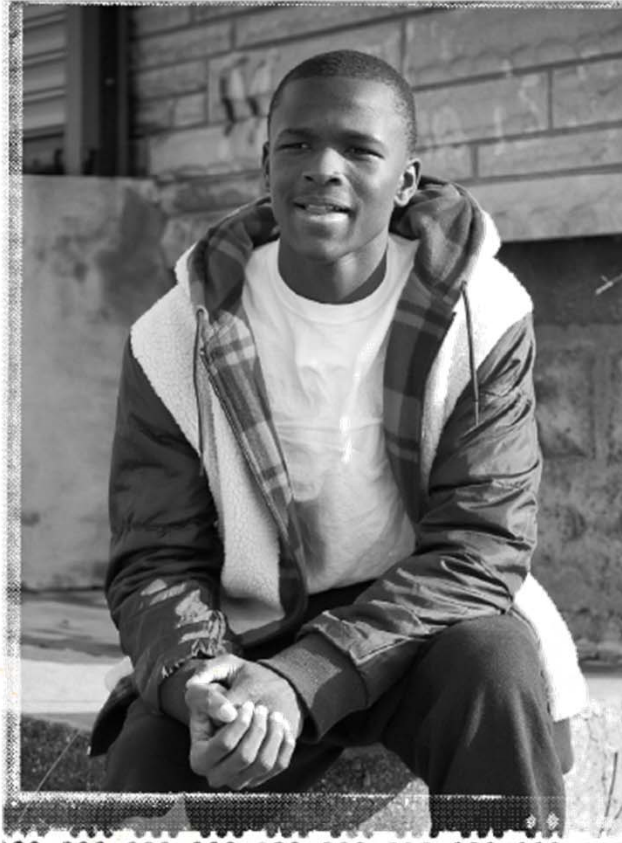


<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLP3pAfCHgo&feature=youtu.be>

Next Steps

- Release research week of October 24; national rolling media; continued media attention
- Manualize curriculum; policymaker/decision maker meetings
- Increase to 200 sites and 10,000 adoptions
- Generate resources to continue long-term evaluation of WWK child well-being
- For more information:
 - www.davethomasfoundation.org
 - 800-ASK-DTFA (800-275-3832)
 - rita_soronen@davethomasfoundation.org

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