

3 Ways to Volunteer

Despite a desperate need for foster and adoptive families across the nation and worldwide, many advocates recommend getting acquainted with children and their needs first. Good intentions without follow-through are often more hurtful than doing nothing at all, says David Jordan, executive director of Agape Child and Family Services in Memphis, Tenn. Staying power is therapeutic in itself.

Agape offers qualified volunteers three levels of commitment—a model your church can replicate for its orphan care ministry. (For security purposes, social services require volunteers who work with children to be screened, which may involve an FBI record check.)

1) Participation. Behind-the-scenes activities that provide real support with a limited time commitment. Examples include fundraising, collecting clothing and backpacks for foster kids, or helping with preparations for foster care events.

2) Engagement. Through this more face-time commitment level, volunteers interact directly with children at events like Parents' Night Out or holiday parties. This level is a good place for prospective foster or adoptive parents to meet foster kids and adoption professionals in their communities.

3) Ownership. Volunteers willing to make ongoing weekly or monthly commitments can serve as mentors or event organizers or work with families.

Joanne Feldmeth, vice president of Royal Family Kids' national clubs and mentors, says the scope of mentoring programs depends largely on the availability of directors. "They're not typically as warm and fuzzy, but those are the people that are gold, and we look for them," she says. —*Anahid Schweikert*.